ABSTRACT

WOLFE, CONSTANCE RAE. Middle Leader Communication with Faculty during Student Success Reform Efforts in Two Community Colleges. (Under the direction of Audrey J. Jaeger).

Change is an acknowledged reality for organizations, which must adapt to changing environments to remain relevant (Burke, 2018). Community colleges are no exception as they address the challenge to improve student outcomes. The student success agenda emerging within the last decade calls for higher education institutions to improve student retention, completion, and learning in order to prepare a workforce and create a society able to respond to the challenges of the new century (Wyner, 2014). Change may be important, but it is not easy to achieve (Bess & Dee, 2012). Creating and sustaining change in organizations is a difficult task, and change efforts often fail (Kovach & Mairani, 2012). Because much of the change required of community colleges focuses on student outcomes, faculty and midlevel leaders such as department chairs are pivotal to the success of improvement efforts. As facilitators of learning, faculty implement change on the ground, and midlevel leaders serve as the bridge between upper administration and faculty. Because of their constant interaction with faculty, midlevel leaders become the primary evaluators and motivators of faculty work during change efforts (Bryman, 2007; Gonaim, 2016). This study frames organizational change as a communicative process and applies a stakeholder approach to studying communication. Organizations are created and maintained through communication, and therefore are changed through communication (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011). Change efforts fail in part as a result of poor or non-existent communication (Lewis, 2011); therefore, communication between faculty and midlevel leaders such as department chairs is an important factor in achieving organizational change

focused on improving student outcomes. This qualitative case study explored department chair communication with faculty in two community colleges that experienced comprehensive student success reform in order to determine factors that may contribute to improved faculty engagement and improved student outcomes. Topics included communication channels as well as strategies used to communicate vision, respond to faculty resistance, motivate faculty, and provide social support. Department chairs in the study used the following strategies to inform, motivate, and support faculty: They emphasized the positive aspects of change, shared information but prioritized input, used targeted more than general messages, and favored efficacy over discrepancy messages. Two related conclusions highlighted the importance of the department chair in community college change efforts and the local nature of change.

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Middle Leader Communication with Faculty during Student Success Reform Efforts in Two Community Colleges

by

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BIOGRAPHY

Wolfe graduated from the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia, with a bachelor's degree in English and a concentration in Writing, where she fell in love with teaching as a Writing Center tutor. She went from there to Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond where she worked as a graduate teaching assistant, first as a writing and computer tutor and then as an instructor in her very first and very wonderful teaching assignment in freshman composition. She earned a master's in English with a concentration in Writing & Rhetoric with the intention of empowering students by improving their reading, writing, speaking, and thinking skills.

Wolfe has taught English and Humanities courses in high school, college, and community college settings both public and private, in Virginia, Maryland, South Carolina, and North Carolina. She became a community college convert after an inspiring experience teaching developmental English to single mothers working hard to improve their lives and be an example to their children. She worked for 18 years at Surry Community College in Dobson, North Carolina, as an English faculty member and Department Chair, as Director of the college's critical thinking initiative, as Director of the Academic Support Center, and for the last 12 of those years as Dean of Arts & Sciences.

In 2018, Wolfe began her tenure as Vice President of Instruction and Chief Academic Officer at Alamance Community College in Graham, North Carolina.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Change is an acknowledged reality for organizations, which must adapt to changing environments or face irrelevance or extinction (Burke, 2018; Schein, 2017; Waddell & Pio, 2015). Change may be vitally important, but it is not easy to achieve (Bess & Dee, 2012). At the turn of the 21st century, the failure rate of planned change initiatives was reported to be around 70% (Nohria & Beer, 2000), and high failure rates continue to be reported (Burnes, 2004; Kovach & Mairani, 2012). Organizational change is a complex, multi-layered process difficult to achieve and sustain (Burke, 2018), as evidenced by several studies conducted over multiple years that followed 26 higher education change initiatives supported by the Kellogg Foundation and the American Council on Education (Bess & Dee, 2012). Only a few of the projects in the study resulted in the transformations that were intended. In fact, only six of the 26 institutions were considered to be successful (Bess & Dee, 2012). A follow-up study conducted four years after completion found that only three of those institutions had sustained the change (Bess & Dee, 2012).

Higher education is not immune to the need for change. Educational institutions including community colleges must change in order to remain relevant and achieve successful outcomes (Gonaim, 2016; Riggs, 2009). Much of the change required of community colleges focuses on student outcomes, making faculty and midlevel leaders such as department chairs pivotal players in the success of improvement efforts (Stout, 2018; Wyner, 2014). Faculty are the "core operators" (Levin, 2013, p. 233), and middle leaders are positioned between faculty and administration (Bess & Dee, 2014). Faculty implement change on the ground, and because of their constant interaction with faculty, midlevel leaders become the primary evaluators and motivators of faculty work during change efforts

(Bryman, 2007; Gonaim, 2016). These two groups are important stakeholders in the task of achieving organizational change focused on improving student outcomes.

Background of the Problem

Community colleges remain the focus of national change efforts often referred to as the Completion Agenda (Community College Excellence, 2016). Achieving the Dream, launched in 2004 by the Lumina Foundation and seven partnering organizations, was formed to improve student outcomes at community colleges across the nation. Complete College America, a 2009 initiative, is another national non-profit alliance dedicated to eradicating achievement gaps in higher education and disseminating high-impact strategies to improve outcomes for all students. Founded in 2010, the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence awards a million dollars in prize money every two years to a community college that demonstrates exceptional student outcomes. The goal of Completion by Design, a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation initiative established in 2011, is to improve student completion rates for low-income students in community colleges. Started in 2014 with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the American Association of Community College's Pathway Project aims to improve community college student completion through the implementation of academic and career pathways. Many other initiatives and organizations, such as Jobs for the Future, Frontier Set, and Public Agenda focus on improving outcomes in two- and four-year institutions.

These initiatives underscore the fact that community colleges need to change approaches and redesign systems in order to improve student outcomes. The early years of reform efforts focused on support systems and student services at community colleges; the next phase of reforms that focus on teaching and learning will by necessity involve

community college faculty (AACC, 2014; The Aspen Institute, 2014; Chaplot, Rassen, Jenkins, & Johnstone, 2013; Community College Excellence, 2016; Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2017; Stout, 2018). Yet in a recent survey of 782 full-time community college faculty across the nation, only 19% agreed that their college valued and respected their ideas and skills; 39% "somewhat" agreed (Public Agenda, 2017). Even though 66% of respondents agreed that it was important for their college to increase student completion rates, only 12% agreed that their college included faculty in decisions related to the student success agenda, with 39% "somewhat" agreeing. And only 10% of respondents thought that their college did a "very good job" of investing in faculty preparation for student success initiatives.

Any work with faculty necessarily involves the leaders who work most closely with them, but faculty respondents in the Public Agenda survey did not think that department chairs had a significant amount of influence in college decisions related to the student success agenda (only 36% agreeing that chairs had influence). When asked who should have significant influence, 71% of respondents selected department chairs and 94% indicated full-time faculty should have significant influence over decisions related to student completion programs. Seventy-nine percent (79%) indicated that upper-administration currently had significant influence over the student success agenda, but only 17% of respondents indicated that they trusted those with significant influence "a lot" (44% indicated they had "some" trust in their leaders). These data indicate that community colleges have some work to do to engage faculty and midlevel leaders in the student success agenda.

Midlevel Leaders

Midlevel leaders are responsible for implementing much of the planned change in community colleges (Mitchell & Eddy, 2008). By definition, they reside in the middle of the

organization (Quinley, 1996), acting as a bridge between faculty and administration (Bozeman, Fay, & Gaughan, 2013). They are responsible for the day-to-day operations of the college as well as for leading change in their departments (Foote, 1999; Sirkis, 2011). Higher education administrators, a category including deans, accounted for 11% of the total public, two-year college employee population in fall 2016 (Grinder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2017). Department chairs at most higher education institutions emerge from the faculty ranks (Jenkins, 2017).

While executive leadership is integral to promoting change (Burke, 2018), middle leaders also play an important role in the success of organizational change efforts (Balogun, 2003; Kras, Portillo, & Taxman, 2017). Midlevel leaders in higher education have a significant impact on organizational operations and as change agents (Craig, 2005). Middle managers are central figures in organizational change as change mediators (Balogun, 2003; Huy, 2002). Midlevel leaders are therefore important, if not always acknowledged:

> Too few people outside of community college administrative circles adequately understand the enormous contributions outstanding midlevel administrators make to the successful operation of their colleges. While strong presidential leadership is a critical component to the long-term success of a college, the deans, vice-presidents, and other midlevel administrators are the ones who have the greatest impact on the actual operations, organizational priorities, and functioning of the college. (Riggs, 2009, pp. 30-31)

Administrators in the middle are strategically placed; they communicate the college's values and mission throughout the organization (Riggs, 2009). They are responsible for the quality

of academic and student support programs and provide support for faculty (Riggs, 2009; Sirkis, 2011).

Faculty

As implementers of programs and facilitators of learning, faculty are important to the change process. Faculty engagement is necessary to increase student learning outcomes, and communication plays an important role in building and sustaining that engagement (Aspen, 2014; Community College Excellence, 2016; Harrill, Lawton, & Fabianke, 2015; Stout, 2018). David Leslie (1996) noted that "change in colleges and universities comes when it happens in the trenches; what faculty and students do is what the institution becomes. It does not happen because a committee or a president asserts a new idea" (as cited in Tierney & Minor, 2004, p. 91). Community colleges must adapt to a changing environment, and in the process, must improve student outcomes. Middle leadership and faculty play pivotal roles in organizational change, and their social interactions play a strategic role in the success of that change.

Statement of the Problem

Organizations need to change and adapt to remain relevant, and in some cases even to survive, and community colleges are no exception as they address the challenge to improve student outcomes. The student success agenda emerging within the last decade calls for higher education institutions to focus on improving student retention, completion, and learning in order to prepare a workforce and create a society able to respond to the challenges of the new century. Yet it has been shown that change efforts often fail; creating and sustaining change in organizations is a difficult task.

Change efforts fail in part as a result of poor or non-existent communication (Lewis, 2011). A 2007 study revealed that only 30% of faculty respondents agreed or strongly agreed that faculty and administrators communicated effectively at their institutions (Cummings & Finkelstein, 2009), yet faculty and their supervisors must be engaged in the change process to improve student outcomes (Gardner & Ward, 2018; Sirkis, 2011). Faculty participate in shared governance with administration and expect to be consulted on matters that affect their work, including any proposed change initiatives (Bess & Dee, 2014). Administrators and faculty operate on different timelines, often have different goals, and employ different communication protocols (Bess & Dee, 2014). Faculty and administrators work within differing paradigms, which inform differing vocabularies and speech practices, all of which complicates communication (Bess & Dee, 2014). Midlevel leaders such as department chairs find themselves in the middle between faculty and administration, responsible for bridging the communication gap.

Because change occurs through the social interactions of change implementers and change managers (Ford & Ford, 1995; Ford, 1999; Ford & Ford, 2008), the communication between middle leaders such as department chairs and faculty warrants study. As part of the ongoing effort to improve success rates of organizational change related to student outcomes, we need to better understand how department chairs communicate with faculty during the change process in institutions that have achieved success in comprehensive reform efforts.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in social constructionism and organizational communication and change models. Rather than claiming that there is one objective reality, social constructionists assert that people construct their own reality based on their experiences and

beliefs; people's perceptions are their reality (Bess & Dee, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998). In the social constructionist paradigm, social interactions expose perspectives and create common ground (Bess & Dee, 2012). Knowledge is produced through these interactions.

Organizations are socially constructed (Ford, 1999), created through social interactions (Roth, 2000), making communication the fundamental unit of organization (Bess & Dee, 2012). Through the communication process, organizations are formed and maintained (Bess & Dee, 2012). Therefore, it can be argued that organizational change occurs in the context of communication and that spoken and written communication create new versions of reality, which inform the change process, the goal of which is the creation of a new, shared reality (Ford & Ford, 1995). From this perspective, change implementation can be conceptualized as a communication problem occurring between and among stakeholder groups in the organization (Lewis, 2011; Lewis & Seibold, 1998). The quality and quantity of communication during change can result in success or failure, and high-quality change communication has been shown to impact employees' engagement in and commitment to change (Ford, 1999; Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2002; Jansson, 2014; Lewis & Seibold, 1998; Lewis, 2011; McClellan, 2011).

This study adopts a stakeholder approach to examining communication. Stakeholder theory is aligned with the approach of this study in that it offers a perspective on organizations that highlights the relationships and interactions of organizational members. The Stakeholder Model of Change Implementation Communication provides a lens to examine how implementers select communication strategies for particular groups and how stakeholders respond to them (Lewis, 2007). This study focuses on the interactions between

two stakeholders in higher education: faculty as front-line employees and department chairs as their direct supervisors. The model is founded on the assumption that communication between stakeholders produces change outcomes (Lewis, 2007). For the purpose of this study organizational communication is defined as:

> a complex and continuous process through which organizational members create, maintain, and change the organization by communicating verbally, nonverbally, electronically, and in writing with individuals and groups of people engaged in roles as internal and external stakeholders. (Keyton, 2011).

Organizational communication can be examined throughout the broadly defined phases of the change process using Kurt Lewin's three-step change model of unfreezing, changing, and re-freezing (Burnes, 2004; Lewin, 1947). In the first phase, the system must be destabilized and people must be motivated in order to open up to change (Burnes, 2004; Schein, 2017). The second phase involves the actual change, or move, toward the new. In the final phase of the process, the change becomes the new norm, reinforced by better results (Schein, 2017). Participants in this study were asked to ground their perceptions of change communication in these broad phases of the change process.

Information sharing, vision and motivation, and social support have been identified as communication activities that change managers use to implement change (Lewis, 2011; Lewis and Seibold, 1998). These interactions can be either formal or informal, verbal or written. The activities provide a framework for exploring perceptions of department chair communication during the change process.

Assumptions

Several assumptions undergird this study. These assumptions are grounded in the literature review and in the researcher's professional experiences as a community college faculty member, academic administrator, and evaluator of student success initiatives. The researcher holds the following to be true for the purposes of this study: (1) Communication is the vehicle through which organizations are created, maintained, and changed and is therefore an essential component of organizational change; (2) Faculty and their immediate supervisors are key stakeholders in organizational change in community colleges related to improving student outcomes and therefore must participate in the change effort for it to be successful; (3) Chair communication with faculty during student success initiatives and faculty engagement in those initiatives are connected.

The first assumption is based in the literature on organizational communication. It is assumed that communication is the phenomenon through which organizations are created and sustained (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011). Organizations develop and change through the interactions of their members (Keyton, 2011). In this study, organizational change is assumed to be a communicative process.

Second, this study assumes that department chairs and faculty are significant players in change efforts at community colleges focused on improving student outcomes and as such, must participate in the change if it is to be successful. As facilitators of learning, faculty must be engaged in efforts to improve student outcomes (Hutchings, 2010; Stout, 2018). Because they directly oversee the work of faculty, department chairs are in the best position to engage faculty, who implement the change (Czech & Forward, 2010).

Finally, if communication is a phenomenon that produces change in organizations, and if the participation of department chairs and faculty is crucial for success in change focused on improving student outcomes, then the communication of chairs and faculty should play a role in whether change is successful or not. High-quality communication has been shown to impact employee engagement in change (Ford, 1999; Jansson, 2014; Lewis, 2007; McClellan, 2011; Tanner & Otto, 2016). If department chairs employ effective communication strategies as they interact with faculty, they can impact faculty participation in change. Therefore, it is assumed that effective department chair communication during student success initiatives and faculty engagement in those initiatives are interrelated.

Purpose of the Research and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study is to explore department chair communication with full-time faculty in two community colleges that have experienced comprehensive student success reform in order to determine factors that may contribute to improved faculty engagement and improved student outcomes. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do department chairs at community colleges recognized by the Aspen Institute's Community College Excellence Program communicate with faculty during the unfreezing, changing, and refreezing phases of the change process during educational reform efforts?
2. How do department chairs communicate with faculty during the change process related to information sharing, vision and motivation, and social support?

Methods

This study is a descriptive, qualitative multi-case study using semi-structured interviews and document analysis to explore the perceptions of department chairs and faculty regarding chairs' communication during the change process at two colleges named as finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. Qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning that participants assign to their experiences and is typically grounded in social constructionism (Creswell, 2014). The goal of qualitative research is to create rich descriptions of participants' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants in this study were asked to describe their perceptions of department chairs' communication during the change processes at their institutions.

The case study design is appropriate for research that explores a complex phenomenon in a real-world context, and multi-case research results in a more robust study (Yin, 2015). This case study focused on two institutions that were named as finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. The sampling was thus purposeful and drawn from special cases with documented positive student outcomes. Participants were department chairs and full-time faculty from general education and career-technical programs.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews provided an avenue to explore the research questions. A number of prepared questions provided consistency, but semi-structured interviews offered flexibility to more fully investigate participants' responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Questions explored participants' interpretations of department chair communication in the areas of information sharing, vision and motivation, and social support (Lewis, 2011; Lewis & Seibold, 1998). Questions also allowed

participants to explore these communication activities as they occurred during broad phases of the change process.

Document analysis provided an additional data source. Job descriptions, organizational charts, strategic plans, student outcomes reports, and mission statements were examined. Data from interviews was triangulated using document analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Organization of the Study

The remaining sections are organized in the following manner. The next chapter reviews the relevant literature on communication and organizational change and the role of midlevel leaders in change implementation. A theoretical framework is identified to explore the communication strategies that department chairs enact to implement change. Chapter three describes the research design including how data was collected and analyzed. Chapter four outlines the findings that emerged through data analysis. In exploring how department chairs communicated with faculty during student success reform efforts at two community colleges, this study suggests that chairs engaged faculty by building a department vision for change, translating administration's goals to faculty, and communicating faculty reactions to administration. Chairs also enacted a variety of strategies to counter resistance to change, to motivate faculty to engage in the change, and to provide social support during the change. The study also suggests the department is the primary site of change implementation and that all change is local. Chapter five provides a discussion of these findings by relating the themes that emerged from the interviews to the literature on change implementation communication. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and reflections on the significance of this study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study applies organizational change and communication theories to the problem of change failure as it relates to improving student outcomes in community colleges. The failure of colleges to improve student success was identified by President Obama early in his first term when he called for an increase in the number of college graduates by 2020 (Lederman & Fain, 2017). Completion rates for community college students are poor: Of the 2013 cohort of community college students, only 32.8% completed a credential within three years of initial enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). For community college students who intend to transfer to a four-year institution, completion rates are no better:

> Of the 33 percent of community college students who transfer to four-year colleges, 42 percent complete a bachelor's degree within six years. In other words, 14 percent of the entire cohort of entering community college students earns a bachelor's degree within six years. (CCRC, 2018)

To compete in the new economy, Americans need some form of postsecondary education ("Higher Education," n.d.). President Obama highlighted the importance of community colleges in this effort by advocating for free community college tuition (Lederman & Fain, 2017).

Community colleges are accessible institutions for many Americans due to lower tuition costs, proximity to home, and open-entry admissions policies (Malcom, 2013). Nearly half of all four-year college graduates enroll first in community colleges: According to the Community College Research Center, 49% of all the students who completed a four-year degree in 2015-16 had enrolled in a community college in the previous 10 years (2018).

Community colleges attract a diverse pool of students, many of whom would not otherwise have access to higher education (Malcom, 2013). They are more likely than four-year institutions to enroll low-income and first-generation college students (Ma & Baum, 2016). Hispanic students disproportionately enroll in community colleges (Ma & Baum, 2016). Community colleges serve as the entry point to the middle class for many Americans ("Higher Education," n.d.). Community colleges serve multiple purposes, including preparing students for university transfer and the workplace, training the local workforce, and providing continuing education for lifelong learners in the community (Meier, 2013). In order to meet the demands of the new economy, create the talent needed to compete globally, and assist people in their efforts to achieve financial stability and become productive members of their communities, community colleges need to change (Carnevale, Smith, & Stohl, 2013-14; Merisotis, 2015; Wyner, 2014). Given the diversity of the student population and the multiple missions of community colleges, improving student success in community colleges is a challenging task (Boggs & McPhail, 2016). In order to improve student outcomes, faculty and their immediate supervisors—midlevel administrators most commonly referred to as department chairs—must communicate effectively (Koerner, 2014).

Organizational change and organizational communication literature, including the Stakeholder Model of Change Implementation Communication (Lewis, 2007, 2011), provide the conceptual framework for this study. Change is conceptualized as an interactive process that organizations engage in for the purpose of adaptation to the environment in order to remain viable, or for the purpose of continuous improvement (Kezar, 2001, 2014). The type of change examined in the study is planned organizational change in community colleges that aims to improve student success.

Organizational Change

Scholars have noted the extensive nature of organizational change literature, which is over a hundred years old (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Organizational change is traced to the work of Frederick Taylor in the early 1900s, in the newly established field of scientific management (Burke, 2018, p. 30). Conceptualizing organizations as machines with moveable parts, Taylor focused on improving processes on the shop floor (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Burke, 2018). Another early area of the literature, including the work of Henri Fayol who is recognized as the father of administration theory (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015), focused on change management, identifying the functions of managers in an organization during change implementation. A series of well-known studies in the 1920s and 30s conducted by a team of researchers from the Harvard Business School at the Hawthorne plant in Chicago included a series of experiments to identify factors leading to increased employee productivity and morale (Burke, 2018). A key finding, explained by Fritz Roethlisberger, was that in "most work situations the meaning of a change is likely to be as important, if not more so, than the change itself" (as cited in Burke, 2018, p. 36).

Kurt Lewin's studies in the 1930s and 40s on group dynamics during planned change resulted in a three-phase organizational change model of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing (Burnes, 2004; Lewin, 1947). Lewin's model combined with his work in field theory, group dynamics, and action research contributed to the foundation of the Organizational Development (OD) movement (Burnes, 2004). Over the years, Lewin's work has been debated and expanded, and it continues to inform the literature (Burke, 2018; Burnes, 2004; Mirvis, 1996; Schein, 1964, 2017; Weick, 2000; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Post-World War II,

W. Edwards Deming and other researchers examined methods for improving organizational efficiency and quality (Langley, et al., 2009), an effort that continues in contemporary organization improvement science approaches such as Six-Sigma, Total Quality Management, and Lean Improvement (Langley et al., 2009).

In the late 1960s and continuing to the present, much of the OD literature has characterized organizations as complex, open social systems (All-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Mirvis, 1996). In the open system, the boundaries between internal and external environments and among internal units and subunits are permeable (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Burke, 2018; Keyton, 2011; Kezar, 2001). In this view, organizations are in a near-constant state of adaptation as they respond to changes in the external environment and as internal units become more interdependent, in that a change in one unit causes changes in another (Burke, 2018; Kezar, 2001).

The Change Process

Describing organizations as open systems continually adapting to a complex environment aligns with an understanding of the change process as recursive rather than static. Organizational change does not occur in discrete, fixed stages; change instead is a reciprocal process that occurs in overlapping phases (Lewis, 2011; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Planned change, by its definition, requires a plan for change, but the reality of organizational change is that nothing ever goes according to plan (Burke, 2018). While the process is nonlinear and complex, researchers nevertheless continue to describe the change process overall as occurring in a progression of phases (Burke, 2018). Lewis's Three-Step Model characterizes change as occurring in three broad phases with a beginning, a middle, and an end. In the unfreezing phase, the system is destabilized and therefore made more open to

change. This unfreezing or thawing of the system could be triggered by an event, by establishing a sense of heightened urgency for change, or through the education of organization members, among other factors (Burke, 2018). Unfreezing does not always end in actual change; movement toward the change must occur. During the second phase, the organization changes or moves in the new direction, but until the system is refrozen, the change hasn't been accomplished (Burke, 2018). The change needs to be reinforced by new processes, structures, practices, and reward systems (Burke, 2018; Burnes, 2004). The entire process itself is context-dependent, with each case requiring its own assessment and approach (Lewin, 1947). This study frames organizational change as a non-linear and unpredictable process that nevertheless follows an overall progression, or a "phased way of thinking about, planning, and implementing organization change" (Burke, 2018, p. 126).

