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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

MANAGING THE AFFECTIVE RESPONSES OF EMPLOYEES DURING  
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Brad Kennington

June, 2020

Barbara Mather, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by:

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

Higher education is facing a period of continual change driven by numerous external and internal forces. Consequently, higher education leaders are faced with the frequent and daunting task of planning and managing organizational change in higher education institutions, which are both complex and dynamic in nature. Adding difficulty to this task is the fact that employees often react to change with emotional responses that are both challenging to understand and complicated and to manage. Managing affective dimensions of change can be overwhelming to leaders, which can lead to failed organizational change efforts. This study explored and answered (a) how a group of leaders conceptualized and experienced the affective dimensions of change; in addition to (b) if and how, those leaders planned to manage employee affective responses during a change process? This study used a phenomenography methodology and included a sample of eight participants who had experience managing organizational change at a U.S. institution of higher education. Data were gathered through semi-structured interview protocol utilizing a set of 10 standard questions. Each interview was recorded and transcribed, at which point data was analyzed through a thematic coding process. Analysis of the participant responses returned findings aligned to eight themes, all of which associated with one of the study's two research questions. Themes and associated findings relating to the first research question were: (a) situational variables; (b) leader readiness; (c) leader beliefs (constructs); and (d) unexpected affective responses. Themes and associated findings relating to the second research question were: (a) communication strategies; (b) leader competencies; (c) leader behaviors and attitudes; and (d) culture. From these findings, the research and analysis yielded three conclusions. First, before leaders can effectively manage and help employees cope with affective factors, they must first focus on becoming emotionally centered. Second, leaders in higher education face unique

factors that add to the difficulty of managing affective responses during organizational change. Lastly, higher education leaders are not sufficiently prepared to manage affective dimensions of change; leaders need additional training and development in order to effectively help their employees cope with affective factors throughout the change process.

*Keywords: organizational change, higher education, leadership, affective responses, emotions, management*

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Organizational change has become routine throughout all industries. Where once executed on special or unique occasions, research dating back more than twenty years highlighted that organizational change has become a fundamental facet in business (Mack, Nelson, & Quick, 1998). This sentiment rings true of the higher education industry, which has been experiencing a rapid and constant rate of change over the last century (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). Kezar and Eckel (2002) argued that the pace of change in higher education has accelerated beyond the point where casual shifts in strategy are impactful or useful, yet most generalized change strategies fail, and relatively little has been published about executing successful change at universities.

Organizational change is dynamic in nature and comes with many complexities that can derail its success. One such complexity is how well leaders manage the affective responses of their employees throughout a change process, such as their feelings, moods, and attitudes (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Change has the power to incite intense positive or negative emotions in employees—most often however, change incites negative affective responses (Gelaidan, Al-Swidi, & Mabkhot, 2018). The employees' experience, if negative in nature, can have disastrous effects on change outcomes, which subsequently influences the leader's experience, creating an interconnected web of employee and leader affective responses that dictate change outcomes.

Friedrich and Wüstenhagen (2017) argued that whether employees embrace or reject change greatly depends on how they interpret the situation, which is often a direct reflection of how well the leader creates an environment that supports employee acceptance of change.

Employees tend to react more positively when the change presents an opportunity or is aligned to

their beliefs or norms. In contrast, employees react more negatively toward change believed to be a threat or when it conflicts with their established values. Further, emotional responses to change are not static; these responses shift over time, going through multiple stages such as denial, anger, or depression, until general acceptance of the change is accepted (Dasborough, Lamb, & Suseno, 2015). These emotional shifts, or affective factors, are difficult to manage, often resulting in a less-than-effective change management strategy that fails to meet the needs of the employees (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017).

Failed organizational change typically results from an imbalanced focus on both, human (or affective) factors and business (change process) factors (Iacovini, 1993). Research shows that successful organizational change has a reciprocal relationship between the employee and the change itself (Mack et al., 1998). Change can affect how an employee functions, but the employee can also affect whether or not a change is effective—the success of one depends on the other. Vakola and Nikolau (2005) found that the majority of all change initiatives fail in part due to employee attitudes and resistance to the change itself.

A challenge that has long complicated organizational change, as highlighted by Strebler (1996) more than 20 years ago, yet remains relevant today, is the fact that leaders and employees do not share the same sentiments about organizational change. Leaders tend to embrace change, believing it will better position their organizations for future success, while employees often resist change, believing it is disruptive and intrusive. Thus, an employee's predisposition or attitude toward change, even before the change is announced, is an important factor that leaders need to take into consideration when planning and executing change.