Change in Higher Education

Higher education can also be described as a complex social system adapting to a changing environment. The sector exists in a changing, complex landscape of budget shortfalls; greater accountability and scrutiny at local, state, regional, and federal levels; increased competition from public, private, and for-profit institutions; rising tuition and student debt; increasing diversity of students and staff; underprepared students; demographic changes; demand for accessible, online and non-traditional scheduling; a globalized and interdependent economy; rapidly changing technology; and the corporatization of higher education (Allen, 2003; Ayers, 2009; Bess & Dee, 2014; Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Esterberg & Wooding, 2012; Kezar, 2014; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Higher education has been described as organized anarchy (Cohen & March, 1974). It is complex and unique from other types of organizations, with a culture of shared governance, goal ambiguity, specialized structure of

academic disciplines, and faculty autonomy (Allen, 2003; Bess & Dee, 2012; Esterberg & Wooding, 2012; Kezar, 2001; Koerner, 2014). Colleges and universities tend to have loosely coupled systems with decentralized, less coordinated units and high specialization within units—although community colleges in general are more tightly coupled, centralized, and interdependent (Bess & Dee, 2012; Kezar, 2014). These characteristics of higher education influence how change occurs within it. Higher education institutions have been criticized as closed systems that are unresponsive to change, but change is necessary in order to meet the challenges of improving student success outcomes; higher education therefore must engage with the change process (Bess & Dee, 2012).

One way of studying the change process is to examine how organizational members communicate during change. Communication plays a central role in the change process (Lewis, 2007; Lewis & Seibold, 1998). It can be argued that organizations are created and maintained—and changed—through the interactions of their members. This focus on communication provides a framework for studying organizational change that can be applied to higher education institutions.

Organizational Communication

Organizational communication research historically viewed organizations as containers in which messages were transmitted through structured communication networks that linked management to subordinates (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009). This traditional view characterized communication as a separate phenomenon within the organization (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009). As the field developed, scholars began to see communication as a process and adopted a social constructionist view, asserting that communication is the avenue through which organizations are created and sustained (Cooren,

Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011; Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009). In other words, communication is not a separate phenomenon; organizations emerge from communication and continue to develop and change through communication (Keyton, 2011). Organizational scholars therefore assert that organizations are communicatively constituted (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009). Organizations are defined by the many interactions occurring between and among their members; as a result, organizations are "ongoing and precarious accomplishments realized, experienced, and identified primarily—if not exclusively—*in* communication processes" (Naslund & Pemer, 2011, p. 1150).

If organizations are constructed through communication, then they are constructed through language (Lewis & Seibold, 1998). Language is the instrument which enables people in organizations to achieve things (Taylor, 2009). Organizations consist of social interactions—whether written or verbal, formal or informal—creating and recreating reality (Roth, 2000). As groups of people communicate regularly on common topics, they form communities of practice, and these communities form a shared identity, using shared language (Taylor, 2009). Communities of practice perceive and interpret the world differently from each other, differ in their patterns of communication, and therefore may struggle to communicate with each other (Taylor, 2009). Localized conversations, when shared across boundaries, become metaconversations (Putnam, 2013). Organizations consist of conversations embedded into other conversations, over and over again, until new communities or collectives emerge; in this way organizations develop not linearly, but recursively (Putnam, 2013). Given the complexity inherent in communication, effective organization "is nothing short of a little miracle—the fine balancing of *cosmos* and *chaos*

over time" (Tsoukas, 2013, p. 65). If effective organization is such a delicate balancing act, it may explain why organizational change efforts so often fail.

Communication during Change Implementation

Many studies have shown that the quality and quantity of communication during change can result in success or failure (Ford, 1999; Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2002; Jansson, 2014; Lewis, 2007; Lewis & Seibold, 1998; McClellan, 2011; Tanner & Otto, 2016). If organizations are constituted through communication, then organizational change also occurs through communication. Change occurs when the process of communication engenders a new reality (Ford, 1995). From this perspective, change implementation can be described as language-based, and the way to manage and produce change within organizations is to alter or shift the conversation toward the desired change (Ford, 1999; Ford & Ford, 2008). If we are to understand how to lead organizations during times of change, then we also need to understand the ways leaders use language to "craft 'reality' out of the 'hustle and bustle' of events" of everyday working life (Clifton, 2006, p. 203).

Resistance to change can be seen as an issue of language maintenance because shifts in language may challenge one's identity (Ford, 1999; Klonek, Willenbrock, & Kauffeld, 2014). Organizational change requires individual change, and if people are unwilling to change how they speak (and listen), the organization itself will not change (Ford, 1999). Resistance to change is often a response to conversations about the change, more so than a response to the change itself (Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2002), echoing the findings of the Hawthorne studies in which people reacted more to the meaning of the change than to the actual change (Burke, 2018). Employees' conversations about organizational change can signal failure (Klonek, Willenbrock, & Kauffeld, 2014; Schwarz, Watson, & Callan, 2011).

As an example, three resistance conversations were identified in one study: conversations of complacency, resignation, and cynicism (Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2002). These approaches to resistance can be shifted or altered through dialogue in which people examine their assumptions and expectations (Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2002).

If change is a process powered by social interactions (O'Neill & Jabri, 2007), then change implementation failure may be the result of an organization's failure to recognize the significant role of conversation in producing change (Klonek, Willenbrock, & Kauffeld, 2014). Organizational members' understanding of and support for change projects has been shown to be impacted more by the conversations they have with their peers than by communication from senior management (O'Neill & Jabri, 2007). Studies have shown the importance of including voices from many stakeholders in a change effort rather than focusing on a single voice—for example, that of the leader or of other senior administrators (O'Neill & Jabri, 2007). The multiple perspectives of various units and sub-units of an organization must be integrated into the change conversation. Change occurs when longstanding perspectives are "dismantled (de-constructed) and replaced with the new" (O'Neill & Jabri, 2007, p. 581). Change needs to be a two-way process that involves genuine conversations about implications and effects. Organizations should create opportunities for people to interact and talk about change (Lewis, 2011).

In his work on the diffusion of new ideas throughout communities and organizations, Everett Rogers (2003) explained the diffusion of innovation as communication about new ideas. He defined communication as a process in which people share information in order to reach understanding (2003). Rogers asserted that people's understanding of an innovation develops through social networks. If an innovation is to spread throughout the organization,

then there must be an exchange during which one person communicates new ideas to other people. Innovations are therefore diffused throughout the organization through conversations. Rogers found that people rely on "near peers" (pp. 18-19) to learn about and eventually accept change.

According to Rogers (2003), communication networks are the conduits for spreading new ideas or approaches. Communication networks consist of opinion leaders at the center connected to other individuals throughout the network. These networks are most effective when those who are interacting within them are similar in beliefs, level of education, socioeconomic status, occupation, and background. However, the diffusion of innovation requires at least some communication links in which the people who are interacting are different; otherwise, the spread of innovations will be limited. Communication between dissimilar groups can result in misinterpretation and misunderstanding because more effort is required to communicate with people who are different (Rogers, 2003). A Stakeholder Model of Change Implementation Communication explains how stakeholders communicate across boundaries during the change process.

Stakeholder Model of Change Implementation Communication

A stakeholder perspective on organizational change provides a framework for understanding why change efforts succeed or fail. Freeman (1984) introduced the stakeholder model in *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Stakeholder theory provides a relational, interactive perspective, examining the ways that stakeholders with diverging points of view interact and negotiate within an organization (Lewis, 2007). While early stakeholder models focused on high-level stakeholders, recent literature addresses all stakeholders in organizations, with the awareness that stakeholders at all levels are not blank

slates but bring experiences and perspectives which influence their interpretations of interactions within the organization (Lewis, 2011). Adopting a stakeholder perspective on change implementation communication provides a framework for understanding how implementers and stakeholders enact and interpret change-related communication (Lewis, 2011).

Lewis's Stakeholder Model of Change Implementation Communication assigns an active role to stakeholders in organizational change (2007, 2011). Stakeholders will interact with each other as they make sense of change efforts. These exchanges help them understand what is happening and determine whether they will accept the change, resist the change, or attempt to alter the change (Lewis, 2011). The outcomes of change efforts are therefore dependent on the communication and interactions between and among organizational stakeholders (Lewis, 2011). This model explains communication strategies that implementers can select and the ways those strategies impact stakeholders' engagement with the change initiative; these interactions produce the outcomes of the change (Lewis, 2007). While all organizational members have a stake in the organization, in this study's application of the model described below, department chairs are the change implementers and faculty the stakeholders.

Antecedents to Communication Strategy Selection

The first component of the model posits that perceptions of the context for change and institutional factors play a role in the communication strategies that implementers use (Lewis, 2007, 2011). Implementers select strategies based on their perceptions of the goals of the initiative, the challenges they think they will face, the organization's history of change, and stakeholders' readiness for change. Readiness for change originates from the level of

stakeholders' identification with the organization and accessibility to information, and from whether they think the change is necessary and capable of being achieved (Lewis, 2007). Implementers make decisions about communication strategies against a background of institutional factors such as the organization's practices, procedures, and structures. Included in these factors are the professional traditions of stakeholder groups. These "powerful socializing forces of training" along with the organization's culture will affect communication strategies such as whether to invite collaboration or to dictate changes, or whether to emphasize compliance with the change or allow flexibility in implementing it (Lewis, 2007, p. 186).

Communication Strategies

The second component of the model identifies communication strategies that implementers can use to enact change: (1) delivering a positive message or balancing the message by acknowledging the negative side of the change, (2) disseminating information or soliciting feedback, (3) providing general or targeted messages, and (4) creating urgency to change or instilling belief that stakeholders can accomplish the change (Lewis, 2007). Each dimension provides choices regarding what to emphasize in stakeholder communication, for example whether to focus on the positive aspects of the change or acknowledge the difficulties of the change (Lewis, 2011). Implementers may elect to prioritize participation at times by soliciting feedback or provide top-down information at others by disseminating information (Lewis, 2007). Numerous studies found that stakeholder participation lowers pushback, reduces anxiety, and increases compliance with change (Lewis, 2007). Implementers may elect to customize messages about the change or adopt a blanket strategy of sharing the same message across groups (Lewis, 2007). A study found that blanket

messages were used when the change did not require consensus, and targeted messages were selected when it was important to seek consensus among stakeholders (Lewis, 2007). Finally, implementers can create urgency for the change by highlighting the gap between the current and desired state. They can also choose motivate stakeholders by convincing them they can achieve the goals of the change effort by instilling the expectation of success (Lewis, 2007). The strategies are not mutually exclusive; implementers blend the strategies as necessary, based on institutional factors and their perceptions of the change situation.

Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Change Situation

The third component of the model centers on stakeholders' perceptions of the context for change. As with implementers, stakeholders' backgrounds or personal experiences with change influence how open they are to change efforts (Lewis, 2007). Stakeholders have existing beliefs and values regarding change that they bring to the current change process. Stakeholders have concerns that drive or color their interactions during the change process. Stakeholders face uncertainty during the change process, experience anxiety that group norms may be affected by the change, may have concerns about their identities and relationships within the organization, and may be anxious about being able to perform in the changed environment (Lewis, 2011). Lewis argues that a Stakeholder Model of Change Implementation Communication must take into account the inter-stakeholder relationships that create a complex web of relationships in organizations. Communication strategies must consider the differing interpretations that stakeholder groups make of change (Lewis, 2007).

Change Outcomes

The fourth component of the stakeholder model proposed by Lewis is the production of outcomes. Stakeholders interact, interpret those interactions, and make sense of

communication strategies and messages; this communication process is the "observable system" of the change effort (Lewis, 2007, p. 195). The system can produce intended and unintended outcomes, some desirable and some undesirable. For example, Lewis explains the negative effects of inauthentic communication (stress, burnout, emotional fatigue) and argues that these outcomes should be monitored as closely as intended outcomes (2007). Lewis's stakeholder model of change communication connects communicative actions to change outcomes (2011). It posits that stakeholder interactions drive outcomes. According to this model, a department chair's understanding of the stakes that faculty hold in the organization and the chair's selection of communication strategies based on that information are predictors determining the outcomes of planned change (Lewis, 2007). The negotiation of stakes between chairs and faculty as they communicate during change affects the outcomes of the change.

In one example of a stakeholder approach to change communication, researchers identified the communication patterns of senior and middle managers in order to study how change occurs between stakeholders at different levels in the organizational hierarchy (Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011). Communicative practices were identified and organized into two sets: one by senior managers ("inviting, proposing, building, clarifying, and affirming") and the other by middle managers ("building, challenging, reiterating") (p. 33). The relational engagement of both stakeholder groups produced generative dialogue, which is the collaboration of multiple stakeholders to negotiate new meanings. Middle managers played an important role in the change process by questioning senior managers' change plans (Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011). In the process, the change was reframed and improved.

This study frames organizational change as a communicative process authored by multiple stakeholder groups, including middle managers as change implementers.

Midlevel Leaders: Communicating across Boundaries

In organizational change, pertinent stakeholders include those in upper and middle management as well as those on the front lines of the change. Middle managers play an important role in linking employees with senior management (Lewis, 2011). Midlevel managers can interpret change initiatives to front-line employees, translate font-line concerns to senior management, and bridge boundaries within the organization (Lewis, 2011). Being in such a position of importance, middle managers can exert either positive or negative influences on organizational change efforts (Huy, 2002; Lewis, 2011).

Balogun (2003) found that middle managers engage in both sensemaking and management; in planned change initiatives, they undergo personal change as well as help the members of their team handle the change, all the while maintaining daily operations. They are change intermediaries, making sense of the changes so they can understand the changes themselves, and then translating the change to their employees.

Midlevel managers have been called practical authors (Shorter & Cunliffe, 2003). Middle managers provide the communication that gets work done (Keyton, 2011). When managers act as practical authors, they create meaning relationally through their communication with others. Through conversations, managers author stories of the organization that clarify, challenge, and create meaning and new ideas. They create "organizational landscapes" (Shorter & Conliffe, 2003, n.p.) out of the chaos and complexity of working life (Barge, 2004). In order to do this, managers must be able to both observe their interactions and simultaneously participate in them (Barge, 2004).

Communication with supervisors determines how employees view change over time (Thornhill & Saunders, 2003). In one study, those who felt more positive about the changes were more likely to state they were treated with respect while those who felt negative about the changes were dissatisfied with the way they were treated by managers (Thornhill & Saunders, 2003). The social interactions between managers and those they supervise appear to be important factors determining employees' acceptance of change (Tanner & Otto, 2016; Thornhill & Saunders, 2003; van der Voet, 2014). One study found that trust plays an important role during organizational change and that employees are more likely to trust their direct supervisors over senior management (Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia, & Irmer, 2007). Employing middle managers to facilitate change in a two-way communication process was shown to be a more effective way of managing employees' uncertainty (Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia, & Irmer, 2007).

The communication processes of middle managers and employees play a pivotal role in organizational change. In community colleges, department chairs and faculty—critical populations with a stake in change that focuses on student success—assume the roles of midlevel managers and their front-line employees.

Stakeholders in Higher Education

Higher education institutions consist of multiple subcultures (Baxter, 1993). Subcultures in the academy adopt differing, contradictory codes for communicating about change (Baxter, 1993). Faculty may adopt a code of collegiality which prizes individuality and face-to-face conversations while administration often works from a code of corporate management that values putting things in writing (Baxter, 1993). Faculty may view administration's preference for written documents as symptomatic of bureaucracy and red

tape while the administration may view the faculty's preference for conversation as too informal and inconsistent. The result is that “instead of joining together to solve the serious problems of the universities, we are mainly talking past each other” (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012, p. xx). Each subculture has its own language and rules for engaging in speech. Faculty, for example, focus on academic freedom and rigor, and administrators prioritize strategic planning and institutional mission (Allen, 2003; Bess & Dee, 2014). These identities inform how stakeholders interpret interactions with each other. In addition, faculty tend to view their work as individualistic, even seeing themselves as free-lancers (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012); on the other hand, administrators take a big-picture view of the campus.

The differing perspectives of these two stakeholder groups are reflected in their values. The groups represent two worlds, the world of academia and the increasingly corporatized world of administration, and each world has “its own values, beliefs, and expectations. Each sees its world as the dominant reality” (Bolman & Gallos 2011, p. 147). Faculty value collegiality, autonomy, diversity and discussion and debate that lead to consensus; conversely, administration value control, hierarchy, productivity, and action (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Kezar, 2014). Faculty may prefer decentralization and individuality, while administration promotes centralization and standardization (Kezar, 2014). Each stakeholder group makes sense of the institution in different ways, which complicates communication.

The communication rules and procedures that faculty and administrators use are often incomprehensible to the other side (Bess & Dee, 2014). It is difficult to establish communication that bridges the borders of each community because to traffic across the boundary threatens a loss of autonomy (Bess & Dee, 2014). A group may fear the loss of a

long-held identity as it merges with a larger group to accomplish change (Bess & Dee, 2014). Conflict between stakeholder groups will slow change at a time when it is needed most. In order to effect change, institutional stakeholders need to adopt communication strategies that encourage authentic conversation across boundaries (Bess & Dee, 2014). Department chairs are well-positioned to cross those boundaries.

Department Chairs

Like organization, leadership is a communication phenomenon rooted in language (Czech & Forward, 2010; Gonaim, 2016). Likewise, the work of the department chair is grounded in language. As one scholar noted, the real work of the department chair is managing conversations, particularly during times of change (Bowman, 2002). Bolman and Gallos (2011) refer to department chairs as "boundary spanners" (p. 146) and "buffers" (p. 148). As community colleges face the pressures of implementing comprehensive student success reforms under budget constraints and increased scrutiny, some have argued that college leaders need to do more to leverage underutilized middle managers in achieving outcomes (Ebbers et al., 2010). Others have noted that when facing these challenges, college leaders may promote corporate styles of management, taking some of the control over teaching and learning away from the faculty (Eddy, 2013; Levin, 2007). This trend highlights the importance of the role of the department chair in bridging the gap between faculty and upper administration (McArthur, 2002).

Building relationships between administration and faculty and communicating across boundaries should help community colleges address today's pressures (Eddy, 2013). Studies focused on leader communication acknowledge that the role of midlevel leader in higher education is complex, ambiguous, and often contradictory and conclude that success in the

role hinges on effective communication (Czeck & Forward, 2010; Gonaim, 2016; Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999; Lucas, 2000). From the perspective of faculty in one study, effective communication is collaborative, open, honest, clear, nonjudgmental, and empathetic, while ineffective communication is defensive, secretive, and vague (Czech & Forward, 2010).

Department chairs oversee the work of faculty (Eddy, 2013) and contribute to the core work of the institution. A functional department will be open to communication across boundaries (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012). Middle managers are centrally located and thus positioned to span boundaries; they can move freely between levels of the organization (Eddy, 2013). When academic departments function effectively, they are "powerful sources of identity and meaning" (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012, p. 86). The department chair is the critical factor in creating and maintaining a functional department; chairs play a significant role in retaining and motivating faculty (Czech & Forward, 2010; Gardner & Ward, 2018). Chairs create and maintain the culture and climate of the department (Gardner & Ward, 2018), and according to some researchers should view themselves as community organizers who work to increase support through relationship building (Czech & Forward, 2000; Esterberg & Wooding, 2012). When academic departments function effectively, they can drive change in the institution (Gardner & Ward, 2018).

Department chairs are the first level in the academic hierarchy, responsible for implementing the plans of senior administration; their participation and support are critical for change initiatives to succeed (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012). Department chairs can be the bridge between faculty and administration in times of change (Bess & Dee, 2014).

Community College Faculty

The majority of the work in an institution of higher education is done by faculty (McArthur, 2002). Faculty in community colleges expect a level of autonomy as they determine their work schedules and perform their teaching, and they expect to participate in governance and collaborate in academic decisions (Kisker & Kater, 2013; Levin, 2013; McArthur, 2002). Faculty work in independent academic units or tribes (Allen, 2003) with different, often clashing worldviews (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012). Community college faculty are often divided into general education (or university transfer), career-technical, and remedial or developmental education camps, with each group constituting its own subculture (Levin, 2013). Adding to the complexity of multiple cultures, conflict can occur within the faculty ranks in that disciplines have different priorities and points of view (Bozeman, Fay, & Gaughan, 3013; Kezar, 2014). For example, in a study of a community college undergoing change, two subcultures emerged: career-technical faculty identifying with a labor versus management culture and general education faculty identifying with the academic culture (Ayers, 2005). Each subculture communicated from competing frameworks, inhibiting the college's change efforts (Ayers, 2005).

Trust and transparency can also be viewed through the communication lens in that both are established and maintained through communication. Two-way communication, trust, and transparency have been shown to be central to faculty engagement and meaningful improvement (Kater, 2017). A culture that does not encourage collaboration fosters apathy, suspicion, and disengagement (Czech & Forward, 2010). Communication and team-building have been identified by faculty as significant factors in creating a positive work environment (Czech & Forward, 2010; Lucas, 2000).

College culture has been described as "a conglomeration of tribal communities organized into villages and hamlets of departments and disciplines" (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012, p. 3). These communities often band together against a common enemy, the administration (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012). This divide between faculty and administration makes higher education resistant to change (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012). As some have noted, "it is easier to move a cemetery than to change a university" (Lucas, 2000, p. 7). Like all organizations, colleges are systems of human interaction (Bess & Dee, 2012), and in order to study the change process, we need to study the communication between the key stakeholders responsible for change in higher education.

Change Implementation Activities

In 1998, communication scholars Lewis and Seibold completed a comprehensive literature review and established a research agenda for organizational change scholars that included a focus on social interactions during the change process that involved information sharing, vision and motivation, and social support. Since then, researchers have studied these communicative activities in various contexts of organizational change, some of which has been described throughout this literature review. This section identifies key features of each of the activities and connects them to research on the communication of department chairs and faculty in higher education.

Information Sharing

Information sharing includes the methods used to disseminate information about change, the stakeholders doing the sharing, the channels used to share information, and the criteria used to assess the credibility of information (Lewis & Seibold, 1998). Informal and formal networks are utilized to share information during the change process. Organizations

have information-sharing norms, typical communication patterns that have to be leveraged and at times transformed in the change process (Lewis, 2011). For example, some stakeholders may be used to hoarding information as a form of control—acting as gatekeepers—but as part of the change effort must now disseminate information more widely (Lewis, 2011; Rogers, 2003). If change implementers are perceived to be withholding information or providing incomplete or conflicting information, they will be perceived as less credible (Lewis, 2011).

Initially, change managers may share information in the form of announcements, but as the change is implemented, the users may transform from recipients of information to information-sharers in the form of offering responses and opinions (Lewis, 2011). Lewis states that more research is needed to understand information creation and dissemination during change by organizational members on the periphery of the change, that is, those who are not officially a part of the change process. In one study, change implementers reported on the primary source of information-sharing during change: 30% reported that people received most of their information from the implementation team, 27% reported it was top management, and 17% reported information came primarily from midlevel managers (Lewis, 2011). However, those who were not directly involved in implementing the change reported that they received the majority of their information about the change through small, informal, peer-to-peer networks (Lewis, 2011). Lewis concludes that people seek information from those closest to them, while those implementing the change prefer to exert more control over information-sharing. Information that is shared can be accurate or inaccurate, credible or unreliable. Studies have shown that during change, organizational members may seek

information as a form of social support, whether that information is accurate or not (Lewis, 2011).

Information sharing can reduce the stress that often accompanies change, but change agents must avoid information overload, in which communication about change becomes excessive, possibly irrelevant, and cannot be effectively used by members of the organization (Rogers, 2003; White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010). Rogers (2003) asserts that information sharing occurs throughout all phases of the change process and should be addressed strategically in each stage. For example, one study concluded that the beginning of the change period was a crucial phase for information sharing; how the change was talked about shaped the members' perceptions of the change experience (Lewis, 2011). Conversations that close out a change initiative can also impact the outcomes of the change (Ford, 1999). Studies focused on department chairs indicate that effective chairs regularly provide information to stakeholders on the department's direction and progress (Bryman, 2007; Gonaim, 2016).

Vision and Motivation

Vision and motivation refer to the ways the vision for the change is communicated, and by whom, and the ways users are motivated to enact change as a result of that interaction (Lewis & Seibold, 1998). One predictor of success in change programs is establishing a clear vision or purpose for the change (Kezar, 2014; Lewis, 2011; Schein, 2017). The vision communicated by change agents might be reframed by users, both those who support and resist the change. Change agents engage in "emotional labor," or the management of emotions during interactions with employees; this emotional labor is part of the change agent's work in motivating others to support the change (Zorn, 2003, p. 169). Emotion can be

used to unfreeze an organization and move it toward a shared vision of change (Mirvis, 1996).

Creating a shared vision and effectively communicating it are hallmarks of effective department chairs (Bryman, 2007; Gonaim, 2016; Lucas, 2000). Research suggests that faculty will be motivated by considerate and honest interaction, fair treatment, and recognition of good work, and that change should be framed as an opportunity rather than a problem (Bess & Dee, 2014; Bryman, 2007; Gonaim, 2016; Stone & Coussons-Read, 2011).