Organizational change often leads to a significant emotional void between those in leadership and the affected employees. Kotter (1995) first argued that the aforementioned void is



created due to employee perceptions that leaders do not understand the burden that organizational change places on the employee. During organizational change initiatives employees are often left to make sense of the changes on their own, but rarely have the information needed to come to the correct conclusion about why the change is being implemented, or how it will affect them (Kotter, 1995). This leads many employees to struggle with feelings of stress and confusion (Iacovini, 1993).

Kofman (2006) uses a simple analogy to illustrate the consequences associated with overlooking the emotional impact change has on employees. Just as a car requires to have its wheels balanced in order to move quickly and smoothly, employees also require that their emotions are in balance in order to function competently. Kofman (2006) explains, “whether a car or a person, the faster the periphery rotates, the more still the center must be; otherwise the vibration will destroy the structure” (p. 240). A leader who fails to acknowledge and correct unbalanced employee emotions throughout the change process increases the risk of those “vibrations” having a disastrous effect on the intended results.

As this analogy illustrates, overlooking or simply disregarding the affective dimensions of organizational change can disrupt the process, or even completely thwart a leader’s efforts to successfully implement the planned change (Strebel, 1996). However, employee emotions are difficult to understand and are influenced by countless intrinsic and extrinsic factors, which Iacovini (1993) argues are not always logical, rational, or reasonable. Consequently, leaders need to be prepared to encounter various affective factors throughout the change process, whether positive, neutral, or negative in nature. This research study aimed to provide a better understanding of the lived experiences of leaders within higher education who are tasked with executing change and managing employees’ emotional reactions, which are difficult to predict

and understand.

### **Statement of the General Problem**

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, much has been documented regarding the significant changes seen in higher education which have represented constant change driven by a number of disruptive forces, such as technology advancements, increasing competition, government and public scrutiny, globalization, and many more (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Staley & Trinkle, 2011; Straatmann, Kohnke, Hatrup, & Mueller, 2016). Staley and Trinkle (2011) compare these forces to fault lines in the educational landscape which have been active and need close monitoring in order to prepare for ongoing change in the future. To maintain a competitive edge on both an academic and business level, universities are forced to continually change. At times, these organizations must take drastic measures such as uprooting old systems, procedures, and policies, in addition to reconsidering their values frameworks in order to remain viable (Vaira, 2004).

The research of Milian, Davies, and Zarifa (2016) found educational leaders often lack the information or knowledge needed to make rational decisions and manage the change effectively, including having the skillsets needed to mitigate emotional fallout. Universities are extremely complex and multifaceted entities that often operate in a state of ambiguity. Milian et al. (2016) argue that most organizations outside of higher education have a simple and streamlined vision, such as increasing sales of a leading product, but universities have multipronged and interwoven goals that tie to various initiatives, such as academics, funding, enrollment, research, or community partnering. Consequently, universities tend to function with a high level of internal discontent stemming from the competing agendas between the academic and business sides of the institution (Spendlove, 2007). These internal dynamics lead many to

describe universities as “organized anarchies with high inertia, unclear technologies and problematic goals,” (Spendlove, 2007, p. 407).

Compounding the problem further is the fact there is no standard career path within higher education that effectively prepares its leaders for the myriad of internal and external pressures faced while leading their organizations through constant change (Whitchurch, 2006). Some leaders have backgrounds in business, others have experience in academia, but rarely does a leader have a combination of the two. This scenario makes it difficult for leaders within higher education to develop the unique skill sets and competencies needed to lead these dynamic organizations through change. Consequently, whether university leaders embrace organizational change willingly, or are forced to by internal or external pressures, most fail to execute the change process as well as they would like (Blanchard, 2010). Leaders tend to rush into a period of change too quickly, often with an insufficient base of understanding gained exclusively through readily available change literature (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Consequently, Blanchard (2010) identified that one third of all change initiatives are implemented without an appropriate framework or structure. He warns that leaping into change with a blind confidence that the change will miraculously be successful only works to compound the chance of short and long-term consequences.