Social Support

Social support refers to interaction that addresses the anxiety and fear that often surrounds change and focuses on change users' emotional needs (Lewis, 2011; Lewis & Seibold, 1998; Steigenberger, 2015). Rogers (2003) noted that because diffusion is concerned with new ideas, it creates uncertainty and unpredictability, which can cause anxiety. Change causes stress and can impact people's commitment to the organization (Lewis, 2011; Schein, 2017). Stakeholders may identify so strongly with the status quo to the point of maintaining it even in the face of required change (Lewis, 2011). Social networks form around interactions that provide comfort and a common storyline (Lewis, 2011). Organizational members make sense of change based on their membership in groups, and this group identity helps to reduce uncertainty (Brown, Colville, & Pye, 2015; Dawson & McLean, 2013).

During organizational change, social support is necessary to help members manage their emotions, which indicate their reactions, both positive and negative, to the change (Steigenberger, 2015; Zorn, 2003). Social support can also include ready access to useful and credible information during change (Lewis, 2011). Rogers (2003) found that change agents are successful when they empathize with the users of the change. Studies on the effectiveness

of department chairs indicate that effective leaders establish respectful, supportive, trusting relationships with faculty (Bryman, 2007; Lucas, 2000).

Conclusion

This literature review examined research from organizational change, organizational communication, and change implementation communication. While the literature on these topics is vast, in order to better understand how to create and sustain change during student success reform efforts, research is needed that explores communication between community college faculty and their direct supervisors during organizational change. Communication includes social interactions enacted through language—through the conversations between and among these stakeholders, which constitutes their reality.

Less literature examines communication between middle leaders and faculty in community colleges, in particular communication that results in successful change outcomes for community college students (Eddy, 2013). Pamela Eddy (2013) asserts that research on community colleges is less prevalent than four-year institutions, and what research exists often does little more than highlight best practices. She argues that community college researchers need to study the causes leading to organizational outcomes and asserts that collaborative leadership from middle managers focused on building relationships with faculty should lead to successful institutional change (2013). Gonaim (2016) states that most of the research on department chairs relies on survey data, which supplies the wording for participants to select or rate rather than allowing participants to share their stories. She recommends that future research on department chairs employ qualitative methods in order to more fully explore their experiences in their own voices in the context of their institutions. This qualitative study aimed to do just that: explore the perceptions of chairs and faculty

related to chair communication in community colleges that have a demonstrated record of successful student outcomes.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The Completion Agenda for America's community colleges has focused attention on the need for comprehensive student success reforms (Community College Excellence, 2016). Community colleges must change in order to improve those outcomes, yet organizational change is difficult and often incomplete or transitory (Bess & Dee, 2012; Nohria & Beer, 2000). Faculty represent a significant stakeholder in educational institutions and must be engaged in change efforts focused on student success (AACC, 2014; Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2017). Compounding the change process is the unique nature of academic institutions in which faculty expect autonomy and academic freedom and inhabit a culture that is often at odds with college administration (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012; Kezar, 2014). Sitting at the nexus of faculty and administrative roles are middle leaders—specifically department chairs—who work directly with faculty to enact change (Bess & Dee, 2014; Eddy, 2013).

The purpose of this case study was to explore department chairs' communication with full-time faculty in community colleges that have experienced comprehensive student success reform in order to determine factors that may contribute to improved student outcomes. Two institutions were selected from a group of community colleges recognized by the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program as exemplary in engaging faculty in improving student success. This qualitative inquiry addresses the following research questions:

1. How do department chairs at community colleges recognized by the Aspen Institute's Community College Excellence Program communicate with faculty during the unfreezing, changing, and refreezing phases of the change process during educational reform efforts?

2. How do department chairs communicate with faculty during the change process related to information sharing, vision and motivation, and social support?

Rationale for Qualitative Research

The exploratory nature of this study and the reliance on community college department chair and faculty perceptions of their communication during comprehensive reform efforts support a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is typically grounded in social constructionism, which holds that people create meaning in situations, particularly through their social interactions (Creswell, 2014). In other words, meaning is constructed (Crotty, 1998). Reality is believed to be produced and reproduced through social interactions (Crotty, 1998). Qualitative researchers seek to understand the meaning that participants assign to their experiences and focus on participants' interactions in specific settings (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research gathers data in the participant's own setting (Creswell, 2014). This type of research aims to create a rich description of the meanings that participants assign to their experiences, in order to see the world through their perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This study describes department chair and full-time faculty perceptions of department chair communication during change efforts at institutions that have successfully engaged faculty in student success reforms. Participants were asked to recall and describe their social exchanges and interpersonal interactions during organizational change. As described above, qualitative research provides the optimum methodology for this research study. The study relied on department chair and faculty perceptions of their experiences to better understand department chair communication during comprehensive reform efforts. These interpretations

of reality can be appropriately examined through a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2014).

Rationale for Case Study Approach

This study employs a case study approach, examining the perspectives of department chairs and full-time faculty at community colleges that have experienced and sustained positive student outcomes. The case study design is appropriate for research that explores in depth a complex phenomenon in a real-life context (Yin, 2014). A case study involves in-depth examination of a case. A case is "a bounded integrated system with working parts" (Glense, 2011, p.22) that is specific to a certain time and place (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, Yin (2003) states that a case is "a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context" (p.13). The case study approach is applicable to this research study in that the research was limited to two community colleges and bounded by the department chairs and faculty interviewed at these two institutions. Additionally, communication is a contemporary phenomenon studied in the real-world setting of the two community colleges. Case studies are recommended when the research seeks to describe or explore a current phenomenon that has limited prior research, when the research aims to answer "why" or "how" questions, and the researcher lacks control over events (Yin, 2014). This research study meets these conditions indicating that the case study methodology is an appropriate approach.

Case studies are based on an interpretivist paradigm (Glense, 2011) suggesting that a single truth does not exist and reality is determined by the individual having the experiences. Therefore, another reason for selecting case study methodology is to allow the researcher to

explore the phenomenon through multiple lenses allowing for the construction of a more robust and richer understanding of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A case study was selected for this study to allow for a rich account of faculty and department chair experiences to better understand how chair communication influences faculty engagement in comprehensive community college reform efforts.

Finally, a multiple-case study is considered to be more robust than a single-case study, allowing for more variation and increased validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2015). The use of a multiple-case study allows for an analysis of data within the institutions selected as well as across the institutions selected (Yin, 2003). Community colleges across the country are as diverse as the students they serve; therefore, gaining an understanding of how department chair and faculty communication influences faculty engagement at two institutions, rather than one, will increase the potential value of the results and their application across various community college structures. Similarities and differences can also be deduced from studying more than one case (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). When similarities are noted across multiple cases, replications of findings contribute to the external validity of the study and the robustness of the results (Yin, 2003).

Sample Selection

Purposeful sampling works from the assumption that selecting a sample from which the most information can be gleaned, a sample that is unique or special in some way, will lead to insights about the phenomenon under study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The sampling method in this study was purposeful in that the participants worked at community colleges that were finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. Both community colleges have received numerous awards for demonstrating significant gains in improving

student outcomes. In addition, both of these institutions have been recognized for promoting strong faculty engagement and demonstrating impressive improvements in the area of student learning. Participants for this study were selected from department chairs and full-time faculty in general education and career-technical programs.

Site Selection

The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program awards a one million dollar prize every two years to a community college that demonstrates excellent performance in four categories: student learning, credential completion, family-sustaining employment, and equity in outcomes for minority and low-income students (Aspen, 2018a). The process for selecting the winner begins with a review of nationally available performance metrics on the country's 1,000 public community colleges, focusing on student retention and completion, including equity in outcomes. From the data, 150 colleges are determined to be eligible to apply for the Aspen Prize (Aspen, 2018b). These colleges are invited to submit applications, providing additional data regarding labor market outcomes, student learning assessment, and retention and completion. From the pool of applicants, ten finalists are named. The winner is selected from the finalists after extensive reviews of the colleges' qualitative and quantitative data and on-site visits. Josh Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, explains that the finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence have demonstrated exemplary outcomes related to student success:

> Their leaders, faculty, and staffs have developed cultures that drive toward scaled improvements in completion and classroom learning as well as students' post-graduation success—at universities where they transfer and in the job market. And they work hard to achieve strong results for all students, understanding the critical

> role community colleges play in advancing social mobility for many students who historically have been underserved in higher education. (Aspen, 2018a, n.p.)

The College Excellence Program recognizes the need for community colleges to change in order to achieve successful student outcomes and expects the Aspen Prize to spark identification and replication of best practices for achieving those outcomes (Aspen, 2018b).

As a result of their accolades in the area of student learning, innovative institutional cultures, and improvements in student outcomes, two community colleges agreed to serve as sites for exploring department chair communication through a case study approach.

To protect the anonymity of the participants and the two community colleges, pseudonyms will be utilized throughout the study. Plains Community College (PCC) is used when referring to the smaller of the two colleges and Urban Community College (UCC) is used for the larger institution. These two community colleges are located in the South Central area of the United States. Both community colleges operate under a state-level higher education coordinating board or agency and are governed by a locally elected board. Each college has multiple campuses, offers over 100 curriculum level credentials, has an organizational structure with roles similar to a department chair, has experienced tremendous change resulting in some turnover in personnel, implements student success efforts at scale, and has seen significant improvements in completion outcomes. Neither college is unionized or has a tenure process. While different titles were used by faculty to describe administrators at the two colleges, for the purposes of this study the following terms are utilized: "Department chair" is used to describe the immediate faculty supervisor; "Vice President" is used to describe the top academic leader; and "President" is used to describe the top leader at the institution.

Participant Selection

The population of participants was determined by the scope of this research project which focused on department chairs and faculty who have been engaged in comprehensive community college reform efforts. Participants for this study were selected from department chairs and faculty in general education and career technical programs at the two identified community colleges recognized by the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program as achieving exceptional student outcomes. Following the initial solicitation email (Appendix A), the Vice President at each institution coordinated with the researcher to identify department chairs and faculty who have demonstrated strong engagement in comprehensive student success initiatives at their respective sites. Additionally, selected chairs and faculty must have worked at the institution for at least several years. In the case of PCC, the Vice President contacted the complete list of faculty identified as potential participants to gauge their interest. A list of those who showed interest was compiled by an administrative support staff member as well as a grid showing each faculty member's availability. The researcher used the college directory to select a sample of seven department chairs and faculty that closely resembled the characteristics of the general faculty population. Once the research schedule was coordinated, the administrative support staff member sent calendar invitations to both the participants and the researcher. The researcher emailed participants with additional information about the study (Appendix B). A very similar process was conducted at UCC; however, the researcher was provided with a list of names and their available interview times. The majority of these department chairs and faculty were in areas other than career technical programs, and follow-up conversations occurred to identify additional participants from those areas. Every participant was present and chose to participate. Prior to

participation, the Informed Consent for Research form was explained to participants which detailed the purpose of the study, their involvement, their rights as participant, and how their confidentiality was protected (See Appendix C). Each participant signed a copy of this form and agreed to be audio recorded. All were told they could withdraw from the study at any time.

This sample of community college chairs and faculty was representative of the various disciplines and programs available at the colleges, included early champions and the initially more reluctant participants in reform efforts, and matched the demographics (i.e. gender, race, age, and longevity) of the general population.

Data Collection

The goal of the study was to interview enough department chairs and faculty members at each institution to achieve both rich and thick data (Dibley, 2011). To achieve depth in data collection, a sample of 6-8 representatives from the faculty and 6-8 department chairs at each institution was targeted. Yin (2009) suggests that the sample size for case studies include at least six sources of information, and Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) suggest that data saturation begins to occur after 12 interviews. The target of a sample size of 6-8 at each institution would uncover the key variants related to department chair communication and allow for some flexibility should unexpected conflicts arise preventing a few of the selected department chairs and faculty from participating. The final count was 7 department chairs and corresponding faculty at one college and 8 department chairs and 9 faculty at the other for a total of 31 participants: 15 department chairs and 16 faculty. Two of the faculty at one location requested to be interviewed together, resulting in 30 interview transcripts. Therefore, one of the department chairs was matched with two faculty.

The instruments used to collect data in this study included interviews and document analysis. The study employed semi-structured interviews with the goal of yielding rich, descriptive information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The format of the interviews was one-on-one; interviews were scheduled for one hour and ranged from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to investigate a specific topic with a limited number of prepared questions; follow-up questions were asked that allowed for further, less structured exploration (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Interview questions explored the interactions of department chairs and faculty during the change process, asking participants to recall and describe their communication during activities such as information sharing, visioning and motivation, and social support (Lewis, 2011; Lewis & Seibold, 1998). These activities drive the social interaction between change agents and the users of change and can be either formal or informal, verbal or written (Lewis, 2011; Lewis & Seibold, 1998). Asking department chairs and faculty to speak to these interactions during the change process yielded rich, descriptive data addressing the research questions. Interview questions also explored participants' perceptions of their interaction and communication in each of these three areas throughout the change process, from unfreezing, changing, and refreezing, as appropriate. Interview questions are provided in Appendix D and Appendix E.

Document analysis is another approach to qualitative research. Document analysis can provide data about the contexts in which the research will occur. Documents can answer questions about the institutions. They also provide supplemental data, such as demographic information, student characteristics, and success outcomes. Documents may also provide corroborating evidence that verifies information through interviews (Bowen, 2009).

Document analysis for this study included reviewing written documents such as position descriptions, organizational charts, strategic plans, student outcomes data, and mission statements (Kezar, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Some of these documents were available to the public and others were requested of the appropriate staff at each institution. These documents were analyzed in an effort to better understand the institutional culture contributing to participants' communication during the change process.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. The researcher audio recorded each of the interviews using Otter Voice Notes, which translates English conversations into transcriptions. The software is safe and secure as the data is synced over an encrypted connection and stored in a password-protected, secure cloud environment. The transcripts required significant editing by the researcher to accurately represent the content of the conversations. During transcription, identifiers were de-linked from the data which was stored on a password-protected computer.

The computer-assisted data analysis software NVIVO was used to assist with coding data. First- and second-coding cycles provided a thorough analysis of the data (Saldana, 2009). As described by Saldana (2009), coding is a recursive process of identifying, comparing, and checking codes, data, categories, etc. Coding during the first cycle focused on gaining an initial understanding and early analysis of the data; a round of initial or open coding identified 19 areas to explore further. In Vivi coding allowed the researcher to capture quotations from participants to prioritize their voices. Themeing the Data allowed the researcher to analyze the data by grouping it into thematic patterns (Saldana, 2009). Second-cycle coding allowed the researcher to review, organize, and re-analyze the first round of

coding (Saldana, 2009). Pattern coding in this cycle allowed the researcher to develop overarching themes (Saldana, 2009). After several rounds of open coding, In Vivi coding, Themeing the Data, and patterned coding to ensure that all possible categories and themes were captured (including any not directly connected to the study's framework), codes were eventually organized by the communication activities related to information sharing, vision, motivation, and social support. Transcripts were initially coded and analyzed separately by college to determine if any differences existed between PCC and UCC.

Documents were analyzed through an initial skimming and then a more thorough reading of relevant areas. Interpretation followed an iterative process of examining the documents for content and themes. Document analysis provided data about the contexts in which the research occurred. Documents helped provide information about the institutions and background that supported the research questions. They provided supplemental data, such as demographic information, student characteristics, and success outcomes. Documents also provided corroborating evidence that verified information obtained through the interviews (Bowen, 2009).

Document analysis for this study included reviewing written and visual documents such as websites, strategic plans, personnel directories, organizational charts, student success documents and outcomes, and policy manuals (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These documents are available to the public and would reveal the identity of the institutions if included; therefore, they are not cited here or included in the reference section. The documents were collected, reviewed and analyzed prior to the site visits in an effort to better understand the institutional culture. A few documents were revisited to add clarity to information that provided during interviews.

In a few instances, document analysis was combined with interviews. The researcher asked questions about certain documents, such as the reporting structure as evidenced in an organizational chart, about the college's vision and mission statements, about job responsibilities, and about the origin of particular policies and practices (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To confirm information gathered throughout the interviews, data was triangulated with document analysis when possible. Analytic notes written during the coding allowed for in-depth, diverse thinking to develop regarding the data (Saldana, 2009). Topics for the notes included the research questions, codes and reasons for their selection, future directions for the study, patterns or themes in the data, etc. (Saldana, 2009). A research journal was used by the researcher to keep track of notes, thoughts, and ideas arose during the interviews. The few modifications from protocol were documented (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007).

Ethical Considerations

Protecting human subjects required obtaining informed consent from all study participants. Privacy and confidentiality were secured through pseudonyms (Yin, 2015), and transcripts and other documentation were kept on a secure, password-protected computer and in locked locations. The research design reduced adverse actions that may have resulted from participation in the study (Yin, 2015).

Reliability and Validity

The quality of a study is determined by its reliability and validity. The goal of reliability is to reduce the biases and inaccuracies in a study (Yin, 2015). The reliability of data and conclusions in case study research depends on whether another researcher, functioning in the same way an auditor would, would arrive at the same conclusions in the study (Yin, 2015). Therefore, the researcher documented procedures precisely and

thoroughly so that an effective reliability check could be completed using that documentation (Yin, 2015). To boost reliability, the researcher also asked participants to review transcripts for accuracy (Yin, 2015). As a reliability measure, a peer coder with doctoral-level experience in qualitative research who did not have access to the study's research questions reviewed a de-identified chair and faculty transcript. The peer coder identified several major themes which substantiated the overall findings of the study.

Yin (2015) advocates for the creation of a protocol, which outlines the procedures, logistics, and rules that will be followed during the case study. The protocol includes an overview of the study, an outline of the data collection procedures, questions that the researcher should keep in mind when collecting data, the sources of evidence that will provide the answers, and a guide for the final case study report (Yin, 2015). The protocol that guided this study included these components.

Construct validity requires the researcher to create an operational set of measures for the concepts under study (Yin, 2015). To achieve construct validity, the researcher should use multiple sources of evidence, establish a chain of evidence, and ask participants to review reports for accuracy (Yin, 2015). Case studies allow the collection of data from multiple participants and multiple sites. Case studies using multiple sources of evidence were found to have higher overall quality than those using single sources of evidence (Yin, 2015).

According to Yin (2015), "the most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of *converging lines of inquiry*" (p. 120). Triangulating the evidence, a concept drawn from navigational principles using multiple points on a map to identify a precise location, occurs when multiple sources of information lead the researcher to a conclusion (Yin, 2015). Because a case study's conclusions are

perceived as more accurate and valid if based on multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2015), the transcripts of each chair-faculty pairing were reviewed. All but one of the faculty interviews generally aligned with the chairs' perceptions of their communication with faculty. The exception included an interview with a faculty member who did not provide details of the chair's communication efforts, except to say that the chair was supportive and sympathetic in response to glitches that arose during the change. The faculty member stated that the dean rather than the chair provided information and direction regarding the initiative. The faculty member affirmed the college's (and the faculty member's own) focus on student success but provided no other details related to the chair's communication during the change, whether positive or negative.

The 15 department chairs and 16 faculty interviewed offered a range of perceptions regarding the chairs' communicative practices, but none of the faculty who were interviewed offered outright negative perceptions of their department chair. A few faculty offered less positive accounts of their experiences than their counterparts in the study. Because their department chairs did not have the same discipline-specific background, these faculty felt that they informed the chair about some of the changes more so than the chair informed them. However, these faculty also described positive attributes of their chairs' communication.

A chain of evidence can also increase a study's reliability and validity. A chain of evidence allows another researcher or an observer to retrace the steps taken from findings to the data and research questions that led to it—and to make the same journey from the research questions to the findings (Yin, 2015). Research methods were therefore precisely

detailed and well-documented in the case study protocol. Methods were clearly traced to evidence, which was clearly and specifically traced to findings, and vice versa.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations are conditions within the researcher's control that narrow the scope of a research study (Creswell, 2014). Participation in this research study was limited to community colleges that have been finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. Chair and faculty involvement were limited to only those identified by their top academic leader as being employed for at least several years and significantly involved in one or more student success initiatives at the institution. Given the exploratory nature of this study, intentional choices were made to apply boundaries to participant selection in order to increase the opportunity to gain insights from engaged chairs and faculty.

This study had limitations that are important to note. The faculty participants were identified by their administrators as being significantly engaged in reform efforts. As a result, they may not be representative of the full faculty at the two community colleges examined. Those chairs and faculty most engaged and positive about their experiences may have been the most agreeable to the interview and more open to authentic dialogue with the researcher.

A second limitation of this study was that the semi-structured interviews relied on self-report and participants' memories of prior experiences with reform efforts. Therefore, the data collected was subject to inaccuracies given the fallibility of memories. The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions to probe certain areas in greater depth and seek clarifications.

Because these institutions are recognized for being exceptional community colleges, multiple factors may be contributing to the success of the institutions and the engagement of

their chairs and faculty. Examining community colleges that have been recognized and awarded by the Aspen Institute of Community College Excellence as excelling in the area of student outcomes provides the researcher with enhanced opportunities to investigate a climate of effective communication. These cultures may not be indicative of many community colleges across the nation. Another commonality between these two community colleges is that both are located in the same state. Statewide factors and conditions may be present that influence department chair and faculty communication. The colleges shared a number of characteristics, such as operating under a state-level higher education coordinating board or agency and being governed by a locally elected board. As a result of the similarities, factors and conditions may be present that influence chair and faculty engagement. However, this qualitative case study was not focused on causality or quantifying the magnitude of one factor on the improvements in student outcomes. Furthermore, it is not the intent of this study to be able to generalize the findings from these two case studies to all community colleges. As Stake (2000) notes, "the purpose of a case report is not the represent the world, but to represent the case" (p. 448). It was the intent of this research study to gain knowledge about the communication strategies of department chairs in comprehensive reform efforts to improve student outcomes and to hope that readers can find information relevant and helpful to their particular situations and that additional research will be generated from the findings.

Positionality Statement

A study can be limited by the researcher's biases. Positionality is the acknowledgement by researchers that their views, values, and locations, in both time and space, can influence their understanding of the world and the research process. As the researcher, I am aware that my beliefs, values, and experiences are always present and

inseparable from my position as the researcher of this study. Glesne (2011) suggests that "researchers cannot control positionality in that it is determined in relations with others, but they can make certain choices that affect those relationships" (p. 157). It was imperative to mindfully and critically reflect on my positionality throughout this research project.

My educational background is in writing and rhetoric. My belief is that our thinking and the communication resulting from it shape our reality, and both occur through language. My focus on communication stems from my education and my experiences as a college instructor of writing and communication. As a student and an educator, I witnessed the role that written and verbal communication played in changing people's lives and realities. I was drawn to the field by experiencing the power and opportunity that result from good communication skills; I wanted to contribute to the positive change that results from improvement in those skills. These beliefs influenced my perception that change in organizations is produced through communication.

My epistemological perspective that knowledge is socially constructed was also reinforced through my professional experiences. When I became a department chair and later an academic dean, I experienced the different, often conflicting cultures of faculty and college administration. I participated in and observed the social interactions and written and verbal conversations between and among stakeholders, noting that each group often spoke a different language and constructed a different reality as a result. These experiences shaped my belief that reality is socially constructed, as I began to see that the same events and experiences could be interpreted differently depending on the person experiencing them, and that the person's group affiliation significantly contributed to their interpretation of reality.

My transition from faculty member to administrator occurred as a result of a comprehensive student success reform at a community college when I was asked to direct that effort. As a result of that initiative, I participated in multiple evaluative reviews of student success reforms at community colleges across the southeast. These reviews, conducted over a dozen years, revealed the difficulty of implementing, sustaining, and institutionalizing change efforts and the important role that department chairs and faculty play in engendering change in higher education. These experiences have contributed to my perception that communication between midlevel leaders and faculty can determine the success or failure of change efforts.

While conducting this study, I was mindful of the ways my experiences and education contributed to my perceptions about the factors that determine whether community college reform efforts succeed or fail. I was not invested in a particular outcome that conforms to my beliefs and experiences.