### **Statement of the Specific Problem**

The multidimensional nature of change often overwhelms leaders, and projects fail because leaders place too much emphasis on rational factors, rather than the affective factors that lead to high employee engagement during a change initiative (Hardy-Vallee, 2012). Shedding light on this phenomenon, Kotter and Cohen (2002) explain that leaders often make the mistake of trying to appeal to reason with reports, plans, or mission statements. This approach is often

ineffective because the only thing that can motivate an employee to adjust deep-rooted and familiar behaviors is an emotional belief that change is needed (Kotter and Cohen, 2002).

Two seminal works and widely accepted change models, Kurt Lewin's (1947) three-step model and John Kotter's (1995) eight-step model, emphasize the importance of psychologically preparing employees for a transition as the initial step in an organizational change process. This is a crucial step because employees have a natural tendency to resist change; research suggests that employee attitudes toward impending change creates high levels of stress, absenteeism, and turnover amongst employees (Martin, Jones, & Callan, 2007). Gelaidan et al. (2018) studied employee readiness for change and found that a key influencer of employee attitude or subjective feelings toward change is directly influenced by the leader's behavior and emotional intelligence, in addition to their leadership skills and abilities.

Further, the research of Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) specifically focused on leaders within higher education and found that leaders at universities fail to connect theory to practice, which may in turn hinder the leader's ability to execute change and usher employees through affective dimensions of a transition. One reason for this is many leaders at universities are "puppet administrators" who are promoted based on factors, such as teaching discipline expertise, tenure at the institution, or relationships with administrators, rather than displaying the strong leadership characteristics outlined in leadership theories (Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016). The dynamic nature of higher education demands leaders be forward thinking and able to adjust behaviors, but according to Wang and Sedivy (2016), these puppet leaders are ill-equipped and do not know how to implement the best practices outlined in leadership and change theories.

The multifaceted nature of change, combined with the complexity of higher education, requires that leaders not only have a keen understanding of leadership and change theories, but

also have the unique skillsets needed to execute those theories while simultaneously taking cues from employee affective responses and adjusting their own management behaviors.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore how affective factors during organizational transitions affect a leader's ability to effectively implement change at higher education institutions.

### **Significance of the Study**

Today's leaders in higher education have access to a seemingly endless supply of tips and best practices on how to plan and implement change. However, a simple internet search provides an equal amount of literature that claims most change efforts fail. Thus, a gap exists between successfully researching and planning change, and then successfully executing change.

Kotter and Cohen (2002) found that leaders who put too much focus on business aspects, such as gathering data, analyzing reports, and formulating presentations, most often experience a high rate of failed change. Instead of placing the emphasis on convincing people that change is needed, leaders should focus on how that change affects people emotionally. Leaving employees to sort through their emotions on their own is a costly mistake that can lead to a failed change initiative. In order to shift the odds of executing successful change into their favor, Kotter and Cohen (2002) argue that leaders need to encourage positive feelings while limiting negative feelings toward the change effort. However, leaders are often left to sort through affective dimensions of change without proper tools and know-how, resulting in a negative experience for the manager and poor change outcomes.

According to Kezar & Eckel (2002), while most leaders turn to current literature and traditional organizational change models to plan for an organizational transition, those tools are

often too broad to be useful to leaders who seek to make transformational change at universities. Widely applied change strategies are presented as universal and applicable to all institutions, but the traditional tactics suggested in these models, such as “creating buy in” and “communicating often,” typically fail to help leaders fully address the nuance and complexity in higher education systems, such as culture or affective factors.

Gelaidan et al. (2018) examined the effect of leadership behavior and emotional intelligence on employee readiness for change. Employee readiness is a leading indicator of whether or not employees experience positive or negative affect during a change initiative. This is important because the employee experience is interconnected with the leader’s experience. The results showed, when combined with organizational commitment, a leader’s behavior and emotional intelligence explained approximately 51% of the variance in employee acceptance, or readiness for a change initiative. Even so, Gelaidan et al. (2018) argue that emotional responses to change are still widely ignored in modern change literature. Ignoring employee reactions to change greatly impact a leader’s ability to plan and then manage employee affective responses to organizational change, which subsequently impact the leader’s experiences during change and consequently impede the leader’s ability to execute successful change.