Acknowledging my own positionality, I was reflective about the design of the study and my interpretation of responses to avoid simply confirming preconceptions about the concepts under study (Yin, 2015). In order to produce a quality study, I could not be invested in a particular outcome. One strategy for avoiding bias was looking for contrary findings or "rival" explanations when analyzing the data (Yin, 2015, p. 140). According to Stake (1995), "Good case study is patient, reflective, willing to see another view…" (p. 12). Another strategy was to keep a reflective journal during the research process to identify areas where my subjectivity could potentially influence the data collection process and the interpretation of outcomes.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this case study was to explore department chair communication with full-time faculty in two community colleges that have experienced comprehensive student success reform in order to determine factors that may contribute to improved faculty engagement and improved student outcomes. The study addressed two research questions:

1. How do department chairs at community colleges recognized by the Aspen Institute's Community College Excellence Program communicate with faculty during the unfreezing, changing, and refreezing phases of the change process during educational reform efforts?
2. How do department chairs communicate with faculty during the change process related to information sharing, vision and motivation, and social support?

Study Participants

Participants were selected based on their involvement in student success initiatives, specifically, department chairs and faculty who had been actively engaged in the reform efforts as perceived by their administrative leadership. A mix of career-technical and university transfer participants was requested, with participants having at least a couple years of experience at the college. Thirty-one participants were interviewed for this study: 15 department chairs and 16 faculty members (two faculty members requested to be interviewed together because they had worked on the same initiative). A faculty member who worked in each chair's department was interviewed, creating 15 matched pairs. At one of the colleges, the average years of service for all participants was seven years; at the other, the average was more than twice as much at 14.9 years. This difference in years of service reflects one college's recent history of high turnover while they were making significant changes to

improve student success; participants referenced this turnover in their interviews. Department chairs were equally represented by male and female participants, while just over two-thirds of the faculty were female. Table 1 provides details regarding the participants.

Table 1. Study Participants.

	College	Department	Pairing	Gender	Years at College
Pair 1	1	Health Sciences	Chair Faculty	Female Female	5 years 4 years
Pair 2	1	Business	Chair Faculty	Male Female	1.5 years 3 years
Pair 3	1	Math	Chair Faculty	Male Female	5 years 18 years
Pair 4	1	Social Sciences	Chair Faculty	Female Male	4 years 9 years
Pair 5	1	Criminal Justice	Chair Faculty	Male Male	6 years 3 years
Pair 6	1	Welding	Chair Faculty	Male Male	21 years 5 years
Pair 7	1	Fine Arts	Chair Faculty	Male Male	10 years 5 years
Pair 8	2	Math	Chair Faculty	Male Female	11 years 5.5 years
Pair 9	2	Industrial Technologies	Chair Faculty	Male Female	3 years 9 years
Pair 10	2	Physical Sciences	Chair Faculty	Female Female	4 years 40 years
Pair 11	2	Nursing	Chair Faculty	Female Female	29 years 13 years
Pair 12	2	College Prep	Chair Faculty	Female Female	9 years 12 years
Pair 13	2	Math	Chair Faculty	Male Female	16 years 4 years
Pair 14	2	College Prep	Chair Faculty	Female Female	17 years 15 years
Pair 15	2	College Prep	Chair Faculty Faculty	Female Male Female	15 years 11 years 10 years

The departments represented in the study equally represented career-technical and university transfer. Table 2 outlines the departments included in the study. The nature of recent reform efforts resulted in college preparatory and math figuring more prominently.

Table 2. Breakdown of Departments.

Type	Departments
Career-Technical	Health Sciences (2) Business Criminal Justice Welding Industrial Technologies
University Transfer	Math (3) Social Sciences Fine Arts Physical Sciences
College Preparatory	Three departments in total, each consisting of developmental math, reading, and English faculty

Data Collection

Data collection methods consisted of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Department chairs and faculty participated in the study. Participants signed consent forms, and each interview began with a review of the researcher's background and study topic. Key definitions were also reviewed before the interview questions were asked and as needed throughout the interviews. Interview questions focused on department chairs' perceptions of their communication during the change process, their interactions with faculty during the change initiative, and their information sharing practices. Chairs were also asked to reflect on the ways they communicated vision, motivated faculty, and provided social support during the change process and to provide examples where appropriate. Faculty were

asked the same questions but reflected on their perceptions of the chairs' communication, not their own.

As part of the study, organizational charts, job descriptions, strategic plans, college mission and vision statements, and student outcomes data were reviewed. Document analysis provided information that illuminated and supported the findings.

Findings

The remainder of the chapter details the findings of the study, including common themes that address the research questions. This section begins with an overview of student success reforms at both colleges.

Overview: Two Colleges, One Vision

Both institutions have engaged in a variety of student success reforms over the last five or six years requiring the engagement and participation of faculty, including developmental redesign to fast-track students, faculty interventions with at-risk students, a cohort model for incoming students, changes to term length, student engagement strategies, Open Educational Resources to reduce student costs, and reducing program length. The catalysts for these reforms were varied, including state-mandated reforms and college-wide initiatives, but underlying all of them was the desire to improve outcomes for all students. Table 3 details the student success reforms that participants discussed. The institutions' practices demonstrate a commitment to student success. For example, at both institutions, course-level withdrawal rates are shared, and faculty are expected to examine and improve their drop rates. At one institution, classes are canceled only by order of the college president; when a faculty member is absent, other faculty cover classes.

In order to improve student outcomes, change has become a way of life, the new normal. Chairs and faculty at both colleges described a culture of innovation. According to one faculty member, “Things at this institution haven’t stayed the same probably for the past five or six years. There are lots of new initiatives, so faculty are already used to that.” The culture is one of “continuous change. It's going to keep changing and you have to just go with the flow.” The prevailing mindset is, “there seems to be something positive in this direction, let's move that way and we’ll all pick it up and go.” A faculty member stated, “we’ve been a program of change,” explaining that her department chair wraps up a change effort with, “it was hard work, but look at what we achieved. Now, what’s next?”

Table 3. Success Reforms that Participants Discussed.

Pair	Dept	Student Success Reforms	Catalyst for Reform
1	Health Sciences	Program thresholds Required faculty intervention for at-risk students	Low pass rates on certification exam, faculty-generated but in response to external threat: potential loss of program site
2	Business	Open Educational Resources Eight-week terms	Rising cost of textbooks, faculty-led, college-wide Mandated college-wide to improve drop rates
3	Math	Eight-week terms Developmental math studio model	Mandated college-wide to improve drop rates Mandated for developmental math faculty
4	Social Sciences	Open Educational Resources Retention program	Rising cost of textbooks, faculty-led college-wide Mandated, college-wide
5	Criminal Justice	Student outcomes assessment Engagement strategies	Department decision to improve use of student outcomes assessment data Mandated, college-wide
6	Welding	Retention program	Mandated, college-wide
7	Fine Arts	Retention program, including eight-week terms	Mandated college-wide

Table 3 (continued).

8	Math	Student Success course integration with gateway math Co-requisite classes	Mandatory cohort model for new students combining math, English, and student success content State-mandated, improve success rates of developmental students
9	Industrial Technologies	Shorter course terms	Department-led, improve completion
10	Physical Sciences	Faculty intervention for at-risk students	Department-led, improve course success rates
11	Nursing	Variety of reforms, including active learning strategies, reducing program hours, and critical thinking	Mix of department-led and state-mandated to improve pass rates on certification exam
12	College Prep	Condensing developmental courses	State-mandated to fast-track developmental students
13	Math	Co-requisite classes for developmental students	State-mandated to improve success rates of developmental students
14	College Prep	Co-requisite classes Student Success course integration with gateway courses	State-mandated to improve success rates of developmental students Mandatory cohort model for new students combining math, English, and student success content
15	College Prep	Integrating developmental reading and writing courses Co-requisite classes	State-mandated to fast-track developmental students State-mandated to improve success rates of developmental students

The chairs in the study recognized their responsibility to communicate with faculty throughout the change process. In the interviews, chairs described the various channels they used to communicate about the changes.

Communication Channels

Chairs used a variety of communication channels to disseminate information and seek feedback related to the change initiatives. All 15 chairs described regular departmental

meetings occurring at least once a month; some of the chairs held weekly departmental meetings. While chairs disseminated information about administration's plans in these meetings, a majority of the chairs described their departmental meetings as collaborative conversations during which chairs and faculty discuss the vision and goals of the college and department, share progress, "work out the kinks," distribute resources, "talk through ideas," make decisions as a group, and discuss "what worked, what didn't work." A chair defined meetings as professional learning communities focused on brainstorming and reviewing progress on change efforts within the department. As one chair said, "it's just more of a sitting down, working through things."

Chairs also prioritized individual time with faculty. Eleven of the 15 described regular one-on-one meetings with faculty. Chairs held weekly or monthly meetings with individual faculty to discuss progress on initiatives and regularly stopped by faculty offices to perform wellness checks and make themselves available for questions. As one chair stated, "I stop by people's offices and visit with them, I try to make sure that I'm visible and they can get information from me at any time." Meeting with faculty provided an opportunity for chairs to address individual concerns away from the rest of the department.

Chairs also leveraged technology. Nine of the 15 chairs described using email to communicate with faculty. Emails were used to provide ongoing updates and in place of meetings to be respectful of faculty time or to follow up after departmental meetings in order to summarize the meeting or reinforce key points. Text messages were helpful for chairs to encourage faculty, to share "spur of the moment" items, to provide brief updates after a meeting with administration, or to give reminders.

Regardless of the method or channel used to communicate, seven of the 15 chairs perceived that communication was nearly constant. Chairs described almost continual, daily communication, whether in-person or using technology to link faculty located across multiple campuses. Chairs referenced being available to faculty "24/7" through email and text messaging.

The majority of chairs used multiple communication methods and prioritized both group and individual communication. As one chair said, "individual communication is appropriate at times, departmental communication is appropriate at times, it just depends on what the needs are, so several different methods is probably the best way." Chairs described communication as one of their primary responsibilities which became even more important during times of change.

Throughout this chapter, as findings from department chair interviews are provided, a section detailing the faculty perspective will follow. Faculty interviews provided a window into the chairs' communication from the end-user's perspective and served both to validate chairs' perceptions of their departmental communication and to illuminate the chairs' comments. Faculty in the study confirmed the chairs' descriptions of their communication methods and frequency.

The faculty perspective. Faculty shared their perceptions of the department chair's communication during the change process. Fourteen of the 16 faculty respondents described regular, sometimes even daily, collaborative meetings in which chairs sought ideas and feedback from faculty on change efforts. Individual meetings were also mentioned by half of the participants. Meetings and electronic communications were uniformly viewed as positive moves by department chairs to keep faculty involved and informed. Faculty described

experiencing “a lot of conversations” and referenced a high level of engagement and open communication: “it’s been very open, a lot of open communication.” One faculty member suggested that the chair’s communication spurred faculty participation in the initiative and a resulted in a lack of problems in the department,

> There’s been a lot of communication. And I feel like it’s interesting that when there is good communication, then everybody is engaged. And so I feel like they’re hand in hand. I feel like my chair has been very good at communication, that’s probably partly why we don’t have a lot of problems in our department.

Good communication and faculty engagement go “hand in hand,” according to this faculty member. The majority of chairs and faculty at each institution described a high level of communication throughout the change process utilizing a variety of communication channels. The following sections detail common themes and subthemes emerging from chair and faculty interviews as they shared their perceptions of the chair’s communication during change initiatives. Table 4 provides an overview of these patterns.

Table 4. Themes and Subthemes Related to Chair Communication.

Themes	Subthemes
Chairs communicated a vision for change	Building the department vision for change Translating administration’s plans for faculty Communicating faculty reactions to administration
Chairs countered faculty resistance to change	Inviting faculty input to test and improve the change Emphasizing the benefits of changing Playing devil’s advocate Get on board . . . or move on
Chairs motivated faculty to engage in change	“You have freedom” “I want your input” “You are valued” “This is working”

Table 4 (continued).

Chairs used empathetic listening to provide social support	"My door is always open" "This is a safe zone"
Chairs addressed faculty fear and anxiety	"You are part of a team" "This is a learning process" "How can I help you" "I will keep you informed" "Remember why we're doing this"
Chairs and faculty live here: the primacy of the department	A tight-knit family A cohesive team A safe harbor A distant administration

Chairs Communicated a Vision for Change

Both colleges identify strongly with student success. As colleges nominated for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence and recognized for their dramatic improvement in student outcomes, they have demonstrated positive results within the last five years in student learning, retention, completion, and labor market outcomes. Chairs and faculty in the study routinely identified student success as the purpose behind their work. Participants recognized the singular focus on students: "That's communicated a lot to us, that we are literally only here and our doors are only opened to serve students." A department chair perceived that the entire institution bought into the vision, explaining, "I find that everybody wants their students to be successful. They know that administration wants their students to be successful, and so everybody has a piece of the rope." As another chair put it, "I'm sure you've heard [our] mantra is student success, so from the chancellor to the custodian, it's all about student success."

The overall vision or purpose for change was regularly communicated and reinforced by the executive leadership of each college. One chair described the beginning of the communication pipeline for change initiatives:

> Three times a year, our president will present to the entire college—faculty staff, everybody—to the entire college. And this is usually when initiatives are introduced. So we have the president talking about it, showing data [that explains] why we're doing it.

The president introduces the need for the change, providing supporting information to the entire college. The purpose for change is reinforced and communicated at the highest level.

At each college, student success is presented as the college's overall vision and mission, as the singular reason they exist. At one of the colleges, the stated vision is to become the top community college for student success. At the other, the vision is to be the leader in educational excellence with the goal of ensuring student success. Every chair in the study identified student success as the over-arching vision and mission of their college. A sampling of their comments is provided below.

- "This college is a progressive institution, and they are [focused on] student success."
- "We're so focused on and dedicated to student success and helping students achieve their goals, that's just who we are—not just something we do—but it really is the way that we operate."
- "It's just the culture of the school itself. . . . When I got here, I could automatically see that everything is centered around student success."

- "We're all here for the same mission, and we're all here focused on the student's success. I can't reiterate that enough. That's our bottom line, to see our students succeed."

Every change effort discussed in this study was conceptualized as stemming from or connecting to that larger vision, including changes mandated by external groups. While student success was consistently presented as the purpose for change efforts at both institutions, department chairs also communicated to faculty a more specific vision for change tailored to their departments.

Building the department vision for change. Chairs explained that their role at the end of the communication pipeline was to support and communicate the college's vision for changes: "As a department chair, I was the one voicing the college's vision for this particular initiative." Another chair commented, "I know that these are our initiatives. This is where the school is going. This is the vision. So as a leader, I have to line up with the vision of the college." The majority of chairs in the study communicated a purpose for the change by building a corresponding local vision that resonated within the context of their department. In other words, chairs processed the overall college vision and reframed it in a way that made sense for their program or disciplinary focus.

For example, a chair described how she took the college's overall mandate to improve student success and applied it to her department by identifying classes with high withdrawal rates and asking faculty to pilot student interventions: "I filter it and say, 'this is the goal and these are some ideas of how we could do it, and go run with it.'" The chair narrowed the college's goal into a local plan for her department. Similarly, a college-prep chair identified a vision for success that was unique to her department:

> We try to do it with an end goal, we want to see what the big picture is going to be. For our students, it's that first-level college math class, getting into it. But that's not really our ultimate goal. Our goal is for them to get college credits, so that they have that checkmark for their degree plan. And so that's where we start with our vision.

The chair created "our" department's vision by focusing on students' success in college-level classes. A math chair described his department's version of the college's vision with an emphasis on the courses in his department with high withdrawal rates:

> And starting off we looked at data, and are we happy with 45%, 50% of college algebra students passing college algebra? And if not, then we can't continue to do the same thing. So that was the vision: "What we are doing isn't working, so let's try something else. The worst that can happen is it cannot work, which is where we are right now." Something needed to change.

His framed his vision for change in the department as an urgent need to improve results in a gateway math course for students. Passing rates also factored into a customized vision in the nursing department, which focused on students achieving high passing rates on the credentialing exam. The vision was further reframed and focused on creating exemplary nurses. After describing the college's "mantra" of student success, a chair explained,

> So if this is the foundation for everything the college stands for, everything the college is reaching and aiming for, then as faculty, as the chair, we all have an obligation to be on the same page. . . . The ultimate student success is when I see our graduates as registered nurses, and they are out there leading the health care team.

Another nursing chair described collaborating with her department to craft their vision: "We sat down and came up with what do we want, what does [success] look like for us, and we

wanted to create good nurses." Each of the chairs described above reframed the college vision through the lens of the department, identifying what success looked like in their respective areas.

Like the nursing chairs who created a local vision of competent professionals, other chairs crafted a vision for the change based on student success in the workplace. A chair framed the vision for adopting Open Educational Resources as improving the training for students to be successful on the job:

> One of the things I saw in the workforce was a lack of proper training. When we got graduates into the company, they weren't prepared. And a lot of it was theoretical stuff, it wasn't current information. What OER allows us to do is to pull current information. . . . When we introduced the idea, [faculty] were all about it, because they said, "Yeah, this textbook is just off," because it's older, has data from 2010, and we know that, for example, the HR laws changed three, four years ago, and some of the textbooks were still talking about the old laws. As far as the vision, they get it, they see that there are limitations to the standard textbook.

He focused on a vision of preparing students for the corporate world by arming them with current and practical content. Another chair framed the vision as engaging students in shorter-term courses in order to shorten time to completion. He recalled what he said to faculty,

> "Imagine these students, imagine if they went for a whole 16 weeks, look how long it's going to take to get out there and make a living for themselves. But imagine if we had this eight-week course, how much faster they could get out there and start working." That's the conversation I would have. "They're out there, and they can get

> the skill. Yes, it's accelerated, but do you think they want to be here forever? No, they want to go out there and they want start making a living." That's the vision I was sharing, because the more time they're in here, the less time they're out there making a living for their family.

In his department, this chair highlighted the ultimate student success outcome: Getting a good job and earning a living for their families. He connected the broad vision of student success to keeping students engaged in his department's eight-week classes.

One chair stated that upper administrators were the "vision casters" and "strategists," while the department chairs were responsible for executing the vision: "We didn't get to decide a lot of things; we just had to make it happen." Chairs described the task of taking the institutional vision and reframing it within the unique context of their department with the goal of "making it happen" on a local level—even when they had no hand in deciding the direction of the plan. Chairs fleshed out the vision and provided more specific explanations of the purpose behind the changes they were enacting in their departments, and in doing so, they saw themselves as bridging the sometimes-different perspectives of faculty and upper administration.

Translating administration's plans for faculty. Chairs described being "in the middle" between faculty and administration, responsible for taking the broad vision of one group and turning that vision into actual plans on the ground with the other. In the process, they conceptualized their role as a communication bridge between upper administration and faculty. Twelve of the 15 department chairs described acting as a translator, referee, buffer, or filter for information about change initiatives coming from administration. One chair described the rhetorical context he found himself in, with the challenge of taking the

administration's carefully crafted vision and handing it off to faculty members who need time and assistance to convert it to daily work:

> The day that an administrative initiative is announced is the end of a process of work and thought process for administrators, for those who have come up with this idea. [But for us], it is just the beginning. They may have been working on something for two years . . . or let's say it's a year of focused effort. Now we're going to have to give it to faculty members; this is brand new for them, and they're not going to be able to give a year of focused effort in the midst of all their classes and other initiatives they have going. So it's going to take some time.

The implication was that administration might be impatient, but faculty would need time to implement plans. The chair is the go-between, helping one (very busy) group make progress on the plan while potentially having to keep the other group at bay.

In the process of translating vision into action, chairs had to be able to explain to faculty the research and thinking that led to the change. Because chairs had a seat at the table to see what was happening behind the scenes, they were in a position to explain and clarify the administration's reasoning to faculty:

> I was in an in-between space, between the teaching faculty and the administration, and I got to see both sides of what was happening at the college. I was privy to why decisions were being made sometimes, and it was part of my job to communicate to faculty that reasoning.

Chairs also used their inside knowledge to help faculty see that the administration supported them during the change effort: "As a leader, I have to show to faculty that 'administration is

for you. This is why they are making this decision.' Once I sit down and show them that, then they understand."

In addition to providing behind-the-scenes information, chairs decided what information faculty needed to know in order to fulfill the college's vision; they did not always share everything that administration communicated to them. A chair working in the sciences described her approach as digesting the administration's vision and goals, including their "lingo," and communicating it to faculty in a more concise, scientific, and useable manner:

> What I try to do is make it practical. I'm very visual, hands-on, and so whatever [administration is] asking us to do or focus on, I convert it to boots on the ground, things that faculty can see and use, tools and resources that I develop to help them achieve whatever annual priority we have for that year. . . . I'm here to help faculty navigate whatever we need to navigate through. . . . So, I feel like I'm a translator-filter because being here, I hear all the initiatives and lingo. Faculty don't know all of that, they don't know the back end of stuff, and they don't know what all of this means. Just give them what they need to know and what they need to do. . . . I'm trying to get the goal accomplished, and they don't need all that fluff.

She converts the administration's goals into tangible resources and tools that will help faculty "navigate" the change without getting bogged down in extraneous information. In a similar vein, another chair characterized her role of filter or buffer as removing obstacles so that faculty could achieve the vision she had for the department. She described her job as getting on a "highway" to remove "all the rocks and the stumps and remove all the obstacles off the highway so they can put students in the car and drive them from point A to point B."

One of the faculty respondents who briefly served as a department chair agreed that chairs often had to determine what should be communicated to faculty, and what should be left out:

> The chairs filter a lot in the sense of you don't need all information. . . . We sit in those meetings with the dean and we hear the all the million things we are going to have to do this semester and [have to pull] out which of those are most important for my programs and my faculty.

Chairs evaluated what they heard and decided what information their departments needed in order to accomplish the administration's goals. While they might be receiving information about "a million things," they did not need to share all of it with faculty. Sharing too much information could be a barrier to faculty engaging in the change.

Sometimes the act of filtering or translating information meant figuring out how to get faculty buy-in when the administration's vision seemed to come from a conflicting agenda. Faculty and administration often had differing focuses despite the broad unifying vision of student success, and this disconnect stemmed at least in part from the administration's distance from the daily work of faculty:

> I'll recognize that there's a separate focus there, the administration has their focus, and our program, even our faculty, have another focus. And what I try to do as a supervisor is to try to blend the two, but I know there's going to be a separation of those two perspectives. I just worked really hard to get them to understand, "this is the expectation they have." And this is the reason, how it translates to student success. Sometimes it's not so obvious, sometimes administrators that have been away from the classroom for some time, don't really understand the nuances in the

> classroom, the minutiae of class, and they create initiatives that really aren't workable. So for me being that go-between for faculty and administration, I have to work really hard at trying to digest, what are they expecting here? And how can we turn it into work?

This chair conceptualized his role as transforming the administration's vision into day-to-day action, similar to the science chair's description of translating vision into "boots on the ground." Translating the vision also involved the difficult task of figuring out how to honor the administration's expectations and meet their goals while changing their plan into something "workable." Another chair echoed the idea of differing agendas, describing his role as a "tough road": "It means you're in the middle, so you're serving two audiences, because you want to help the administration get those initiatives done. But then the administration has to be realistic in terms of what demands they are making of faculty." The chair continued, "In some situations, they've never either worked in it [teaching], or they've been so far removed for so long that they've lost what actually happens at that level." He expressed some frustration at this disconnect but at the same time described working to "soften" the administration's messaging for faculty:

> Part of it is, if some of the initiatives aren't voluntary—they tell they are, but they're not—and you're expected to do things. I think that creates a little bit of a morale issue, as well as a breakdown in trust, and I do my best to soften that and explain to them, "This is what we're doing and why we're doing it, and we've only got so much bandwidth, but let's just do the best we can," and kind of shepherd them through it.

In this instance, the chair acted in the best interest of the faculty, protecting them from conflicting and potentially demoralizing messages, describing himself as a shepherd. Other

chairs also translated administration's communications with the goal of tempering the message. Chairs were "referees" navigating between the administration and faculty. Chairs described themselves as having "feet in both worlds," and one chair illustrated this by sharing a situation in which college-prep faculty heard a conflicting message from college leadership regarding their job security during state-mandated initiatives aimed at reducing developmental coursework. At the department meeting afterwards, the chair found herself explaining the apparent disconnect between what administration had communicated in the past and what they were now saying:

> During our college-wide presentation, they talked about college-prep and the changes going on, and the president of the college came out and said, "We don't know what the job security looks like," but yet [faculty] have been hearing that everything will be okay with the plus 18 [graduate hours], and so the trust level went down a little bit. They left that meeting very, very concerned; that was the hot topic during our department meeting, and so I'm trying to play the middleman and say, "She is seeing it on a broader picture, she is stating that, yes, we already knew that you needed your plus 18, but those of you that chose not to, we don't know what that's going to mean. We don't know if that's going to mean you are going to be out of a job later on, or have to move to a different department where your master's is more suited other than what we're at right now, we don't know."