As such, Dasborough, Lamb, & Suseno (2015) sought to close the gap by examining employees within a higher education institution as they progressed through a change initiative. The study employed a phenomenographic research design in order capture nuance and variance between participant experiences. The results identified that reactions to change, before, during, and after the transition, greatly depend on an employee’s individual perspectives and the emotions associated with those perspectives. Further, employee emotional responses were not static, but changed over time, moving from “anticipatory” emotions (hope and fear) to “realized”

emotions (happiness and sorrow).

Dasborough et al. (2015) also found that current change literature mistakenly lumps employees into one homogenous group, when in reality different subgroups exist, each with varying levels of emotional responses. Leaders overseeing a change initiative need to approach and address these subgroups differently—providing guiding support to an angry employee calls for different actions than assisting a fearful employee. This study aims to address this specific area of change management by analyzing the lived experiences of leaders within higher education who are responsible for managing employee emotional responses to change. The leader’s lived experiences and the employees’ lived experiences are interconnected, and by focusing on the manager’s experiences with managing employee affective responses, this research can offer new understanding of leader experience and how their experiences aid or hinder positive change outcomes.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Personal construct theory.** In 1955, American psychologist George Kelly authored *A Theory of Personality: The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. Kelly’s book, which continues to shape modern understanding, unveils the personal construct theory (PCT). PCT argues that the way a person makes sense of their world is grounded by a system of personal constructs. These constructs are developed through individual experiences and unique to each person (Fransella, 2015; Karnaze, 2013; Kelly, 1955). PCT is based on the philosophical assumption that “whatever nature may be, or howsoever the quest for truth will turn out in the end, the events we face today are subject to as great a variety of constructs as our wits will enable us to contrive” (Kelly, 1955, p. 3). Personal constructs shape individual reality and are integral in the beliefs and behaviors that are foundational to a person’s personality (Fransella, 2015).

To understand PCT, Butt (2008) argues the importance of distinguishing between events and constructs in order to draw conclusions about individual experience. A central tenet in PCT is that people tend to construe the same event differently based on their idiosyncratic set of personal constructs. For example, three employees experiencing the same organizational transition may have dissimilar, possibly contradictory, reactions, such as anger, happiness, or not caring at all. These reactions are based on the employees' previous experiences with similar events. Emotional reactions associated with these events also vary; some people may express discontent verbally, while others sit quietly and stew over the inconvenience. People can only make sense of the world as it appears to them, so understanding how people interpret an event, based on their personal constructs is just as critical as understanding the event itself (Butt, 2008). This notion is important in change management as many leaders focus on the event, or steps associated with a change process, but may ignore individual constructs.

One aspect that sets PCT apart from other prominent personality theories, such as behaviorism and psychoanalysis, is its philosophy that a person is an active and responsible agent who has the ability to control their emotional response to external forces (Butt, 2008; Holland, Neimeyer, Currier, & Berman, 2007). Kelly (1955) argued that while each person has to contend with external forces, it is the way people construe the event or the constructions people place on the event that govern their reactions. Thus, individuals have the ability to reconstruct their reality, shifting the outcome entirely based on an innumerable set of alternatives (Holland et al., 2007).

**Personal transition curve.** Using PCT as a theoretical foundation, British psychologist John Fisher (2019) developed the *personal transition curve* (see Figure 1 in Chapter 2). Fisher's *personal transition curve* is based on the five stages of grief modeled in *the loss transition*



*curve*—which has been adapted and widely referenced in organizational change management literature as the *change curve*—attributed to Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’s (1969) foundational and widely embraced research on the emotional transitions of those coping with personal change (Scheer, 2000). The five-stage change curve outlines the phases a person will progress through when responding to a transition. Fisher’s (2019) Personal Transition Curve expands upon Kübler-Ross’s (1969) model by detailing thirteen emotional phases an individual encounters throughout each stage of change: (a) anxiety; (b) happiness; (c) fear; (d) threat; (e) guilt; (f) depression; (g) gradual acceptance; (h) moving forward; (i) disillusionment; (j) hostility; (k) denial; (l) anger; and (m) complacency.

Fisher (2019) developed the Personal Transition Curve in response to concerns that traditional organizational change models focus too heavily at the organizational level and ignore the affective factors at the individual level. Fisher (2019) argued that managers overseeing an organizational change initiative need to understand the impact said change will have their employees’ constructs. In any change, large or small, success depends on the manager’s ability to help employees alter their constructs to align to the new world. If employees persist to operate with a previous set of practices, emotional rifts appear, and the change initiative is compromised.