By "playing the middleman," the chair felt she had to explain the president's comment in a way that would honor both the president's message and the faculty's concerns at the same time. This was a tricky rhetorical maneuver, and one she had to perform spontaneously.

Chairs explained their "middleman" role as sharing behind-the-scenes information to illuminate the college's vision, acting as a translator to recast the vision in ways that resonated with their departments, and tempering the message coming from administration in order to protect faculty from unworkable plans or unwelcome messages. In addition, several department chairs cautioned against communicating initiatives as an edict from administration: "I try to explain the purpose behind what we're doing. I never used the idea of 'Okay, they told us we're doing this.'" It was tempting to frame the purpose behind a change as, "Well, guys, they're at it again, you know the upper administration has told me that I have to tell you this. . . . They're telling us to do this." The chair elaborated,

> I think the biggest lesson I've learned being a chair was to go ahead and own the messaging in such a way that does not perpetuate the "us versus them" paradigm. It's very important and it's so tempting. It's easy to slip into that, so easy, especially if you're messaging an initiative that could be perceived as negative or "They're going to hate this."

Along the same lines, another chair acknowledged, "I don't say, 'The dean wants this,' or 'The vice president is making us do this.' I explained to my instructors on the first day that I'm not going to palm the hard stuff onto the dean and the vice-president." Chairs described the often-difficult position of communicating the administration's vision without blaming administration, even if the changes really were coming down as "directives" or if they did not always buy into that vision themselves. One chair shared that he may have to cast the administration in a more positive light than he thinks they deserve in order to accomplish their goals:

> I want it to look like it's administration that's helping grease the wheel, even though it may not be. . . . I want [faculty] to understand that administration isn't doing this just to punish someone, it's a matter of what they want, what their vision is.

Translating the vision could mean actually rewriting the story, changing the messaging in order to engage faculty in the initiative. In this sense, the chair truly is "owning" the messaging—by authoring it.

The department chairs in this study characterized themselves as the link between the administration's vision and faculty's implementation of that vision. The chairs were positioned to receive inside information and were responsible for translating the administration's vision and goals into work, and this at times included filtering or tempering the message in order to secure and maintain faculty engagement in the change effort. This communication, however, works both ways: Chairs are also uniquely positioned to share faculty's thinking and reactions to the change effort back up the administrative chain. The chairs in this study recognized their responsibility to communicate to their supervisors throughout the change process.

Communicating faculty reactions to administration. As middle managers, chairs recognized that communication worked in both directions, and while their primary role was to communicate vision to the faculty, they also were obligated to communicate faculty concerns about or reactions to the college's goals back to the administration. Ten of the 15 chairs described their communicative responsibility both to faculty and administration: "There are times we've gone back to administration and said, 'You know, this isn't going to work.'" As one chair remarked, "Administration trusts me to be able to communicate honestly with the faculty, but they also expect me to communicate honestly with

administration." Communicating honestly with administration means sharing problems that the chair is in an exclusive position to see:

> You're in the middle, you're serving two audiences, because you do want to help the administration get those initiatives done, but then the administration has to be realistic in terms of what demands they are making of faculty. . . . I think there's a diplomatic way to say, "put the brakes on a little bit, you're wearing people out."

The chairs therefore described themselves as being in a unique position to influence both faculty and the administrators above them, even if it required some diplomacy. One chair asserted that the college's efforts to attract and retain larger numbers of students could backfire, stating that achieving high enrollment could mean, "we just get somebody who can fog a mirror." He described the situation as "walking a tightrope without a net, but we're held accountable," then adding, "it's not that blatant, but that's the feeling it creates. It can be demoralizing sometimes." Chairs acknowledged the difficulty of navigating between the two worlds. It is a balancing act, without a safety net—at times it feels like a risky endeavor.

The department chairs in this study agreed that student success was the broad vision fueling the change efforts at their colleges. Chairs communicated this broad vision to faculty but also created a targeted vision that resonated within their departments. They were privy to inside information from administration and decided how and what to share with faculty. In the process, chairs characterized their roles as filters or translators, taking the vision and turning it into actual work. In the process they might be changing the message, adjusting the plan, or putting words into administrators' mouths. Chairs felt the tension of having to translate between different, sometimes conflicting agendas. The faculty respondents in the

study supported the chairs' perceptions of communicating a vision for the change within their departments.

The faculty perspective. The majority of faculty in the study echoed the chairs' focus on student success as the vision behind change efforts and expressed satisfaction with this common vision. Faculty appreciated keeping the focus on the students' best interest. They expressed faith in the administration to "make decisions that are good for student success." As one faculty member said, "I'm glad we make the effort to try things that might help support students better and change their lives."

Faculty perceived that most change efforts originated from valid research conducted by administrators: "This is what research is showing us right now is best for our students." Another faculty member stated that "the initiative came from the analysis of data. They looked at professors who had high retention rates in their courses and what were those professors doing." Faculty gave administration high marks for gathering data to inform changes that they—the faculty—would be implementing.

A faculty member shared how this data and the resulting change plans are funneled from the college leadership to her department:

> So once [administration has] done all the meetings and discussions among them, then they come and they discuss it as a group. And then they actually get down to the smaller departments. We have our main [meeting] which is all campuses, that's our main meeting with everyone. And then it breaks down where it's our dean. She will have a meeting with her departments, and then our department chair will have a smaller meeting with us or just those under him. So we went through it three different

> times, and that narrows it down to different disciplines and what their feelings and concerns are.

She confirmed the department chairs' description of communicating a narrowed vision for the department; the administration shared the larger vision, followed by meetings with the dean, and finally the department met to "narrow it down" and discuss what the change meant for them, providing an opportunity to share their concerns.

In this narrowing process, faculty recognized that department chairs act as filters for the administration. One said of his chair, "He's been a pretty good voice for the administration and going between, explaining why things are the way they are, why they need to be done the way that they're done." Faculty recognized the role of the chair in acting as a go-between in sharing the administration's vision.

Faculty stressed the importance of communicating a purpose or vision, stating that college leaders, including their immediate supervisors, need to share why changes are necessary. As one faculty member said, "I want more of that why." She continued, "But I think that's something that our director has learned because she's felt that pushback. And she's felt that questioning of why, but why."

All 16 faculty members in the study expressed positive feelings about their department chair's communication and support during change initiatives. And the majority of faculty in the study expressed faith in the upper administration's vision of student success and positive feelings about college leadership. However, a subset of the faculty acknowledged that tension can exist between faculty and upper administration. These faculty recognized that the administration is removed from the day-to-day work of implementing change. As one faculty member put it, the administration is "saying these things, but they

don't really know what it's like to do these things. Sometimes you get the feeling that there may be differing agendas." He went on to say that the administration was "more interested in keeping students, and we are more interested in the students we keep are the ones worth keeping." He explained that faculty tend to care about quality over quantity, while administration is sometimes perceived as caring more about the number of students coming through the institution. Other faculty members acknowledged the general tension and distrust that can exist between faculty and their "common enemy," the administration. A faculty member described the tension in terms of the organizational hierarchy: "So you're going to have a little bit more abrasion naturally between faculty and administration because of that power dynamic." Another faculty member acknowledged that when something happened that he didn't like, "it's really easy to say, well, that's just because administrators weren't thinking about me, or they thought about me, but just decided to do this anyway." He tempered this admission by adding, "It's not like I really know, maybe they did, but chances are that probably it's just nobody thought of it because they're not in the situation that I am." He characterized the administration as distant; while they may be well meaning, they are removed enough from the daily work of faculty to not always know what the best approach might be.

Faculty affirmed the student success focus of the colleges' change initiatives and described the importance of communicating a vision for change. They expressed satisfaction with their department chairs' framing of the vision and purpose behind the change but echoed some of the chairs' acknowledgement that administration and faculty can hold different perspectives which can create tension. These conflicting agendas place department chairs in the middle, attempting to navigate communication to both groups in ways that encourage

faculty to engage in the change and that honestly communicate concerns to upper administration. As chairs worked with faculty to implement changes, they encountered resistance from faculty who were unwilling to change.

Chairs Countered Faculty Resistance to Change

The department chairs responded to faculty who resisted the change. Fourteen of the 15 chairs described communicating with faculty who were pushing back against the change effort, that is, faculty who were expressing disagreement with the change, not those who were anxious or fearful about the change. Chairs employed several strategies to communicate with faculty during pushback, including inviting faculty to provide feedback and participate in the change, emphasizing the benefits the change would bring, and playing devil's advocate by describing contrasting points of view. Chairs recognized the legitimacy of resistance and worked to earn faculty's participation.

Inviting faculty input to test and improve the change. A majority of the chairs described soliciting input as a strategy to counter faculty resistance. For example, when a faculty member claimed, "No, that won't work," a chair's response was, "Okay, how will it work? We're all a team and I want your input. What do you think?" In a similar scenario, a faculty member argued that the higher success rates in eight-week classes were a result of grade inflation, not the shorter course term: "The reason they are getting high success rates is they are just inflating grades." The department chair recalled his reply: "I'd like for you to try this class. It's not a life sentence, but I want you to try this for yourself. [Find out] why is this working so well. Is this working honestly, with you in the classroom?" In response to resistance, the chair invited active participation in the change, arguing that the faculty member needed to see for him or herself whether grades were inflated or the course set-up

influenced the higher success rates. In another example, when presented with low success rates in a course, a faculty member argued that it was out of his control, that students' outside obligations or personal situations resulted in their lack of success: "It's not really me, it's them. They're homeless or they have a family." The chair recalled saying to the faculty in response,

> "Those are good things to think about. Let's put [all of the student support services] on paper. . . . This is to help facilitate the conversation if they have a problem other than studying or not getting the content. This is what we can provide them, so at least we can help, no matter what the situation is."

Again, the chair invited active participation by providing a list of resources for students and asking the faculty member to document those interactions with students. Sometimes faculty claim administration is acting like an emperor: "These are edicts from on high that we have to blindly follow." One chair responded to that with,

> "It may feel that way, but the leadership vision here is, in order to move us forward, somebody has to come up with the ideas. We have a faculty senate, we have open-door policies with our vice presidents. If you have an idea of how to make something better, you have access to take that initiative with administration, and if it's a great idea, you'll probably get put on a committee to explore it."

The chair's response was to remind the faculty member that other faculty had already provided input into the change effort, and to suggest that the faculty member share his concerns and ideas with administration to push for improvements.

When a faculty member pushed back against using specific engagement strategies, saying "It's too childish," the chair organized a demonstration so that the faculty could

participate in the strategy to experience how it worked. The chair said he replied: "This is not about being childish. This is about getting students to engage." He explained that he would have an instructor demonstrate the strategies, "so they can see it for themselves, and now they don't have an excuse to say, 'I don't know how to do this. How can you fit this in math?'" Again, the chair responded to resistance by soliciting the faculty member's participation in the very strategies he or she was belittling. Another chair explained that when faculty raised dissenting views, he needed to make sure that "all the faculty are heard and understood. . . . So how do I show attention? I try to say, 'I hear what you're saying, what do you think about this?' and have a dialogue." In these cases, department chairs countered faculty pushback with invitations to join the dialogue, get involved, and become a part of the change effort. The chairs stressed that faculty members' experience and knowledge could be put to good use to test the changes, to provide feedback on them, and to suggest improvements.

Emphasizing the benefits of changing. In keeping with both colleges' strong focus on student success, a majority of chairs also described focusing on the positive outcomes of the change initiative when faced with faculty resistance, in particular, how the change enabled faculty to better provide an engaging, high-quality learning environment. When a faculty member pushed back on Open Educational Resources, saying "I don't know what that is. I don't want to do that," the chair said, "This material is more current, let's go through it. . . . You tailor it to what you want. . . . You can do it however you think is reasonable with whatever you think is more relevant and important." Likewise, another chair emphasized the flexibility of adopting OER: "You can add, and you can detract, and you can put in." These

chairs highlighted the ability to customize their courses with digital resources, using only the most current and relevant material and providing a better experience for students.

In another example, a faculty member argued against adopting the eight-week class model, saying "Well, some students would say this is too quick." The chair's response:

> A student told me that "if it was 16 weeks, I think I would have dropped out, but because of this pace, I can stick with it. I don't get bored." Because our students in this generation are fast. They get information fast, they have to be fast, the technology is fast. They are not the same generation as we were back then, so they could get bored really easily.

The chair emphasized a positive outcome of accepting the change—increased student engagement in a fast-paced course. To counter faculty resistance, chairs reiterated the benefits of the change efforts: Faculty should participate because the work benefits students.

Playing devil's advocate. Several chairs also described responding to faculty resistance by communicating an opposing argument or sharing another perspective. When a faculty member resisted a change initiative by saying "That's a really stupid decision," the chair's strategy was to share the opposing points by presenting the administration's point of view, playing devil's advocate "to help people see the other side of an issue that maybe they had been blind to." When a faculty member pushed back on a change, saying "We have to have multiple choice questions, we have to do this, we have to have a book. The students have to have this and have to have that," the chair's response was, "No they don't, the audience may not necessarily want that. Look at it from the student perspective." He argued that as business faculty they needed to look at it from the end-user's (the student) point of

view instead of from their own (faculty) perspective, emphasizing the need to more actively engage students in course materials and assessments.

When offering counter perspectives, chairs acknowledged that the messaging should be tempered, ensuring that the faculty felt their voices were heard:

> When I can listen and then be able to offer the counter view and make sure that if faculty voices differ from the administrative leadership and the direction that we want to go, that that's not messaged as, "Well, your opinion doesn't really matter. This is just what we're going to do anyway." It is making sure that all the faculty are heard and are understood: "Hey, I appreciate the fact that you are willing to say that you agree with or disagree."

Chairs responded to pushback by playing devil's advocate in an attempt to open the faculty to alternative perspectives. However, this should be done in a non-threatening manner. After all, resistance is a form of engaging with the change, and therefore should be welcomed and addressed with respect.

Chairs in this study described how they responded to faculty who pushed back against the changes. In some cases, they used a strategy of soliciting faculty input in order to test the changes. In others, they emphasized the benefits of participating in the change effort. At times, chairs played devil's advocate to try to get faculty to see the change from other points of view. In these instances, chairs attempted to convince faculty to engage with the changes in a more positive manner, but at one of the colleges in the study, more serious faculty resistance was met with a more serious college response. According to both chairs and faculty in the study, college leaders were willing to let extremely resistant faculty leave the institution.

Get on board . . . or move on. One of the colleges participating in this study experienced a significant loss of personnel as the institution began to change. Each of the chairs and many of the faculty from this college alluded to the faculty turnover, explaining that some faculty, in most cases faculty with many years of service (between 10 and 25 years), decided to move on. One chair characterized some of the losses as involuntary ("we send them down the road to our competition"), but most described faculty making the decision to leave. Something the administration said or did led the faculty to understand that they could not remain at the college if they were not going to participate in the reform efforts. As one chair said, "We did lose three faculty right in the beginning who said, 'You're crazy, and we're not doing it.'" As changes are enacted, chairs reported that some faculty cannot get on board: "One thing that's very noticeable around here is as momentum gets going, you see the ones that fall off." Chairs explained that while the college wants everyone to enjoy working there, the most important factor is doing what is best for students, not pleasing faculty. A chair explained,

> We've had significant staff turnover in the last couple of years. [The college] is very clear about what they want, about where we're going, about the kind of people that we want to be here, and nobody is excluded. But you definitely can't come in and say, "Well, I didn't know that this is what it was going to be." And for some people that doesn't work that well.

The college demonstrated a willingness to weather the turnover in order to achieve their mission. They communicated a resolve to improve student success. Some of the chairs reported feeling concerned at first about the losses, but they explained that it provided a chance to hire faculty whose vision was aligned with the college's: "It gave us the

opportunity to pull in faculty who didn't know how it had been done." The college was "able to bring people in who were not reluctant to change." Chairs at this institution described looking for applicants who were comfortable with change. They tell applicants, "There is going to be change. You do understand when you come to this school, it's always going to be, what can we do better?" While chairs described communication strategies designed to move resistant faculty toward change, if faculty do not want to invest the time in the change, they make the choice to leave.

When faculty at this institution did not participate in the change, chairs emphasized that the faculty knew what the college's vision was, and they had the option of getting on board with it, or moving on, either voluntarily or involuntarily. One chair recalled saying, "Let's be real. This is the vision. This is where we're going, make sure you understand that before you sign the contract. If you sign the contract, and you want to come back, that means you are for it." Another chair referred to the annual contract signing as a moment to remind faculty of the college's goals, "Somebody might say, 'this is stupid, I'm not doing this,' and they have the freedom to not sign their contract."

While the other college did not experience the same level of turnover, several chairs and faculty referenced faculty resigning or retiring. One chair, after inviting a faculty member to test a change and provide feedback to improve it, said the result was unsuccessful and the faculty member decided to retire. One of the chairs referred to the college's student success initiatives "helping to push some [faculty] out the door." Another chair described the college's strong focus on student success, saying that everybody in her department believes in that focus, but immediately acknowledging that "if [faculty] aren't good, well they don't last here very long. We are so focused on and dedicated to student success." Being a "good"

faculty member equated with a focus on student success. Additionally, a third of the chairs at this college talked about hiring open-minded personnel as a key component of their change efforts. Several chairs mentioned the value of hiring new faculty because it allowed them to bring in people who were committed to the student success mission and comfortable with change: "I look for a passion, that they genuinely want and will do whatever is needed in order to make students successful." Faculty are hired because they care about students.

At both institutions—though more pervasive at one than the other—chairs and faculty confirmed that some faculty left the college, presumably because they were unwilling or unable to invest in the change. Chairs responded to this by recognizing the opportunity to hire faculty whose values aligned with the college's, thereby reducing the odds of encountering serious resistance in the future.

Separate from addressing faculty resistance to change, chairs recognized a responsibility to motivate faculty to maintain their engagement throughout the change process, and they used several communication strategies to do so.

Chairs Motivated Faculty to Engage in the Change

When asked how they motivated faculty during the change process, chairs described four types of strategies. To engage faculty in reform efforts, chairs emphasized academic freedom and gave faculty the flexibility to respond to changes in creative ways. They also made a point of seeking input from faculty on the change process, giving faculty a voice in how the changes were implemented. Chairs communicated to faculty that they were valued and important to the success of the change effort, and they shared success stories and data to show how the changes were positively impacting students.

"You have freedom." Chairs uniformly recognized that faculty expect a level of autonomy in performing their jobs. All 15 department chairs described engaging faculty and achieving buy-in by giving faculty the freedom and flexibility to determine how to achieve the goals of the initiative. A chair working with faculty to improve withdrawal rates resisted the urge to control how the faculty implemented the changes:

> I try not to be too scripted in what I ask them to do. I ask them to look at something, or I ask them to think about it. So I try to keep it open-ended where I'm not feeling like I'm pressuring them to do one particular thing. . . . Faculty need that, they need that cushion. You can't take it away from them.

Emphasizing freedom "cushions" the work of change for faculty. Another chair explained that top-down mandates will act as a demotivating factor: "It's got to be faculty-driven because if it's not, then it's just mandated from the top-down and they're not going to have the buy-in." Chairs were the visionaries, showing faculty the destination but leaving it up to them to figure out how to get there:

> I don't necessarily give them the plan, but I'll tell them what the end result needs to be, and so they get to work out the pieces because they're the ones that are really implementing and doing the work. I'm more of a leader, guide, visionary, to make sure we hit our targets, but I give them leeway so they can create it the way that they think is best.

Recognizing that faculty expect to have some autonomy in executing their jobs, chairs resisted efforts to control how the changes were implemented in order to motivate faculty to participate.

"I want your input." In addition to giving faculty freedom to enact the change in their own way, chairs also engaged faculty by asking them to share ideas about how the changes were being implemented. All 15 department chairs described motivating faculty by seeking input. One chair stressed, "if I come up with an initiative, and there's a better way of doing it, I'm open to that, and they know that." Chairs described regular brainstorming sessions with faculty: "There's a lot of discussion, everybody's getting input and feedback into how we proceed with these things." Chairs who had formerly worked in industry explained that their roles as supervisors in industry were "rigid" with less tolerance for debate and discussion. However, in academia, the supervisor's role is different:

> Here, because there are the dynamics of communication and idea flow, I've always approached [supervision] differently. I want them to perceive me as a supportive colleague, someone willing to do what needs to be done to help them be successful in the classroom.

Another chair who had worked in industry stated, "I work with my faculty. I'm not an overlord. . . . [I ask them] 'What do you think about this?'" The chairs who worked in industry before entering academia recognized that while supervision in industry might be more top-down, as supervisors of faculty they needed to maintain open lines of communication, to the point of seeing themselves as peers working together toward a common vision. To this end, one of the chairs saw himself as comprising only a percentage of the department; everyone had the same stake in achieving successful outcomes: "There are five of us. I'm 20%."

Chairs acknowledged that seeking feedback meant they had to be open to whatever points faculty might raise: "It's not always pleasant for me to hear. . . . Collaboration isn't

always about us being on the same page about things. Sometimes it's dissent, sometimes it's disagreement that brings us to a better product." Chairs recognized the need to remain open to other points of view, to encourage dialogue, or the request for input would not be seen as genuine. One chair explained that it was "refreshing" for faculty to see that she was "willing and open" to consider their ideas. She emphasized being "very up front, and open and honest" with faculty during dialogue about the change. Communicating that faculty had a voice in the change, and being open to everyone's ideas, helped chairs motivate faculty to engage with the change.

"You are valued." Chairs also motivated faculty through expressions of appreciation. Nine of the 15 chairs motivated faculty through praise, communicating their value to the change effort. As one chair said, "if you play on their strengths and compliment them on that, it gives them a sense of purpose." Another chair used the college's badging system to communicate appreciation, but she also wrote notes to acknowledge faculty's value and contribution to the change effort. Chairs gave faculty the credit for successful results whenever they could. As one chair explained, "I'll say every single time, 'That's them. That's not me. They created those numbers, they do the work. . . . I don't take the credit where it's not mine to take." Acknowledging faculty expertise was another way that chairs motivated faculty and made them feel valued: "The motivation piece was that they were the experts, and that was pretty clear."

One chair wrote a "specialized note to each one to welcome them back" as a way to show her appreciation for what they do. But another cautioned that praise and appreciation have to be authentic, "You give them the kudos and the 'atta-boys,' but not doing it patronizingly, you do it in a genuine way . . . you give the accolade when it's deserved."

Chairs communicated their belief in the faculty's value and recognized their expertise to motivate them to engage with the college's change initiatives.

"This is working." Another way that chairs reported motivating faculty during change efforts was sharing the positive outcomes of the initiative. Six of the 15 chairs described communicating successful results to motivate faculty to continue in the change work. As one chair put it, "It's hard to argue with the momentum of a movement when you see success." She added, "If you have a track record for successful things, it becomes much easier to ask people to do things." Another chair motivated his faculty by asking them to trust him when he said that the change actually produced results: "I know from the get-go, it seems tough, but these things do work." Implementing the changes gave him good results, and he knew it could work for them, too.

A chair working with engagement strategies reported that when faculty saw students "coming back to the table" and re-engaging in class, they were motivated to continue. Communicating those positive results became part of his effort to engage faculty. Similarly, one chair said he worked from the "success breeds more success" model: "So always when faculty got involved and found it to be successful, then they also would become champions for that initiative." A chair who shared dramatic improvements in success rates after a faculty member in her department piloted an initiative said the results "sparked" faculty buy-in. Faculty respondents in the study affirmed this approach as well as the strategies of giving faculty flexibility, seeking their input, and expressing value and appreciation for faculty.

The faculty perspective. Faculty enjoyed the opportunity to provide input. A faculty member praised her chair for "being receptive to feedback," and several were appreciative that they were able to share what wasn't working with the eight-week terms, to have a voice

in the decision-making about which classes would work best in that set-up. One faculty said that when she meets her counterparts from other colleges, “they’re shocked that the faculty [here] has so much input on everything.” Faculty also noted that having “full creative range” to implement changes was a motivating factor. As one faculty member said,

> I think being given the opportunity to create the plan works so much better than being told, here’s what we’re doing, being told, here’s the plan, make it happen. Especially for people coming from a liberal arts background, when you take away the creativity, it just puts a rain cloud over the faculty.