**Emotional intelligence and mindfulness.** Fisher (2019) argues that leaders must adopt an employee-centric approach to executing change. When leaders fail to pick up on employees’ social and affective cues, which may indicate how well an employee is coping with the change, successful implementation of that change is threatened. Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) explain that within higher education, which is an industry that changes often to meet market demands, leaders must remain flexible and people-centered in order to offer support that meets the needs of the employees who are dealing with shifting constructs. Responding appropriately to employee

needs calls for heightened skillsets in the areas of emotional intelligence and mindfulness, such as self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating oneself, empathy, and handling relationships (Goleman, 1998). Hede (2010) explains that developing skillsets in these areas helps leaders recognize and deal with their own emotions, in addition to the emotions of others.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study.

1. How do leaders in higher education conceptualize and experience affective dimensions of organizational change?
2. What do leaders in higher education do, if anything, to manage the affective responses of their employees during an organizational transition?

### **Brief Description of Research Design and Methodology**

This study used a qualitative phenomenography methodology with in-depth interviews to explore how affective responses of employees impact a leader's ability to implement an organizational transition. This qualitative research design and methodology lend well to this type of study for two reasons. First, according to Maxwell (2005), qualitative research methods should be used to explore lived experiences and investigate how research participants understand and make sense of a given event. As Kelly (1955) explained, events can be construed differently based on an individual's set of personal constructs; thus, whatever the world may be, personal reality can only be understood by individual interpretations. A qualitative research design provides the flexibility needed to fully explore all variables, past and present, that influence and mold individual experience and interpretations.

Second, according to Akerlind (2005), phenomenography aims to make connections between individual experiences with a common phenomenon in order to draw conclusions about

the range of meanings within a common base of people. Phenomenography has a non-dualist approach in which meaning is constituted in the relationship between the individual and phenomenon (Trigwell, 2006). When executing a transition, leaders are not only expected to manage affective factors, but they are themselves immersed in the human emotion that accompanies any change process. For this reason, phenomenography is best suited to help the researcher gain first-hand knowledge of how affective responses of employees during impact the ability to implement an organizational transition across organizational leaders.

In-depth interviews are a common data-gathering method within phenomenography (Akerlind, 2005) and were employed in this research study. In addition, all interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to extract common themes and draw conclusions. Additional information about this study's research design and methodology are discussed in Chapter 3.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

1. This study assumes that each participant, or change leader, has experience planning, implementing, and managing affective factors during a change process.
2. This study assumes that change leaders experience varying levels of emotions during a change process, both positive and negative in nature.
3. This study assumes that all participants could accurately recall detailed responses to each survey question, and those responses were truthful.
4. It is assumed that during an organizational change initiative, the leader's experiences and employees' experiences are interconnected; subsequently the leader may experience negative affect when their employees have negative experiences.
5. It is assumed that leaders within higher education may lack the training, experience, and overall knowledge to effectively deal with the complexity associated with managing

employee affective responses to change.

6. It is assumed that leaders overseeing a change initiative within higher education are underprepared to manage affective factors during a transition, which directly impacts their ability to successfully implement the desired change.
7. It is assumed that most change leaders do not fully comprehend the emotional fallout that can occur during a change initiative.

### **Definition of Terms**

In order to maintain consistency and integrity of language throughout this research it is important to define key terms. The following list contains substantiated definitions for terms within this research:

- Change management: A set of instruments, including an outlined framework, which enables a manager or leader to implement and execute change (Kotter, 2011).
- Change process: A system of steps, or procedures, that leaders follow during a business transition in order to drive successful outcomes.
- Construct: developmental experiences that are individual by nature and shape a person's worldview and unique interpretations of reality (Fransella, 2015; Karnaze, 2013; Kelly, 1955).
- Emotion: An individual's positive or negative response to internal or external stimuli that elicits a psychological change (Fugate, Kinicki, & Prussia, 2008).
- Higher education [institution]: For purposes of this research, higher education refers to: (a) any level of education beyond high school that leads to a degree, or (b) any degree-granting institution, such as a college or university.
- Manager and Leader: Kotter (1995) explains that management and leadership are

separate functions, but are complementary in nature—a manager controls a process while a leader provides direction and motivation. For purposes of this study, manager and leader are used interchangeably to define an individual who has legitimate power over one or more employees and is responsible for planning and implementing change, in addition to problem solving and providing direction.

- Participant: A person who was interviewed for the purposes of data gathering during a study. The participant is an informant or an individual who experienced the studied phenomena first hand (Boeije, 2010). In this study, all participants were change leaders who were responsible for planning, implementing, and managing change processes.
- Affective responses (or factors): Manager or employee moods, feelings, or attitudes in response to external stimuli, such as a change initiative.
- Affective dimensions: broad environment and situational elements created by changes in affective responses.

## **Chapter Summary**

In summary, given today's increasingly changing landscape, institutions of higher education are continually forced to adapt in order to weather a constant barrage of internal and external driven threats. While organizational change is common, successful organizational change is not. Research shows that close to three fourths of all change initiatives fail (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). One well-documented reason that change fails is tied to the affective dimensions of change management. Leaders often expect employees to cope with change efficiently and effectively, but can fall short at providing adequate resources and support to ensure that change is implemented smoothly (Thundiyl, Chiaburu, Oh, Banks, & Peng, 2015). The consequence is a failed change effort, lack of employee engagement, and floundering results due to psychological

barriers (Straatmann et al., 2016).

Chapter 1 established a foundational understanding of the core problem that will be examined through this qualitative research study. Chapter 1 outlined the study's purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, and provided brief discussion of the methodology, all of which are addressed in the following chapters. Lastly, Chapter 1 provided a brief background on the recent literature and positioned the significance of this study, in addition to how the study fills a gap in the existing body of work related to higher education in the area of organizational behavior and change management.

Chapter 2 presents an extensive review of current and relevant literature on the topic of organizational change and the importance of affective factors.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In an effort to explore how leaders within higher education prepare for and manage affective elements during a process of organizational change, it is important to provide a review of associated research and published literature. To that end, the following chapter aims to establish a foundation of research in three main areas. First, this chapter highlights the current environment in higher education and the factors that are forcing current and future organizational change, from both internal and external institutional perspectives. Second, this chapter provides an overview of relevant organizational change research as it pertains to (a) employee affective responses to change initiatives; (b) effect of emotions on change outcomes; and (c) management's role in managing employee affective responses during change. Lastly, this review of literature provides information relevant to the theoretical framework for this study.

### **Background and Environment in Higher Education**

According to Craig (2004), throughout U.S. history, higher education has characteristically served as a vehicle to inspire and bring about societal change. In doing so, institutions of higher learning have largely been invulnerable to external forces, functioning in an autonomous fashion while holding onto strong traditions (Craig, 2004). However, as early as the beginning of the 1960s, the future of higher education and the forces affecting how it is governed began to be called into question (Jarvis, 2000).

In their formative work dating back more than 60 years, Kerr, Harbison, Dunlop, and Myers (1960) argued that society was in a period of transition, moving toward a unified world without national boundaries, spurred by the pace of societal innovation and the rapid advancement of technology. Kerr et al. (1960) envisioned an interconnected world-wide society by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a move toward industrialism that would challenge the

traditional approach to education. This shift would force higher education to not only extend its reach beyond national borders, but also increase its ability to meet the robust expansion of workforce demands. Kerr et al. (1960) wrote:

The [future] industrial system demands in its labour force a wide range of professions and skills. Indeed, the creation of high-level manpower is one of the major problems encountered in the transition to industrialism. And, since science and technology generate continuous change, new skills and occupations are constantly replacing the old. Thus, industrialism requires an educational system functionally related to the skills and professions imperative to its technology. The variety of skills, responsibilities and employment conditions at the work place creates a new ordering or structuring of society. (p. 239)

Jarvis (2000) and Craig (2004) affirmed the prediction of Kerr et al. (1960), explaining that higher education indeed experienced a role-reversal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and is continuing to change. As discussed, higher education was once fundamentally self-governed, acting as a disruptive factor within society, but as Kerr et al. (1960) predicted, it is now largely controlled by external societal forces, which influence how a higher education institution positions itself to be successful (Craig, 2004). Staley and Trinkle (2011) compare these forces to fault lines in the educational landscape, which have been very active in the recent past and need to be closely monitored by institution leadership in order to prepare for change in the future. The changes to higher education have been so invasive that the system is now highly diversified; what was once a simple and semi-structured educational system has now been replaced by a number of systems that are continually adapting to the shifting educational landscape (Staley & Trinkle, 2011).