Another faculty member expressed satisfaction that “everybody can add their own spin, their own little twist to things.” Faculty also found recognition of their hard work and value to the cause to be a motivating factor during change efforts, even more so than monetary rewards. As one faculty member said, “There could be a little more of that genuine one-on-one appreciation.” He continued, “Given the choice between $100 or just somebody stopping by my office and telling me that I’m doing a good job, I would take that any day.” Another commented that her chair motivated her when she noticed something positive and shared it:

> I like to hear, “Hey, I saw this interaction,” or “I saw a student and they really liked when we did this or we did that.” More about the program and the structure of what we’re doing. I like to see that that paid off. And she’s always good at giving you praise when you need it.

The faculty member continued, “So to me, that speaks a lot because it shows you care about what I appreciate, and what I need to know to keep going.” Faculty also mentioned the motivating factor of successful results: “I think whenever you see a positive result of the change, and then you see another positive result [you think], ‘Yeah, let’s just keep changing.

Let's just keep growing and being more positive." Results confirm they are on the right course. When chairs share data "that says, we're doing what we're supposed to be doing," this motivated faculty to continue. One faculty member acknowledged that his ego kept him from fully engaging in the change effort, but when he saw the positive results, he had to "go ahead and do it." He said, "And so you see results, and it motivates you to say, even though this is not my preferred style of teaching, it does work."

Chairs identified, and faculty confirmed, common communication strategies for motivating faculty to participate in change efforts. Chairs recognized the need to motivate faculty and saw it as their responsibility. They also understood that change breeds uncertainty and can stir feelings of anxiety and fear and described their duty to provide social support to faculty during change efforts. In particular, chairs described using empathetic listening as a way to provide social support.

Chairs Used Empathetic Listening to Provide Social Support

Faculty in the study expressed concerns that their performance evaluations would be negatively impacted by the change; as one faculty member put it, "the biggest fear that people have on anything like this is if it winds up on your evaluation, and you get docked for it." According to one faculty member, "Anytime you change something, it's going to be painful." Faculty also expressed anxiety about what the changes meant for their daily workload and work-life balance. The department chairs monitored faculty reactions to change by welcoming faculty to share issues or concerns. Thirteen out of the 15 chairs used empathetic listening as a form of support for faculty during change implementation. That is, chairs paid attention to faculty's expressions of concern; they demonstrated compassion and non-judgment. They desired to create a safe space for faculty to feel trusted and welcome to

express themselves. As one chair stated, “My slogan is always to seek first to understand and then to be understood.” Chairs communicated their availability and willingness to listen to faculty through open-door policies.

“My door is always open.” Chairs maintained an open-door policy that included face-to-face office visits: “My door is constantly open. I try very hard to be an approachable person.” One chair noted, “I try to listen as much as I possibly can. Half the time they just want to vent and I’m okay with that. I’ll listen.” Chairs wanted faculty to feel free to express their emotions about the changes: “I have faculty who burst into my office and shake their fists and then invariably say, ‘Thank you for listening to me,’ and we’re good, and we move on.” Another chair suggested that a trusting, open relationship was built over time, which allowed faculty to feel free to vent:

> If they just need to vent, my door is always open—literally, whoever wants to walk in, can at any time, and they can close the door behind them, and we’ll talk about whatever. That is something that is built up over time.

When change is implemented, there may be problems that others—such as upper administration—didn’t anticipate. Because faculty are on the front lines experiencing those problems in real time, they need to be able to talk about those frustrations, but this requires trust:

> I’ve slowly tried to gain their trust simply by listening to what they want. . . . Everything’s on paper, but when you get down to the nuts and bolts of it, it may just not be working. And they need to know that they can at least vent to you.

Along the same lines, one chair said, “It’s important to patiently listen to all of the questions, patiently listen to the critiques that may come.” Chairs acknowledged that enacting change is

not a simple task, that once implemented, adjustments will need to be made, and in the process faculty need to share their concerns with someone who understands their experience and who is in a position to do something about it.

Many chairs extended the open-door policy to phone, email, and text, which allowed them to maintain availability to faculty 24/7. Seven of the 15 chairs talked about being available to faculty all the time: "Every faculty has my cell phone, and there is not a time when you cannot call me." One chair commented, "I make myself available to them 24/7. . . . And if I'm up, I'll answer. If not, then as soon as I get to work the next morning, I'll be there." Another made sure that faculty knew they were free to call anytime: "They all have my cell phone, they know that I'm totally open to them calling me." This open-door policy only works if the space that is provided for venting is perceived as a safe, non-judgmental environment, and chairs recognized the need to create a safe zone for faculty.

"This is a safe zone." Chairs created a judgment-free safe zone for faculty that invited faculty to share their concerns, frustrations, and questions about the changes: "I'm not judgmental. I'm more like a therapist than anything else because I know they have a lot going on." Another chair described the role in similar terms, providing support in the event of a "breakdown":

> I was a very good listener and gave them a safe place to be able to voice their frustrations or have a breakdown if they needed to. I gave them that safe place so that they knew that I was on their team. . . . My door was always open if they were ever worried about anything.

For faculty to take advantage of the open-door policy, they had to trust that the chair would not use the information against them, as one chair suggested:

> I have an open-door policy with faculty. Sometimes things can't wait for a scheduled meeting, or things are just emergencies. . . . I have to acknowledge that a person trusting me with this information, it usually means that's a good sign.

Chairs stressed the importance creating a feeling of safety for faculty by keeping concerns confidential:

> I always wanted my office to be a safe zone, whether it's about the dean or administration or something that they can come and openly talk about, or if they feel threatened by something, and they're unsure about something, I want them to be able to openly talk about stuff. . . . They know that it's going to stay in that office.

For faculty to take advantage of the open-door policy, they have to trust that their responses will not be reported to upper administration in a way that casts them in a negative light:

> If faculty have frustrations, they can come into the office, it's a private area, they can say whatever they want, they can fling profanity, frustrations, and they know that it's a safe place for them, that I'm not going to go to my dean and say, "Well, they're not receptive to this or that."

Those comments were echoed by another chair, who said, "Knowing that they're very comfortable coming in and being able to cut loose like that and not worry about repercussions, or it leaving the office suite, I think that builds trust and dependability."

Being an available and compassionate listener requires inner strength as well as time. Chairs referenced their busy schedules and the challenges of making empathetic listening a priority despite their own deadlines and stressors:

> You know, no matter how busy I am, if they come in, if my door's open, even though I'm frustrated, and I have a deadline in 10 minutes, I just have to turn on this calm

> face. They took their time to come down here and talk to me, so let me give them some time.

This kind of listening required a deliberate act on the chair's part to set aside the pressing issues of her job in order to focus on faculty. Chairs felt they had to demonstrate their investment in faculty in this way. A chair described a similar scenario in which she made a point of communicating her attentiveness and care:

> Let's say I'm working on my computer, and if they come in and I'm trying to send an email, and instead of trying to still send an email and listen to them, I'll say, "Give me one minute, let me finish up this email, and then you will have my attention." And once I've completed that, I purposefully make sure that I've closed down my laptop, so I can give them my undivided attention, and little things like that so that they know I'm listening, and I can follow along, and that I genuinely do care about each person who works in the department.

Chairs expressed awareness of the need to offer social support to faculty as they grappled with change. They supported faculty during a time of potential uncertainty by opening their office door, literally and metaphorically, to listen empathetically to faculty concerns. In some cases, they prioritized faculty needs over those of their families. One chair described talking to her husband about her workload: "It's funny because you probably think that I'm wasting time, but sometimes, I have to take 10 minutes and sit in somebody's office and see how they're doing and let them talk to me about things and not do something else." She added, "and that may mean that I'm grading at home that night, but I've tried to be present." Chairs made a point of being "present" for faculty, and faculty respondents in the study agreed. They described open-door policies that offered support during the change process.

The faculty perspective. A majority of faculty characterized the open-door policy as a form of social support during the change process: “Our department chairs are very supportive. Anything that we needed they were there. They have an open-door policy.” Comments like this one were common, “My supervisor always has his door open. He’s very supportive. I can tell anything to him. It’s a really good working relationship.” Faculty also acknowledged that listening builds trust in the working relationship: “She had an open-door policy, and we could just go in there. . . . It was a very open relationship, a very trusting relationship.” Faculty felt a freedom to voice opinions and issues, stating that they could talk to their chair about anything, and they would be heard. For example, when a faculty member brought concerns to the chair, he said, “I’ve never felt like he disregarded any of them.”

Chairs and faculty at both colleges identified compassionate listening in judgment-free safe spaces as a strategy for communicating social support during the often unpredictable and stressful change process. Chairs also communicated support for faculty during this time by directly addressing their fears and anxieties.

Chairs Addressed Faculty Fears and Anxieties

Chairs utilized a variety of strategies to ease anxiety about change, including characterizing the department as a team and the change effort as a non-punitive learning process. Chairs also made a point of asking faculty how they could help and used information and vision-sharing as methods to calm fear and anxiety.

“You are part of a team.” Chairs emphasized that the faculty were not alone in the change; they were part of a team. In response to the question, “how do you communicate with faculty to provide social support during change,” nine of the 15 department chairs promoted the work as being accomplished by a team. As one chair shared, “I’m of the

mindset of the team approach: Together everyone achieves more." One chair said, "They know that we will always function as a team . . . not only will I support them, but they're also supporting each other." A chair mentioned that it helped faculty to know that "I was on their team; I am one of them."

A chair whose faculty worked at different campus locations emphasized being a team in her department:

> There is no individual and we don't do things by ourselves. If one person falls, the rest of us fall down. If one person stands up tall, the rest of us stand up tall, and that's just how we run. . . . And so that was helpful for them to hear . . . that we're a team, and that we're already cohesive, and that got [us] through these scary times because that's what it was for all of us.

The chair promoted interdependence in the department as a reaction to changes that were "scary."

A subset of chairs at one college recalled another way of making sure faculty did not feel alone in the change process: They shared their own experiences as instructors dealing with the changes. Half of the chairs at this college recalled sharing their own anxieties and struggles with the change effort with faculty as a way of assuaging anxiety. As one chair put it, "I trip over things too. I'm not flawless." Another said, "I also remind them that we struggle too . . . and we have problems in our classrooms." None of the chairs at the other college, in which department chairs teach only one class a year, mentioned sharing their experiences as a teacher.

"This is a learning process." Chairs characterized the change effort as an authentic learning process; the process itself would change and improve over time. Eight of the 15

chairs recalled framing the change as non-punitive, as an opportunity to try new things and learn from the effort. “Let’s try this” was a common refrain in chairs’ recollections of their interactions with faculty. Department chairs noted that faculty were often worried about their performance during a change initiative. They emphasized the trial and error nature of the change effort and the need to accept failures and learn from them to improve. As one chair said, “I don't fault faculty or ding faculty if they try something new and it doesn't work, that’s more important information. Now they know what they may need to do in the future.” They stressed to faculty that they were open to evaluating and re-evaluating progress during the change process in order to make adjustments if necessary. This involved assuring faculty that they would not be negatively viewed by administration if their efforts initially fell short:

> I let them know that it’s a new thing, and administration understands it’s a new thing and whether or not it works from a performance management perspective: “Take into account that you are willing to try this new thing, which is what administration wants, and they don’t know whether or not it’s going to work, so just the fact that you’re trying it is what they’re wanting, and they want genuine results, they don’t want false positive results. So do your best and if it works, great, and not, let’s evaluate and re-evaluate.”

An honest attempt and a willingness to improve were all that was needed.

Chairs admitted that the change process can be unpredictable, but they reframed that potentially negative feature as a benefit for faculty. They told faculty,

> “In something new, there’s going to be hiccups, nothing is going to work perfectly every single time. Everything is fluid, it’s dynamic, it’s changing. Just because we say we’re going to do it this way doesn’t mean we’re going to do it this way forever. We can tweak it . . . do whatever we need to do to make it better.”

One chair emphasized the option to try "something else" if the data show that the change effort didn't work as intended. She told faculty, "We will get to the end of this and we will have results, and we will have data, and if it doesn't work, we'll do something else." A chair stated that when faculty felt overwhelmed by initiatives, he assuaged their anxiety by reminding them that failure during change was an acceptable outcome. The point was to try and to learn from the attempt: "Failure is always an option," but learning from it is not. Another chair recalled what he said to faculty who expressed fear about their retention rates during change:

> "Let's just give it a shot. After this semester, you're going to have three semesters to figure this out, and we're going to learn from one another. If there's anything wrong, let me know, we're going to have the new division of teaching and learning to support this. Even if things don't go the way you want them to go, this will not be punitive. It will be restorative, it's going to be a 'come alongside and support' you."

The college created an office to support faculty during the change process, and this chair reminded faculty that they would have the resources necessary to make improvements. He described the process as "restorative" instead of punitive. Chairs in the study framed the change as a learning process and communicated that failure was a necessary part of change. They asked faculty to "give it a shot" and explained that if interventions did not work, the college would provide assistance to help them figure it out.

"How can I help you?" In a move that dovetailed with their active listening strategy, chairs also made a point of checking in with faculty to see how they could assist them, to find out what faculty needed to be successful, which they concluded would alleviate faculty's fears. While the open-door policy was characterized as a situation in which faculty felt free to

approach the chair, in this case, chairs described actively seeking out faculty to see how they were doing. Half of the department chairs stated that they responded to faculty expressions of anxiety with questions such as, “In what way can I support you more in meeting this particular goal?” One chair recalled saying, “What do you need to make this work better?” and “We know what we’re doing, but how can we do it better, and what do you need from me?” Chairs reasoned that inquiry would reduce anxiety, that sharing what they needed and exploring why they were experiencing these emotions would help faculty work through their feelings about the change. For example, a chair reported that when faculty expressed fear, he asked “Why do you feel that way,” inviting the faculty member to identify the causes of her fear rather than doing the talking himself. One chair wanted to make faculty feel that “their suffering is important in whatever context,” and would perform wellness checks on her department, asking, “How are you doing? What’s going on?” Many of chairs reported that they helped faculty manage their emotions about the change by simply inquiring about their needs. While chairs reported using questioning as a tactic for allaying fears, they balanced that approach by disseminating information to alleviate anxiety.

“I will keep you informed.” Chairs shared information openly and frequently to alleviate fears and anxieties. A third of the chairs stated that they used information sharing as a form of social support for faculty. One chair stressed the importance of being transparent in keeping faculty informed, because in the absence of news, people will generate information, regardless of its accuracy: “One of the problems is that when you don’t hear anything, you make up what you want. And the anxiety and the paranoia of ‘What if?’ and ‘Well, maybe…’ and ‘Well, I heard…” can be overwhelming.” This chair stressed that keeping faculty in the know would help “nip [anxiety] in the bud at the very lowest levels before things get out of

control." Another chair stated that his first effort is to get faculty to understand what is happening during the change effort—and he does so as a "straight shooter," sharing what he knew openly and honestly. One chair stated that whenever a new initiative is afoot, "the first thing I do is let faculty know because that usually alleviates some of the anxiety [that occurs] when you don't know what's going to happen." Chairs told faculty, "when I know something, you'll know something," keeping the line of communication open and disseminating information in a timely manner in order to keep anxiety to a minimum. They did not want faculty to think that they were withholding information. As one chair put it,

> I asked the faculty, "What do you want me to relay to you," and they said, "just please keep us informed." And so that has been my modality with them. When I hear something, I'll let them know. . . . I am an open and honest book with them, 100%.

Chairs recognized that if faculty perceived that they were hoarding information, they would contribute to faculty anxiety about their role in the change. Being transparent and timely in sharing information from administrators would help to dispel misinformation that often emerges during the change process. One aspect of information sharing is related to vision; recalling the purpose of the hard work of change was another strategy for calming anxious faculty.

"Remember why we're doing this." Chairs reminded faculty of the all-important goal behind the change efforts, understanding that vision could act as a salve to calm faculty's anxiety. Five of the 15 department chairs said they reiterated the purpose and vision behind the change. One chair recalled saying to faculty, "We're all going to have concerns, but at the end of the day, it's about the student, and we have to keep our eye on the prize. It's all about them." Another chair reminded faculty that their students' success was worth the

effort: “I just let them know that anytime we change something, again it’s for student success, it’s for the betterment of the student.” A chair described the change process as an “emotional” time but acknowledged that “we were doing it with a purpose.” The purpose behind the work counteracted the unpredictability of change; as long as faculty bought into the vision to support student success, they could harness that vision to carry them through the difficulties and the pain of change.

Emotions often run high during times of change; participants need to feel psychological safety. Chairs recognized this and communicated support to faculty throughout the change process. They not only managed faculty work during change efforts but also their emotions. They addressed faculty fears through messaging that assured faculty they were not alone and that their honest attempts to implement changes would not be used against them should they fail. They also made a point of checking in with faculty, asking what they needed and how they were doing. Some chairs also used open and honest information-sharing as a way to calm fears and concerns about the changes. Faculty respondents affirmed that change could produce anxiety, but chairs could help allay those feelings.

The faculty perspective. A majority of faculty at both colleges confirmed the chairs’ methods for easing anxiety. A faculty member described the benefit of feeling like you are part of a team: “Raising the morale, the camaraderie that we’re all doing this together, all in this together.” Another faculty member explained that his anxiety was assuaged by “watching her [the chair] because she’s gone through the same things that we do. She teaches classes too.” Faculty in the study agreed that change was presented as a non-punitive learning process. A faculty member confirmed this approach by contrasting it with a previous employer who pressured faculty into “faking” results:

> I worked at another school where we were trying something innovative, and it wasn't really working. . . . And at the end, when things didn't look super on paper, the person in charge said we're going to do this again, and it had better go well, or else. At that school, I felt like we should change [what we were doing], but we weren't going to change it, and it seemed to me that there was the pressure to fake the results. Whereas at this school, I feel like we get to try things and we get to tell it like it is. . . . It's just a nice thing when you feel like your job doesn't depend on pretending like something is effective when it isn't.

This faculty member validated the chairs' refrain of "let's try it" and learn from it. False positive results do not help organizations make real progress; authentic results do. Faculty anxiety should lessen, knowing that they are not being pressured to get positive results and can be honest about the process.

Faculty also said their chairs asked questions to see how they were handling the change. Chairs checked in, "making sure everything was okay in the middle of the semester. . . . You know, when you start out with a new course, it's just nice to know that they have our back." A faculty member echoed these comments, describing her chair as quick to check in: "Literally after I send him an email, he is down there within 10 minutes. . . . He'll come down, 'What's going on? Everything okay?' A faculty member described her chair using guided inquiry, asking questions and helping her "work through whatever the problem is, through communication, through talking it out."

A faculty member said his chair used information sharing as a means of easing faculty concerns: "She's very, very open about 'this is what it is.' We don't have to worry, we don't have to try to figure out what's going on. She's very transparent about what is going

on." Reiterating the purpose of the initiative helped another faculty member deal with the emotional aspect of change. She said that the chair focused on her emotional needs by reminding her of the larger purpose behind the change:

> I think she did a really good job about reminding us of what the big goal is, what that big objective is. Because when you're in the grind, and you're down in the trenches, you don't see that. You're just like, 'why, why, why. I'm exhausted, I'm going nowhere, I'm spinning my wheels.' But to be reminded of that [goal], you're okay.

Because they are on the front line of change, "in the grind," trying new approaches and taking risks, many faculty need communication from the chair that helps them persist in the change effort. Faculty respondents echoed the chairs' strategies for assuaging faculty fears and frustrations during the change process.

Chairs and faculty at both institutions recognized the importance of communication in engaging and supporting faculty throughout the change process. As they described the strategies chairs used to communicate vision, to motivate faculty, and to provide social support, they emphasized the department as the primary unit of change, as the most important factor determining faculty participation. They often described the department in contrast to the rest of the college, as a different world from administration.

Chairs and Faculty Live Here: The Primacy of the Department

Chairs and faculty in the study emphasized the primacy of their departments in the change process. That is, the department became the most important factor in the chair's and faculty's acceptance and engagement in the change efforts. Departments were described as families, as teams, and as safe harbors.

A tight-knit family. The majority of chairs and faculty described the department as a tight-knit unit ("incredibly tight"), as a family in a collaborative and collegial environment. They described the dependability and close relationships that have developed within the department as they cover each other's classes and offer support during times of illness or tragedy. The chairs described their familiarity with faculty members' families and lives outside of work. At one of the colleges, a majority of chairs in the study reported socializing with faculty and their spouses at college events, sometimes outside of the work day, as part of the college's push to encourage wider participation in college life. Chairs and faculty at both colleges described holiday parties and birthday celebrations in their departments; like family, they exchanged gifts and fed each other, they visited together. A chair recognized this closeness when he stated, "as close as we all are, as much as we trust each other, if somebody was to violate that, it would be devastating." Another chair stressed the cohesive nature of his department, "you have to understand the dynamics of our group, everybody likes each other." He added, "We all get along very, very well." Seeing each other every day, sharing in the daily routine and helping each other when things went awry, departments were described as interdependent units.

A cohesive team. Faculty and chairs alike described the ways that change brought their departments together as they united to determine how to implement changes in their unique settings. They regularly described their departments as a team; they did not work in silos but brainstormed and collaborated to implement changes and achieve the student success goals of their department. A faculty member highlighted the team-like nature of her department when she said, "We're really a good team now." She added, "I think everyone works well together and really likes their team, and it is almost kind of territorial in the sense

of, they take pride in that team and want their team to be the best." Chairs crafted an identity for the department: "We walk around together. People say, 'There they are again." We will wear the same t-shirts some days; we just have created that relationship with each other." Departments established a strong identity as a unit, making a point of sitting together at campus meetings and sharing their accomplishments—their "wins"—with the campus. Chairs harnessed the power of the team to create a departmental identity:

> There is something to be said for a team and teamwork and being together, physically together, it just sends sort of these sub-textual messages and subconscious messages that these are my people and we can weather a storm and we can get through things together, so that has been quite helpful.

In creating the team identity, they sent the message that the department can "weather a storm," creating a safe harbor for the unit.

A safe harbor. A faculty member affirmed the importance of the departmental unit when describing faculty who were struggling with the changes: "They work it out with their chair and they're putting their trust in that little world and their department. They're just holding on to that." Another faculty member confirmed the significant role that the chair plays in maintaining a supportive environment, "I really can see the difference that a good department chair can make. It makes things easier, you worry about it a lot less." This faculty member shared that he has had several different chairs and for a time the department lacked a chair. He stated, "the time period in which we didn't have a department chair didn't go so well." He said the current chair is "awesome. And she motivates us because we know how hard she works, and there's a lot of stuff that she takes care of. And when she gets excited about something . . . we get on board." He added the chair has "made a huge difference" in

the department. Along those lines, another faculty member mentioned that when he started working at the college, his department chair was also new, "and so he wasn't able to be there for me as much as he wanted to." In the process, the faculty member felt adrift as a new employee. Now he enjoys a strong relationship with his chair. He stated,

> Your relationship with your immediate supervisor is typically the most important relationship that people have in the workplace, because that's the individual they deal with on a daily basis. And I've been blessed, I've been lucky to have the kind of supervisor that I can go to. . . . We can always talk. And I think that's so important, because on this campus, and other places I've been when that relationship is fractured, even though people love their jobs, when their relationship [with their supervisor] is fractured, it never works out.

The same faculty member described the connection between the chair and faculty as very strong, "because you are doing the same things," referring to the close alignment of the chair's and the faculty's daily work routines and responsibilities.

Some faculty in the study recognized that other departments on campus did not appear to enjoy the same camaraderie and closeness and were thankful that their experience was different. One chair described his department as a safe harbor from other departments that were experiencing turmoil: "Even though you hear things that are happening in other departments, where it's a storm over there, when our faculty hear it, it affects them anyway, even though it has nothing to do with us, and we're safe."

One faculty member contrasted the chair she has now with her previous chair. She explained that his constant communication, openness to input, and concern for faculty made her very happy: "I'm definitely happy right now." She reiterated this point: "He has great

communication skills, the department chair we have right now. I've always been happy in my job, but I think this is the happiest I've ever been." Likewise, a faculty member explained that his department is "awesome" and stated that as a result, he was excited and engaged in the work. He said, "I don't know if that's just because I work with great people and my department is special," but he described his fellow faculty members and department chair as dependable and "very close." Another faculty member thought that departments functioned well on her campus, "I feel like we do a good job of working with one another, especially on this campus in our departments." She described other institutions she had worked at as "scary places" in which the department chair did not support the faculty. Several faculty reported feeling happier on the job when a new department chair arrived and prioritized communication with and among the faculty. Departments in which chairs were perceived as supportive of faculty became safe zones, "little worlds" where faculty could be happy despite what might be happening in the institution around them.

A distant administration. The close, cohesive department was often described in contrast to administration, which was labeled at times as distant—even if faculty and chairs felt supported by and had faith in the leadership—and disconnected, often simply owing to the nature of the proximity of chairs and faculty and the fact that chairs also taught classes and so experienced the changes in the same ways that faculty did. Faculty said they felt motivated and supported as they watched their department chairs grapple with the changes in the classroom. One chair who had a reduced teaching load stressed the importance of substituting for faculty as often as she could: "I don't ever want my faculty to feel like I can't relate to them anymore." She further explained that substituting "keeps me abreast of everything, it keeps me in tune with what's going on in the classroom. . . . I don't want it to

be this ‘he said, she said’ side of the house. I want us to all be together.” Spending time in the classroom helped her maintain that connection with faculty.

A department chair acknowledged that faculty trust with the upper administration “may not be at the level that it is with me.” He explained, “I think that maybe they still have that, ‘Well, the administration just doesn’t get it, they’re not in the classroom, and they’re just doing this because they’re just trying something new.’” A faculty member described upper-level administration as being disconnected at times because they are not actually doing what they are asking faculty to do: “How they think it should look and how it actually is done don’t always coincide, and so sometimes there is a disconnect there.” He described the trust level as much higher with the “line supervisor” than with the upper administration for this reason.

Participants in the study characterized their departments as families and as cohesive teams that work together, often through difficulties, to achieve a common goal. During the often painful and uncertain change process, chairs and faculty experienced their departments as safe harbors from the turmoil occurring elsewhere in the institution and from a distant if supportive administration. Even if faculty praised the administration and felt that administrators cared about their work, and most in the study did, they acknowledged that administrators did not share their work experience on a day-to-day level. Their department chair, however, saw them every day, typically came out of a similar program or discipline, taught classes as well, and understood their experiences. When the department chair communicated, he or she spoke their language. This connection created a cohesive community with its own identity that could fuel change in ways that administration could not on its own.

The findings detailed in this chapter focused on the many communication strategies used by department chairs to provide vision, to counter resistance, to motivate, and to calm the fear and anxiety that often accompanies change. Participants mostly focused their recollections on these aspects of the process without detailing particular stages or phases. While findings address the implementation process in detail, participants did not give the beginning and closing stages of the process as much attention.

The Change Process

Chairs and faculty were asked to think about the interview questions in light of each phase of the change process: unfreezing to jolt or nudge the college toward change, moving in a new direction, and refreezing to reinforce the change or make it a part of normal operations. The participants did not provide many details specifically about the first and last phases, but the findings shared throughout this chapter shed light on how the chairs helped move the college in the new direction, or to put it another way, how the chairs implemented the change on the ground. However, a few findings emerged related to the first and last phases.

Unfreezing the system. In the first phase of the change process, the system must be thawed from its present way of doing things. Chairs introduced the need for change by reiterating the college's overall vision of improving student success outcomes. Sometimes change in the department was triggered by an event, as in the case of both nursing departments when the passing rates on the credentialing exam dropped significantly and with it came the threat of sanctions or program closure. Triggering events included the state legislature's decisions to reduce program length or reduce the number of developmental courses that students were required to take. Some chairs created a sense of urgency by

highlighting the highest percentages of student withdrawal rates by courses: “Are we happy with 45%, 50% of college algebra students passing college algebra?” Other chairs created urgency by sharing college-wide retention data and explaining, “We can get on board with this. I have seen the data, and I believe this is the case. We have to do this.” Chairs commented that as long as they connected changes to student success, they could move the initiatives forward:

> Faculty—at least my faculty—are largely already self-motivated, they’re hired because they care about our students. They want the students to do well, and if the initiative is to do exactly that, then they’re on board.

Not much additional “unfreezing” needed to happen as long as faculty were committed to student success and were able to connect the changes to that goal.

Refreezing the system. The system can move toward change, but in order for change to occur, the system must be “refrozen” to support it. Participants at both colleges referenced practices such as routine class observations to reinforce student engagement practices and regularly scheduled meetings with faculty to review their student drop rates. At one college, a committee was created to review faculty requests to offer courses in 16-week sessions instead of shorter terms; faculty had to receive approval in order not to put eight-week sections on the schedule—a clear indicator that the eight-week terms had become the norm. The change became the expectation, and this was reinforced by gains in student outcomes. Better results helped to refreeze the system. As one faculty member said, “It was hard when it started. I didn’t want to do this, but we started incorporating it, and we saw the differences. And so now, we need to do this because it works.” If an intervention was proven to work, it became “second nature,” the standard way of operating. A faculty member described how her

chair closed out a change initiative, “Take a little pause, appreciate what you’ve done, and now shut that and move forward.” Chairs and faculty might take a moment to celebrate successes, but in a culture of continual change, there is less time to hit pause; the next change has already arrived.

Conclusion

This study explored how department chairs at two community colleges that have experienced comprehensive student success reform communicated with faculty during change. Fifteen pairs of chairs and faculty described a variety of student success initiatives and reported their perceptions of chair communication during the change efforts. Topics included communication channels and strategies to communicate vision, respond to faculty resistance, motivate faculty, and provide social support.

Chairs communicated the broad college vision to faculty but also tailored that vision to their departments. They acted as the bridge between the administration’s goals and the actual work of change on the ground; they translated the administration’s goals to faculty, in the process often softening or filtering the message, and likewise, they translated the faculty’s concerns and reactions to administration.

When faculty resisted the change, chairs responded by asking for faculty input, emphasizing the benefits of making the change, and playing devil’s advocate. The colleges also responded to resistance by creating conditions in which resistant faculty decided to move on. Chairs motivated faculty to engage in the change by emphasizing academic freedom, seeking faculty input, expressing appreciation, and sharing positive outcomes.

Faculty received social support during change when chairs practiced empathetic listening. Chairs eased faculty anxiety by communicating that faculty were not alone in the

effort and that change was a non-punitive learning process in which failure was an option, by asking faculty what they needed, by keeping faculty informed, and by reminding them of the vision behind the change. Throughout chair and faculty interviews, the departmental unit was routinely described as a family, a team, and a safe harbor, emerging as an important factor determining faculty acceptance of and engagement in change efforts.

The next chapter provides conclusions and recommendations based on the data and themes generated from it.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The student success agenda calls for higher education institutions to improve student learning, retention, and completion (Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2017; Stout, 2018; Wyner, 2014). Yet creating and sustaining change in organizations is a difficult task (Bess & Dee, 2012), and poor communication is often cited as a reason for change failure (Lewis, 2011). Because much of the change required of community colleges focuses on student outcomes, faculty and their immediate supervisors are integral to the success of reform efforts. Department chairs are the primary evaluators and motivators of faculty work during change efforts (Bryman, 2007; Gonaim, 2016). This study posits that department chair communication with faculty is an important factor in achieving organizational change focused on improving student outcomes. This case study explored chair communication in two community colleges that have experienced comprehensive student success reform in order to determine factors that may contribute to improved faculty engagement and improved student outcomes. The study contributes to the literature on the role that midlevel leaders play in change implementation communication focused on student success in community colleges.

Summary of Findings

The sampling in this study was purposeful in that the participants worked at community colleges that were finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. Both community colleges have received awards for demonstrating significant gains in improving student outcomes and have been recognized for promoting strong faculty engagement and improving student learning. This unique, intentional sampling allowed the researcher to study the communication methods of department chairs in a successful change environment. All of the department chairs interviewed for this study described

communication as an important component of their work. They reported using a variety of communication channels including departmental and individual meetings and leveraged technology to communicate frequently with faculty. Chairs recognized their responsibility to communicate the college's broad vision of student success to faculty but also tailored the vision to their department's unique context, reframing it in ways that resonated with their departments. Describing themselves as filters, chairs translated the administration's goals and plans to faculty in ways that they felt would engage and motivate faculty. In the process, they might soften the message or choose only the information they thought was relevant. At times, faculty and administrative agendas conflicted, and chairs felt a responsibility to bridge that gap. Negotiating the different perspectives was described as a difficult and challenging task. The communication process extended in both directions, as chairs translated faculty concerns and responses to the administration. In doing so, they spanned the boundaries of faculty and administration.

Resistance was recognized as a valid response to change, and chairs acknowledged respect for dissenting voices as they worked to earn faculty participation. When faculty seemed unwilling to change, chairs asked for their input, suggesting that the faculty test the change and report on ways to improve it. Other strategies for countering resistance included emphasizing the benefits of the change and playing devil's advocate. For those situations when faculty pushback was especially pervasive or unmoving, one of the colleges created an environment that resulted in many faculty leaving the institution. Both colleges emphasized the benefits of hiring faculty who valued student success and were comfortable with change.

Chairs accepted their role in motivating faculty throughout the change process and described several strategies for doing so. They emphasized faculty autonomy and freedom in

implementing the change, framing the change as an opportunity for creativity. Chairs resisted the urge to control how the department enacted the change and motivated faculty by seeking their input, ensuring that faculty had a voice in the change effort. Expressing appreciation for faculty's expertise and sharing positive outcomes of the change effort were additional motivational strategies.

The uncertainty of change can cause anxiety or fear, and chairs communicated their support for faculty by listening empathetically. They literally and figuratively created an open door for faculty to come to them with fears, anxieties, and concerns. A priority was creating confidential, judgment-free zones where faculty would feel safe to share their thoughts. Chairs also actively addressed faculty anxiety by communicating that faculty were not alone and that the change process was a learning experience in which everyone should be free to try and fail. Emphasizing that the college did not want false positive results, chairs urged faculty to learn from the process. They also prioritized asking faculty what they needed and how they could help, being proactive in identifying areas of support. Recognizing that the absence of information can cause anxiety, chairs made a point of keeping faculty informed. Finally, they reminded faculty of the meaningful purpose behind their efforts, that of improving student success and helping students to improve their lives.

As participants responded to the interview questions, they described the primacy of the department. Chairs and faculty referred to the department as a family, a team, and a safe harbor in which they felt protected. While study participants expressed positive feelings about all levels of administration, they identified the department as the place they felt most connected. The administration, however well-meaning and communicative, was nonetheless distant from the daily work of faculty and chairs. The administration cast the big vision and

created the overall strategy while the department chairs executed that vision. Chairs translated the vision for the department and then got to work implementing it alongside the faculty, experiencing the change with them and acting as therapist, motivator, guide, and evaluator. The chairs were in the unique position of both helping to envision and implement the change.

Discussion of Findings

The following section identifies the conclusions of the study, grounding them in the data and in relevant literature. Organizational change communication theory and stakeholder theory provide a framework for interpreting the results of this study.

According to the Stakeholder Model of Change Implementation Communication, a chair's understanding of the stakes that faculty hold in the organization and the chair's selection of communication strategies based on that information are predictors that can account for outcomes in planned change (Lewis, 2007). The negotiation of stakes between chairs and faculty as they interact during change determines the outcomes of the change. The findings of this study can be interpreted through this model, which connects the antecedents of communication strategy (perceptions of the change context, including institutional factors), the communication strategies themselves, and stakeholders' interactions and links them to the change outcomes (Lewis, 2011).

Change implementers' perceptions of the change situation will influence their selection of communication strategies (Lewis, 2007). In this study, chairs' professional experiences influenced their approach to change implementation. All of the department chairs served as faculty before becoming chairs and continued to teach classes in their supervisory role. As members of the academy, they selected communication strategies that

aligned with the professional norms and values associated with the faculty role in higher education: academic freedom, autonomy, diversity, decentralization, shared governance, discussion, and debate (Allen, 2003; Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Kezar, 2014). Strategies therefore emphasized seeking input, maintaining openness to adapting the plan, and honoring faculty's expertise in their classrooms. Chairs also encouraged creativity and flexibility and refrained from top-down messaging where possible. They stressed the freedom to be creative, avoided uniformity or standardization, and welcomed dissent as a way to improve the change. For example, one chair resisted the urge to control how faculty implemented the change:

> I try not to be too scripted in what I ask them to do. I just ask them to look at something or I ask them to think about it. So I try to keep it open-ended where I'm not feeling like I'm pressuring them to do one particular thing.

Chairs described "cushioning" change initiatives by allowing faculty the freedom to put their "spin" on the change.

It is important to note that general education faculty and career-technical faculty often follow different norms and practices, leading to different ways of communicating (Ayers, 2005; Bozeman, Fay, & Gaughan, 3013; Kezar, 2014). However, in this study, career-technical and general education chairs followed the same overall strategies and approaches when communicating about change. The only differences of note occurred when chairs reframed and translated the vision and plans for their departments. For example, career-technical chairs reframed vision and goals in terms of workplace requirements and professional expectations more often than general education faculty, who tended to emphasize success in future college courses.

A finding of note is that while faculty in higher education tend to favor an individualized approach to their jobs, often seeing themselves as freelancers (Bess & Dee, 2012, 2014; Esterberg & Wooding, 2012), the majority of chairs in this study communicated in ways that de-emphasized the individual, promoted teamwork, and created a family-like atmosphere in the department. As one chair said, "They know that we will always function as a team . . . not only will I support them, but they're also supporting each other." In times of change, chairs communicated a message of interdependence in the department that contradicts one faculty norm—that of prioritizing the individual. A faculty member confirmed, "We're all doing this together."

Chairs also made communication choices within an institutional context (Bess & Dee, 2014; Lewis, 2011). Institutional factors determine whether dissent is permitted and collaboration is encouraged, whether change is mandated and inflexible or open to adjustments, whether the culture values open reporting of results even if those results are not positive, and whether the institution provides a support structure to help employees make the changes (Bess & Dee, 2012, 2014). In this study, institutional factors permitted collaboration and adaptation as the change process unfolded. Participants described a culture of innovation and collaboration at both institutions ("It's going to keep changing and you just have to go with the flow"). The colleges also appeared to value transparency in sharing results, publishing detailed student outcomes data on their websites and sharing results openly in college meetings. As one faculty member reported, "We get to try things and we get to tell it like it is." The institutions provided support structures, such as instructional designers, retention specialists, and offices of teaching and learning, to assist faculty in implementing changes focused on student success.

While both institutions fostered innovative cultures and tolerated dissent as a form of engagement that could improve the change process (Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2002), in one finding of note, institutional pressures at a certain point did not permit faculty to engage in resistance. That is, faculty who were not in sync with the changes and the direction the college was changing, left ("As the momentum gets going, you see the ones that fall off"). Chairs explained that the college had charted a clear vision for the future, and everyone signed on to that vision when they signed their contracts. As one chair explained to a resistant faculty member, "Let's be real. This is the vision. This is where we're going, make sure you understand that before you sign the contract." If faculty could not identify with the changes or did not want to invest in them, they chose to leave (Ford, 1999; Klonek, Willenbrock, & Kauffeld, 2014). Though this theme appeared in both colleges, it was more prominent in one of the institutions, where chairs and faculty affirmed that a significant number of faculty left the institution as changes were implemented. It is not clear at what points in the process faculty opted to leave, or what the specific triggers for departure were, but what is clear is that the institution resolved to weather the departures, using them as an opportunity to infuse the institution with faculty who believed in the overall vision and who demonstrated a willingness to change (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012). This finding suggests that one radical strategy for change implementation is to communicate the expectation of a commitment to change in such a way as to encourage those who cannot commit to change to leave.

As change implementers, the chairs in this study selected communication strategies based on their assessment of the change situation at their institution. In doing so, they

enacted a mix of approaches with several common themes emerging across both colleges. Specifically, they adopted the following strategies.

Chairs Emphasized the Positive Aspects of Change

Instead of emphasizing the negative side of change, chairs elected to focus on its benefits (Lewis, 2007). Student success, their overall vision, was universally seen as a meaningful and attainable goal, and chairs emphasized this often in their communication with faculty: "Anytime we change something, it's for student success. It's for the betterment of the student." They reframed negative aspects of the change as positive. For example, they recast the unpredictability of change as an opportunity to be flexible and creative, as evidenced in this chair's comment:

> In something new, there's going to be hiccups, nothing is going to work perfectly every single time. Everything is fluid, it's dynamic, it's changing. Just because we say we're going to do it this way doesn't mean we're going to do it this way forever. We can tweak it . . . do whatever we need to do to make it better.

When the administration provided an overall goal without mandating a specific response (such as a blanket message to "improve success rates"), chairs could easily emphasize the faculty's freedom and autonomy in responding to it ("we put our heads together and say, what are some things we could do?"). When the administration (or the state) mandated a particular approach to improving student success, as in adding eight-week terms or reducing the number of developmental courses, chairs found a way to infuse the mandate with an element of flexibility. For example, when the state mandated changes, chairs suggested that faculty figure out the best way to put a "spin" on it "for it to be successful and possibly even utilized across the district." When countering faculty resistance, chairs used this approach as

a positive way to build engagement in the change and refine it in the process (Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2002). Chairs recognized that success breeds success, and that sharing positive results could spark faculty engagement and keep them motivated. This communication strategy aligned with research showing that faculty are motivated by open and honest interaction, fair treatment, recognition of good work, and framing the change as an opportunity rather than a problem (Bess & Dee, 2014; Bryman, 2007; Gonaim, 2016; Stone & Coussons-Read, 2011).

Chairs Shared Information but Prioritized Input

Chairs adopted a blended approach to information sharing. Sometimes they prioritized the dissemination of information; other times, they focused on gathering information from faculty. Chairs felt that it was their responsibility to keep faculty informed about changes: "I was privy to why decisions were being made sometimes, and it was part of my job to communicate to faculty that reasoning." The chairs engaged in communication that focused on disseminating information, including sharing a local vision in the department, translating plans from administration to faculty, and communicating faculty concerns to administration (Bess & Dee, 2014). Chairs acted as conduits of information from administration to faculty, and vice versa (Bess & Dee, 2014; McArthur, 2002). Research shows that if change implementers are perceived to be withholding information or providing incomplete or conflicting information, they will be perceived as less credible (Lewis, 2011). However, change agents must avoid information overload, in which communication about change becomes excessive, possibly irrelevant, and cannot be effectively used by members of the organization (Lewis, 2011; Rogers, 2003; White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010). Chairs in this study recognized the need to strike a balance; as they communicated the administration's

plans to faculty, they eliminated information that they deemed unhelpful to faculty, such as educational jargon.

Studies have shown that during change, organizational members may seek information as a form of social support, whether that information is accurate or not (Lewis, 2011). Chairs also shared information as a form of social support ("when I know something, you'll know something") and recognized that misinformation arises in the absence of information: "One problem is that when you don't hear anything, you make up what you want." Chairs also shared student success results as a way to motivate engagement in the change process, aligning with studies indicating that effective chairs regularly provide information to stakeholders on the department's direction and progress (Bryman, 2007; Gonaim, 2016). When organizational members feel well-informed, they more strongly identify with the organization (White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010), potentially increasing their commitment to it.

Studies show that change managers may initially share information in the form of announcements, but as the change is implemented, the users (in this case faculty) may transform from recipients of information to information-sharers as they offer responses and opinions (Lewis, 2011). That phenomenon was evidenced in this study as chairs overwhelmingly prioritized strategies that sought input from faculty. They described their meetings as brainstorming sessions, and their departments as collaborative environments. As a strategy to counter resistance, they invited faculty to test and improve the changes: "Sometimes it's disagreement that gets us to a better product." They promoted the change as a learning process during which faculty could share their results and work with others to make improvements to the plans. As one chair put it, "I don't fault faculty or ding faulty if

they try something new and it doesn't work, that's important information. Now they know what they need to do in the future."

Chairs also solicited input as a way to motivate faculty to engage in the change and used it as another strategy to provide social support (Lewis, 2007). Empathetic listening and safe zones created the conditions for faculty to share their thoughts and emotions about the change. Rogers (2003) found that change agents are successful when they empathize with the users of the change. Overall, chairs engaged in a participatory approach that invited faculty participation, honored faculty's voices, and empowered them to make decisions about how to implement the change. Research suggests that these strategies encourage engagement. Two-way communication, trust, and transparency are central to faculty engagement and meaningful improvement outcomes (Kater, 2017). Likewise, employing middle managers to facilitate change in a collaborative communication process was shown to be a more effective way of managing employees' uncertainty (Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia, & Irmer, 2007). A culture that does not encourage collaboration fosters apathy, suspicion, and disengagement (Czech & Forward, 2010). Numerous studies have found that stakeholder participation lowers pushback, reduces anxiety, and increases compliance with change (Lewis, 2007).

Chairs Used Targeted Messages

Chairs repeated the same basic messaging when promoting the overall college vision, but for the most part they customized their communication about change initiatives. Chairs tailored their communication to their departmental audience. As middle managers, chairs recognized that their role during organizational change was to represent the administration's goals and plans to faculty. Likewise, chairs demonstrated an awareness of the norms and practices of administration, as they worked to reframe and tailor that messaging to faculty.

They recognized that faculty focus on academic freedom, collegial debate, and rigor, while administrators prioritize strategic planning and institutional mission (Allen, 2003; Bess & Dee, 2014). Faculty prefer decentralization and individuality; administration promotes centralization and standardization (Kezar, 2014). This understanding of their two audiences fueled their approach to communicating a vision for the change and their translation of administration's plans to faculty. As one chair put it, "The administration has their focus, and our program, our faculty, have another focus. And what I try to do as a supervisor is blend the two." Research suggests that blanket messaging is used when the change does not require consensus, and conversely, targeted messages are preferred when consensus is seen as a necessary part of a change effort (Lewis, 2007). The chairs' preference for both collaborative communication and targeted messaging aligns with this research.

Chairs Prioritized Efficacy Messages

Chairs highlighted the gap between the present and desired state as a way to create a sense of urgency ("something needed to change"). But they prioritized messages that convinced faculty that they could accomplish the goals of the change ("We can do this"). They reminded faculty that they had the skills, the expertise, and the resources necessary to meet the challenge. They valued the faculty's experiences, praised their work, and communicated appreciation for their efforts to close the gap. As one chair said, "I'll say every single time, 'that's them. That's not me. They created those numbers, they do the work. . . . I don't take the credit when it's not mine to take." Chairs' focus on efficacy messages aligns with studies on the effectiveness of department chairs, which indicate that effective leaders establish respectful, supportive, trusting relationships with faculty (Bryman, 2007; Lucas, 2000). In one study, those who felt more positive about the changes were more likely

to state their supervisors treated them with respect while those who felt negative about the changes were dissatisfied with their treatment by managers (Thornhill & Saunders, 2003). Focusing on supportive messages allowed the chairs in this study to create a positive and respectful environment.

The Stakeholder Model of Change Implementation Communication (Lewis, 2007, 2011) connects outcomes to the interactions of stakeholders during change and provides a communication-interaction lens through which to study organizational change. The colleges in the study have demonstrated comprehensive student success improvements and provided an opportunity to understand how department chairs as one significant stakeholder communicated with another crucial stakeholder—faculty—to foster their engagement in change efforts. As middle managers, the chairs in this study framed their communication to align with the culture and norms of the academy, and often reframed administrative communication in light of those norms, demonstrating an awareness of the differing perspectives of faculty and administration. For example, if chairs felt that changes were coming from administration as "directives," they reframed the communication to put the administration in a more positive light: "I want it to look like it's administration that's helping to grease the wheel, even though it may not be." Chairs described communication strategies that conformed to existing research about effective communication.

In this study, department chair communication was a critical factor in the successful implementation of change. The majority of the faculty in the study praised their chairs' continual efforts to inspire, motivate, and support them throughout the change. One faculty member described her chair's communication during a moment of burnout and frustration:

> I think she did a really good job about reminding us of what the big goal is, what the big objective is. Because when you're in the grind, and you're down in the trenches, you don't see that. You're just like, 'why, why, why. I'm exhausted, I'm going nowhere, I'm spinning my wheels.' But to be reminded of that [goal], you're okay.

As front-line supervisors of faculty, chairs helped faculty move forward with change efforts in moments like this, occurring on a near-daily basis. In this way, chairs are instrumental in moving the college forward, one day at a time.

The Importance of the Chair in Community College Change Efforts

The findings of this study reinforced the important role that community college department chairs play in the diffusion of innovation. According to Rogers (2003), communication networks are the conduits for spreading new ideas or approaches, and these networks are most effective when those who are interacting within them are similar in beliefs, level of education, socioeconomic status, occupation, and background. However, the diffusion of innovation throughout an organization requires communication between people of different groups; otherwise, the spread of innovations and resulting change outcomes will be limited (Rogers, 2003). Based on the findings of this study, department chairs sit in a position of significance, well-positioned to communicate between these groups.