While it was predicted that the 21<sup>st</sup> century would usher in a period of rapid societal change, which would ultimately influence shifts in higher education, Jarvis (2000) wrote that the actual changes experienced were much more aggressive than what could have been imagined. Furthermore, Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) contend that external pressures continue to drive frequent and ongoing change in higher education, which will be fundamentally stimulated by



society's educational needs.

The following section highlights a number of external societal factors driving change within the higher education industry.

### **Higher Education: External Challenges and Forces Driving Organizational Change**

According to Clark (1998), higher education is in the midst of challenging time in which there is asymmetry between institutional efficiency and environmental demand. For example, since the late 1990s colleges and universities have experienced increased levels of scrutiny from students, parents, legislators, and other community leaders in such areas as curriculum, business practices, and educational outcomes (Craig, 2004). The attention and constant analysis from external activists indicate that stakeholders are poised and ready for higher education to be forward thinking and adopt strategic change (Craig, 2004). External activists, however, are only part of the challenges facing higher education. Staley and Trinkle (2011) compare the vast pressures facing higher education to countless fissures in a landscape that are more "seismic" now than at any other time in history. Beardsley (2018) listed (afore mentioned) activist stakeholders, rising costs, increasing rate of technology developments, new educational models (and entrants), and fierce competition as some of these "fissures" that higher education is facing. Some of these external forces, in addition to others, are addressed in the following section.

**Globalization.** According to Marginson and Rhoades (2002), advancements in technology, strengthening international government relationships, positive developments in world business markets, in addition to many other factors, are all contributing forces to higher education's expansion into every corner of the globe. This process of integrating systems and relationships on an international scale, defined as globalization, is not new, but its impact on higher education has become increasingly apparent (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). Due to

globalization, higher education is experiencing a shift from traditional policies, procedures, and systems to new globally-focused imperatives and demands (Vaira, 2004).

Marginson and Rhoades (2002) explain that higher education is a force that influences economies and cultures throughout the world, in addition to economies and cultures being a force that influences higher education. Higher education has become *glonacal* in nature, a blend-word stemming from the terms global, national, and local (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). For example, Marginson and Rhoades (2002) explain that the flow of students from international origins into the U.S. higher education system is greater than the flow of U.S. students into international higher education systems. As such, U.S. universities are indirectly participating in global markets and foreign economies by educating and shaping international students' thoughts and ideas. Conversely, the steady increase of international student enrollment into U.S. institutions is affecting the traditional American system. Clark (1998) explains that universities are now having to compete on an international scale, in addition to local and national scales, in order to win students and government funding.

Furthermore, De Langen and Van den Bosch (2013) describe a scenario in which the demand for higher education is growing faster than emerging countries are able to meet, especially if a country's solution to its education needs is to build more brick and mortar universities. In the short term, the realistic solution for these remote and emerging countries are to rely on distance education, or online education, but many universities are not positioned to expand into the online space, especially internationally, as quickly as demand and competition requires (De Langen & Van den Bosch, 2013).

Online learning. De Freitas and Oliver (2005) explained that the pressure to increase online learning and deliver e-content is significantly impacting higher education policy and

operations. Their research identified a direct connection between e-learning and organizational change, explaining that e-learning policy impacts the university's structure as well as its pedagogical practices. Further, Mitchell (2009) argues that in order to institutionalize online learning at a university, the school experiences a ripple effect across an interconnected organizational web of departments, including all functional academic and business areas.

According to Armstrong (2016), globalization and online learning converged, aided by advancements in technology, to change the competitive landscape of higher education.

Traditional higher education institutions and their students have grown accustomed to the status quo, leaving the door open for new competition to move in and disrupt the higher education market (Armstrong, 2016). These new entrants, such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), are quickly gaining ground by offering unique education models and new value propositions that appeal to a global education market and evolving student population (Clarke, 2013).

**Massive open online courses (MOOCs).** Clarke (2013) explained that MOOCs are online courses in which anyone can enroll, providing access to rich educational resources from some of the most prestigious universities in the world—free of charge. McClure (2014) further clarified that *massive* refers to the size of the course's enrollment, reaching into the tens of thousands of students. *Open* can be interpreted as free, or without cost, and most often refers to the price of the course, or the unrestricted access to the course's educational resources. *Online* speaks to the modality in which the course is offered, utilizing the internet, making the course accessible anywhere in the world with access to computers. And *course* refers to the length and type of the learning experience, ranging from a couple weeks to a longer, more traditional semester length, at fifteen weeks.