The chair is the link between faculty and administration, a metaphor that captures the crucial nature of the chair's work during change: If a link fails, the chain breaks. The chairs described themselves as a bridge, but in this case a high wire is a better boundary-spanning metaphor. Chairs walked a tightrope, providing enough information to ensure that faculty felt well-informed but holding back information when they felt it might be detrimental to the change effort. Chairs needed to be transparent and authentic but at the same time they needed

to soften or even change messages coming from administration. They generously opened their doors for faculty to vent, but they needed to communicate those reactions to administrators in a way that did not negatively impact the faculty. They managed and negotiated dissent, fear, questions, requests, and breakdowns. Navigating complicated rhetorical contexts, they helped move the organizational conversation away from the past and toward the new (Ford, 1999; Ford & Ford, 2008).

More than a simple conduit of information, chairs found themselves in a position to influence faculty and administration. Because they were implementing change "in the trenches," and participating in the change at the same time, they were able to share feedback that could challenge and alter administration's plans. In one study, middle managers questioned senior managers' plans and refined the change as a result (Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011). As middle managers, chairs in this study found themselves in the same situation.

Chairs were responsible for taking the strategic plans of administration and executing those plans on the ground in their departments. As middle managers, they are change intermediaries; they make sense of the change so they can understand it, they enact the change, and they translate the change to their employees—and they do this while maintaining daily operations (Balogun, 2003). In other words, they generate the communication that gets work done (Keyton, 2011).

All Change Is Local

The findings of this study suggest that regardless of what occurs in upper administration or in other departments on campus, the academic department is the site of change that matters. Participants revealed that if they were happy in their department, they

were happy in their work. For example, one faculty member linked satisfaction with her chair to her happiness at work: “He has great communication skills, the department chair we have right now. I’ve always been happy in my job, but I think this is the happiest I’ve ever been.” Conversely, if the chair position were vacant, or if a new chair needed time to get acclimated, or if the existing chair did not communicate well, faculty described their overall work experience as negative: They felt adrift, alone, and annoyed. As one faculty member said of his chair’s first year, “He wasn’t able to be there for me as much as he wanted to.” The faculty member felt frustrated because he didn’t have the guidance or knowledge the chair could have provided, and he made several missteps as a result. That is not an environment conducive to change.

This finding is in keeping with studies showing that communication with supervisors determines how employees view change over time (Thornhill & Saunders, 2003) and that employees are more likely to trust their direct supervisors over senior management (Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia, & Irmer, 2007). Studies suggest that group identity helps to reduce uncertainty (Brown, Colville, & Pye, 2015; Dawson & McLean, 2013), and department chairs and faculty in this study found that to be the case. Organizational members’ understanding of and support for change projects has been shown to be impacted more by the conversations they have with their peers than by communication from senior management (O’Neill & Jabri, 2007); this study has significance for chairs’ interactions with faculty because chairs describe themselves as collaborators with faculty. As one chair said, “There are five of us. I’m 20%.”

Academic departments are “powerful sources of identity and meaning” (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012, p. 86). The findings of this study align with research in supporting the

primacy of the "little world" of the department. The faculty in the study confirm that the chair is a critical factor in creating and maintaining a functional department (Czech & Forward, 2010; Gardner & Ward, 2018). And when academic departments function effectively, they can drive change in an institution (Gardner & Ward, 2018).

Recommendations

The following sections offer recommendations for practice, policy, research, and theory based on the findings and conclusions of this study.

For Practice

I have three recommendations for practice. The first recommendation describes communication strategies for leaders who directly supervise faculty during change. A second recommendation is that the unique and demanding nature of the department chair's work during change suggests that chairs' emotional and social support needs should be prioritized by the institution. The third recommendation focuses on the hiring and development of department chairs.

Department chairs at the two colleges included in this study communicated effectively with faculty as they implemented change. They described their approaches and faculty confirmed those strategies as detailed in the previous chapter and in the discussion of findings provided above. From their experiences, we can extrapolate several communicative practices that could be useful to chairs at colleges who are undergoing change.

- Create messages that inform, motivate, and support faculty by emphasizing the benefits of the change and the ability of faculty to meet the expectations of the change.

- Create messages that inform, motivate, and support faculty by framing the change in ways that align with faculty values and norms.
- Create messages that that inform, motivate, and support faculty by signaling a willingness to listen empathetically and address emotions associated with change.

The study's findings are based in a particular case of two community colleges that have experienced comprehensive student success reform. The recommended communication practices above provide a more generalized set of approaches to communicating change that are informed by the findings of this study but that do not prescribe the content of change messages. Every change situation represents its own special context, and department chairs should be thoughtful in determining the best strategies for communicating about change in their unique settings.

This study supports a second recommendation for practice: Department chairs need resources, including emotional support, to allow them to continue the complex and challenging work of enacting change that improves student success. As previously mentioned, the chair's dual-role as faculty member and supervisor can be demanding, especially during times of change. When department chairs prioritize effective communication with faculty during change, they run the risk of burning out (Lewis, 2007). Chairs and faculty in the study commented on chairs' 24/7 accessibility to faculty ("every faculty has my cell phone, and there is not a time when you cannot call me") and the challenges of being available while managing the many responsibilities of the job:

> No matter how busy I am, if my door's open, even though I'm frustrated, and I have a deadline in 10 minutes, I just have to turn on this calm face. They took the time to come down here and talk to me, so let me give them some time.

Chairs described doing the taxing work of empathetic listening and helping faculty manage their emotions during change, sometimes to the point of stealing time from their home life: "Sometimes I have to take 10 minutes and sit in somebody's office and see how they're doing and let them talk to me about things . . . and that may mean that I'm grading at home that night." Scholars recognize that providing emotional support for change users during change is an important yet challenging role (Lewis, 2011). Just as chairs listen empathetically and maintain open-door policies for faculty who are working through change, they need an open door that they can walk through to vent and share concerns. It is therefore recommended that colleges prioritize the care and support of department chairs especially during change initiatives.

A third recommendation for practice is relevant for those who supervise department chairs. One of the findings of the study is the pivotal role of the department chair in creating and maintaining a functioning department, one responsive to and engaged in change efforts to improve student outcomes. Chairs did more than simply manage the day-to-day operations of the department. They also provided leadership and guidance during change. Given this finding, it is recommended that when selecting department chairs colleges look for the communication skills of the chairs in this study. For example, chairs who successfully gained and sustained faculty engagement employed targeted, personalized strategies for communication. They were comfortable addressing dissenting opinions and prioritized positive messages. They employed active, empathetic listening and used a variety of communication channels including group and one-on-one meetings and email. They were comfortable with collaboration and with communicating to a variety of audiences. These successful chairs could use language effectively to inform, motivate, and support faculty.

These strategies suggest that successful chairs are open-minded, self-aware, positive, perceptive in social interactions, interested in developing faculty, able to formulate good (relevant, pointed) questions, and capable of listening more than talking. Chairs should possess some dexterity with spoken and written language: Precise, accurate, and clear language appropriate for audience and purpose can reduce misinterpretation and miscommunication. Professional development for chairs should include opportunities to practice and develop these communication skills. The evaluation of department chairs should therefore also include evidence of and provide feedback on these skills.

For Policy

In this section, I offer one recommendation for policy. The findings and conclusions of study suggests that colleges should develop policies that require front-line supervisors of faculty to teach at least one class every fall and spring semester. This study suggests that one of the most valuable aspects of the department chair position is the chair's dual role as faculty member. Every chair in this study was promoted from within the faculty ranks, and as former faculty members, their credibility is enhanced when they continue to teach alongside their faculty.

In this study, despite viewing administration positively, chairs and faculty sometimes characterized the administration as "distant" and "disconnected" in contrast to the department. They were not bad administrators; they simply were removed from the faculty's day-to-day teaching environment. One of the chairs explained why he thought faculty trusted him more than they trusted the administration: "I think [faculty] still have that, 'well, the administration doesn't get it, they're not in the classroom, and they're doing this because they're just trying something new.'" A faculty confirmed this thinking when he said, "How

they [administration] think it should look and how it actually is done don't always coincide." However, when the department chair teaches, faculty may be more motivated to engage in the change effort. When they teach, chairs remain connected and close to the faculty's day-to-day experience.

At one of the colleges, chairs do not teach every semester. Several chairs at this college indicated that this worked to their disadvantage at times. When chairs' teaching loads were reduced, one of the chairs described her faculty's reaction as if "we're not part of faculty anymore." She continued, "And I don't ever want my faculty to feel like I can't relate to them anymore." As a result, this chair prioritized substituting for faculty when they were going to miss class: "It keeps me abreast of everything, it keeps me in tune with what's going on in the classroom." This chair, along with others who were interviewed, mentioned the challenge of staying connected with faculty when they were not teaching on a regular basis. Disconnecting from the classroom experience would be a challenge for an immediate supervisor of faculty at any time, but it presents a heightened challenge during times of change focused on student success in the classroom.

Chairs at the college who teach multiple classes each semester were able to use their learning experiences grappling with change in their classes to connect with faculty: "I trip over things too. I'm not flawless." A faculty member admitted that he felt less anxious about the changes "watching the chair because she's gone through the same things that we do." The camaraderie and credibility that is established through regular teaching is an asset for chairs who are responsible for implementing change "on the front lines."

When department chairs teach, they enhance their credibility with those enacting change on the front lines. Getting "in the trenches" or "in the grind" with faculty to

experience the effects of the change also offers chairs a wealth of first-hand information that can be used to refine and improve the change. Teaching improves the chair's credibility as a change implementer when communicating feedback to the administration. As one chair put it, "There are times we've gone back to administration and said, 'you know, this isn't going to work.'" A chair's credibility with administrators in this situation is enhanced, which should lead to enhancements in the change effort overall. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, I recommend the policy of requiring front-line supervisors of faculty to teach a class every semester.

For Research

I provide six recommendations for research based on the findings of this study. First, the study provided data that revealed some of the ways department chairs communicate with faculty during change. Chairs recalled the ways they communicated during the change process, and their recollections were generally supported by the faculty in the study. However, both chairs and faculty found it difficult to recall specific communication that occurred at precise points in time in the change process, perhaps in part because their institutions engage in multiple change efforts simultaneously, or perhaps due to the passing of time. Though change processes are recursive and dynamic, it is recognized that change occurs in a series of broad phases with a beginning, a middle, and an end (Lewin, 1947; Burnes, 2004; Burke, 2018). Scholars have noted that studying these phases of the change process can provide insights for practitioners (Rogers, 2003), for example, how change is framed at the beginning of the change period can influence how users perceive the change experience (Lewis, 2011), and conversations that close out a change effort can impact ongoing compliance with those changes (Ford, 1999). It is recommended that future research

provide more data on the ways that chairs communicate at the beginning and ending of the change process.

As a second recommendation to improve and expand on this study, I suggest research that studies communication in real-time (versus solely through participant reflection) throughout the life cycle of a change process. Data could be collected through participant observations as stakeholders communicate and could be studied using the tools of conversational analysis. Data from interviews and observations could be supplemented with deeper reflections by asking chairs to keep a journal or conversation log in which they describe and examine their communication strategies. This approach would provide additional data revealing how chairs communicate at various stages in the change process, as well as more insight into the factors that impact chairs' communication choices.

Thirdly, this study focused on department chair communication with full-time faculty, but part-time faculty comprise a growing percentage of the faculty in higher education (Bess & Dee, 2012) and participate in change efforts as well. Like their full-time counterparts, part-time faculty are responsible for enacting change that improves student outcomes. This important population needs to be included in studies to determine if the strategies that chairs employ when communicating with full-time faculty work with part-time faculty as well.

A fourth recommendation for research involves the population of stakeholders and the specific channel of communication studied in this project. This study isolated and explored department chair communication with faculty. However, other communication channels of significance exist, such as faculty communication with the chair, or faculty communication with other faculty, chair-to-chair communication, or chair communication with the next administrative level. Studies exploring these additional communication

channels in successful community colleges would provide further insights on effective communication during change focused on student success reform.

A fifth recommendation for research, and one that would contribute to validating the findings of this study, is to conduct a comparative study of an Aspen-award-nominated college and a non-Aspen-nominated college. This study focused on colleges nominated as Aspen-award finalists and identified the communication practices of department chairs who engaged faculty in the change effort. Examining the communication practices of chairs in less successful institutions would further illuminate the strategies of successful department chairs.

Finally, as described in the recommendations for theory below, this study employed a stakeholder approach to studying change implementation communication. Further research using the model would yield additional insights into how community college stakeholders use and respond to communication strategies focused on information sharing, vision and motivation, and social support. While this study provided data on each of these communication strategies, it is by no means exhaustive. For example, participants in this study shared recollections of conversations they've had with faculty, but no written communications were provided for analysis. How do chairs use written communication to inform, motivate, and support faculty during change? Additional research could also explore how the specific change situation, including stakeholder perceptions of change and institutional factors or pressures affecting the change climate, impact stakeholders' communication during change in community colleges.

For Theory

I have two recommendations for theory related to the frameworks employed in this study. This study employed organizational communication theories to examine department chairs' communication with faculty, and it is recommended that further studies employ the same approach. These theories provided support for organizational change as a fundamentally communicative process and offered a framework through which to view the "observable system of change" (Lewis, 2007, p. 195) in order to attempt to identify factors that impact the success of change efforts. A stakeholder approach to change was therefore appropriate for this study: Stakeholder theory applies a communication-interaction stance to organizations. It provides a relational, interactive perspective, examining the ways that stakeholders with diverging points of view interact and negotiate within an organization (Lewis, 2007). This study adopted a theoretical model that combines stakeholder theory with change communication, the Stakeholder Model of Change Implementation Communication (Lewis, 2007, 2011). This theoretical approach provided a useful lens through which to examine and understand department chair communication with faculty, connecting chair and faculty perceptions of the change situation, communication strategies, chair and faculty interactions and their interpretations of those interactions, with change outcomes (Lewis, 2007). Further studies on change communication in community colleges would benefit from this theory, as described in the recommendations for research above.

Change process models provide another framework through which to understand change communication. This study assumed that anchoring recollections of change communication in a change process model would be helpful to participants and would provide additional data on how chairs communicate during change. However, the model used

in this study, Lewin's Three-Step Model, did not provide participants with the means to adequately remember or describe how they communicated in the beginning, middle, and end of the process. The model was selected in part because of its accessible terminology and more compact scope (for example, three phases instead of eight), but that accessibility may have translated to participants as being too vague. The unfreezing, moving, and freezing phases may have been too ambiguous for respondents to use as a handle for remembering and explaining their communication during change. Another explanation for the lack of data could be that Lewin's model was not presented in enough detail. I recommend using a change process framework that provides more practical explanation of phases or stages. One model commonly used in research on change leadership is Kotter's Eight-Step Process for Leading Change (2012), with precise steps described in layman's terms. Some or all of those steps might prove useful for isolating particular communication strategies tethered to stages of the change process.

Conclusion

This study began with the assertion that change is a reality for organizations, which must adapt to changing environments or risk becoming irrelevant—or extinct (Burke, 2018; Schein, 2017; Waddell & Pio, 2015). Research shows that change may be vitally important, but it is not easy to achieve (Bess & Dee, 2012; Kovach & Mairani, 2012). Both of these statements hold true for higher education, which must improve student outcomes but which struggles to change. As some have noted, "it is easier to move a cemetery than to change a university" (Lucas, 2000, p. 7). In the last decade, community colleges in America have been the focus of many change efforts (Community College Excellence, 2016) as scholars and practitioners alike recognize the need to improve student success outcomes such as learning,

retention, and completion (Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Lederman & Fain, 2017; Wyner, 2014). Community colleges serve many of the country's under-represented populations, many of whom would not otherwise have access to higher education (Malcom, 2013). Community colleges are more likely than four-year institutions to enroll low-income and first-generation college students (Ma & Baum, 2016). These students deserve an education that allows them to contribute to their communities and provide for their families.

With the goal of contributing to the success of student reforms, this study adds to the literature on change in community colleges. Taking a stakeholder approach, emphasizing the communicative nature of change and the stakes that midlevel leaders and faculty share in community colleges, this study explored the ways department chairs communicated with faculty during change in two colleges that have demonstrated successful outcomes as a result of that change. David Leslie (1996) has noted that "change in colleges and universities comes when it happens in the trenches; what faculty and students do is what the institution becomes. It does not happen because a committee or a president asserts a new idea" (as cited in Tierney & Minor, 2004, p. 91). Midlevel leaders are important, if not always acknowledged:

> Too few people outside of community college administrative circles adequately understand the enormous contributions outstanding midlevel administrators make to the successful operation of their colleges. While strong presidential leadership is a critical component to the long-term success of a college, the deans, vice-presidents, and other midlevel administrators are the ones who have the greatest impact on the actual operations, organizational priorities, and functioning of the college. (Riggs, 2009, pp. 30-31)

The study linked successful communication practices with faculty participation in change efforts. As they informed, motivated, and supported faculty, the chairs in this study gained and sustained faculty engagement in the change and in doing so impacted student success. The chairs prioritized inclusive, collaborative communication, framing change as a learning process driving continuous improvement focused on student success. It is my hope that by exploring department chair communication with faculty during comprehensive student success reforms in successful community colleges, I have increased awareness and understanding of midlevel leaders' communication practices during change and their impact on student success outcomes and contributed to the movement dedicated to improving outcomes for community college students, all of whom deserve the best education we can offer.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Initial Solicitation Email

I anticipate needing two days for interviewing 6-8 faculty and their department chairs. I would prefer for the pair to have each worked at the college for at least 2 years and the faculty member to have been significantly engaged in a student success initiative related to a comprehensive institutional reform effort. Also if possible, I would like representation across transfer and career technical programs. I anticipate the interviews will take around an hour with the possibility of some follow up by phone/email for clarifications. Please feel free to put me in touch with someone at your institution best positioned to help us with possible participants if you'd prefer I communicate through them from this point forward.

Please let me know if you need additional information or have any questions. Again thanks for your willingness to let us visit and talk to your faculty/staff.

Thanks again for your willingness to help me with my research interests and complete my doctoral work!

APPENDIX B

Email to Participants

Thank you so much for your willingness to assist in the data collection for my doctoral work at North Carolina State University. I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself.

I am a graduate student at NCSU and an administrator at a community college in NC. I've been a faculty member (English), department chair, and dean as well being involved in reform efforts at my college. I know in our work faculty engagement has been vital to the success of these efforts; however, little attention seems to have been focused on what factors motivate faculty engagement during significant change. I am examining the role that communication plays in faculty engagement in student success initiatives. I am interviewing department chairs and faculty who have been involved in such initiatives.

Typical interview time is around 45 minutes, and I will make an audio recording of our conversation. I will subsequently email a transcript of the conversation for you to check for accuracy.

I have received IRB approval from both NCSU and your college for this research. I've attached the consent form for the interview which you can sign and scan back to my email at your convenience. This form has more information about confidentiality and security of your data, risks and benefits, etc. I am also attaching another document that describes and defines some of the terms that I'll be asking about during the interview. I look forward to our conversation. Please feel free to email or call if you have any concerns or questions.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent for Research

North Carolina State University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Middle Leader Communication with Faculty during Student Success Reform Efforts in Two Community Colleges (#14324)

Principal Investigator: Connie Wolfe

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of how middle leaders communicate with faculty at institutions that have effectively and actively engaged faculty in improving student success.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office as noted below.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the study is to explore factors that promote faculty engagement in comprehensive student success reform efforts. In particular, this study will explore the role of communication with middle leaders and faculty in community colleges.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?

In order to be a participant in this study you must be a middle leader or faculty member who has participated in a student success reform effort at your college.

You cannot participate in this study if you have not participated in student success reform efforts at your college.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 45-60-minute interview on campus at a time and location of your choosing. You may be asked to participate in a follow-up phone or email conversation for clarifications.

Risks and Benefits

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. The indirect benefits are knowledge gained that can assist community colleges in improving faculty engagement in student success reform efforts, thereby improving student success in community colleges.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely on password-protected computers. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

Compensation

You will not receive anything for participating.

What if you are a college employee?

Participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at your institution, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at 1.919.515.4514. You can also find out more information about research, why you would or would not want to be in research, questions to ask as a research participant, and more information about your rights by going to this website: http://go.ncsu.edu/research-participant

Consent To Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled."

APPENDIX D

Faculty Interview Protocol

I have worked as a faculty member and department chair in community colleges and have since moved on to upper administrative roles. I have participated in student success reform efforts at community colleges as a faculty member and a chair and believe that faculty engagement is a crucial component of successful change efforts in community colleges. I believe that the interactions between faculty and chairs play an important role in achieving successful student outcomes. Despite this, not a lot of research has been done on the role of faculty and department chair communication during change efforts in community colleges.

Definitions

Communication - a process through which organizational members interact verbally, nonverbally, electronically, and in writing with individuals and groups in formal and informal settings.

Change process – while change can be unpredictable and nonlinear, the change process can be broadly defined in phases with a beginning, middle, and end. Kurt Lewin's Three-Step Model of change describes the process as unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. The system must first be thawed from its present way of doing things, then move toward the new way of doing things, and finally stabilize and "freeze" the new way of doing things so it becomes the new norm.

Social support – interaction that addresses the anxiety and fear that often surrounds change and focuses on change users' emotional needs.

Faculty Interview Questions

General

1. How long have you worked here?
2. What is your position at the college?
3. What other jobs have you held here or at other community colleges?

Engagement in Student Success Initiative

4. Can you provide an example of a student success initiative with which you are familiar?
5. Can you explain where the college is in the initiative?
6. Walk me through your experience of the initiative.

General Communication

7. How have you interacted with your department chair during this initiative?

Information Sharing

8. How was information about the change effort shared by your department chair throughout the change process:
    a. during the initial stages of moving away from the old way of doing things,
    b. during implementation, as you moved toward the new way of doing things, and
    c. during the final stages, as the new way of doing things became the new norm?

Vision and Motivation

9. How did your department chair communicate a vision for the change effort throughout the change process (unfreezing, changing, and refreezing)?
    a. Can you give me a specific example of what that looked like?
10. How did the chair motivate you throughout the process?
    a. Can you give me a specific example of what you mean by…?

Social Support

11. How did you receive social support from your department chair throughout the change effort (unfreezing, changing, and refreezing)?
    a. As a reminder, social support is interaction that addresses the anxiety and fear that often surrounds change and focuses on change users' emotional needs.

Conclusion

12. Is there any other information you'd like to share with me about your communication with your department chair during this initiative?

APPENDIX E

Department Chair Interview Protocol

I have worked as a faculty member and department chair in community colleges and have since moved on to upper administrative roles. I have participated in student success reform efforts at community colleges as a faculty member and a chair and believe that faculty engagement is a crucial component of successful change efforts in community colleges. I believe that the interactions between faculty and chairs play an important role in achieving successful student outcomes. Despite this, not a lot of research has been done on the role of faculty and department chair communication during change efforts in community colleges.

Definitions

Communication - a process through which organizational members interact verbally, nonverbally, electronically, and in writing with individuals and groups in formal and informal settings.

Change process – while change can be unpredictable and nonlinear, the change process can be broadly defined in phases with a beginning, middle, and end. Kurt Lewin's Three-Step Model of change describes the process as unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. The system must first be thawed from its present way of doing things, then move toward the new way of doing things, and finally stabilize and "freeze" the new way of doing things so it becomes the new norm.

Social support – interaction that addresses the anxiety and fear that often surrounds change and focuses on change users' emotional needs.

Department Chair Interview Questions

General

1. How long have you worked here?
2. What is your position at the college?
3. What other jobs have you held here or at other community colleges?

Engagement in Student Success Initiative

4. Can you provide an example of a student success initiative with which you are familiar?
5. Can you explain where the college is in this initiative?
6. Walk me through your experience of it.

General Communication

7. How have you interacted with faculty during this initiative?

Information Sharing

8. How did you share information with faculty throughout the change process:
    a. during the initial stages of moving away from the old way of doing things,
    b. during implementation, as you moved toward the new way of doing things, and
    c. during the final stages, as the new way of doing things became the new norm?

Vision and Motivation

9. How did you communicate a vision for the change throughout the change process (unfreezing, changing, and refreezing)?
    a. Can you give me an example of what that looked like?
10. How did you motivate faculty throughout the process?
    a. Can you give me a specific example of what you mean by…?

Social Support

11. How did you give social support to faculty throughout the change process (unfreezing, changing, and refreezing)?
    a. As a reminder, social support is interaction that addresses the anxiety and fear that often surrounds change and focuses on change users' emotional needs.

Conclusion

12. Is there any other information you'd like to share with me about your communication with faculty during this initiative?