Burd, Smith and Reisman (2015) explain that MOOCs do not typically offer support structures for students, which would be customary to traditional ground, or online learning. Rather, students support each other and rely on videos, voice clips, and written materials, including word problems, in order to learn. Four years after their introduction, 2012 was labeled “the year of the MOOC” by the New York Times (Atiaja & Proenza, 2016, p. 68). At that time some believed MOOCs would not only make elite education available to the masses at no, or a minimal cost, but also expected the trend to majorly disrupt traditional higher education policy and organizational structures, impacting areas of enrollment, finance, pedagogical design, and more (Macleod, Sinclair, Haywood, & Woodgate, 2015).

While MOOCs have not fully measured up to hype of 2012, they have in fact acted as an external force to disrupt traditional higher education (Atiaja & Proenza, 2016). According to Armstrong (2016) universities today are increasingly relying on MOOCs to supplement traditional classroom instruction, in addition to relieving pressures from a number of other complex academic and business challenges, such as increasing costs.

**Cost of higher education.** According to Guskin and Marcy (2003), the cost of higher education has continually increased for more than three decades, significantly outpacing the rate of inflation during that time. Most institutions are no longer able to keep up with escalating costs with normal enrollment and fundraising growth (Guskin & Marcy, 2003). This reality has fueled a substantial surge in student tuition since the 1960s, leading to growing student dissatisfaction, in addition to heightened public and government scrutiny (McClure, 2014).

Subsequently, McClure (2014) explains that the increasing costs have left institutions scrambling to find innovative ways to reduce the financial burden passed onto students.

Unfortunately, many innovative approaches to reducing negative financial impacts to students—

often in the form of scholarships or financial aid—have led to decreased revenues and insufficient funds to cover school operating expenses, forcing cuts in other areas (McClure, 2014). Subsequently, the student may benefit from an immediate cost reduction, but is then met with insufficient educational support and decreased quality of education (McClure, 2014).

In an attempt to lower cost of tuition, while maintaining quality of education, Arizona State University, for example, recently partnered with the third party education provider, EdX, and launched an innovative program designed to afford incoming freshman the opportunity to complete their first year of university coursework completely via online courses, offered via MOOCs (Arizona State University, 2016). The students can enroll and participate in the courses free of charge upfront, but would ultimately pay for credit once they successfully passed the course (Arizona State University, 2016). According to De Langen and Van den Bosch (2013), MOOCs not only raise education quality and expand certifications, they do so faster than traditional universities can address other looming issues, such as price and declining enrollment.

**Higher education as a business.** Beardsley (2018) explains that dealing with increasing costs, shifting educational models (fueled by technology advancements), and fierce competition are only part of the complexity that higher education leaders must navigate. He also highlights that leaders must acknowledge and reassess the changing demographics and needs of their students. A first step in that process is shifting traditional thinking away from the idea that students are passive participants, and embracing the idea that students are interactive “customers” who help shape the product.

According to Coaldrake (2001), the idea that students are customers highlights yet another challenge in higher education and call for a serious paradigm shift for many academics. Coaldrake (2001) contends that that academics dislike the idea of considering students as

customers, providing two perspectives for this sentiment. First, many academics have little to no business experience and may take the old adage, *the customer is always right*, too literally (Coaldrake, 2001). Coaldrake (2001) argues that from an academic standpoint, if students were customers, they would be able to dictate changes to curriculum, or further, influence how grades should be assigned. Second, Coaldrake (2001) explains that academics believe labeling students as customers challenges the fundamental nature of higher education, in which the academic relationship between teacher and student is most appropriately compared to an apprentice and master, rather than a business relationship between provider and client.

Beardsley (2018) offers another perspective and asserts that the constant market disruption in higher education is forcing universities to reconsider traditional, longstanding, academic-focused archetypes, including the relationship between institution and student. Due to the fact that many academics are rooted in tradition and have proven resolute in their belief system, many universities are now turning to non-academic leaders with business backgrounds and corporate-honed skillsets (Beardsley, 2018). According to Coaldrake (2001), student expectations are shifting and arguments are being raised regarding quality, service and the overall return on the students' financial investment. Accordingly, higher education is relying on this new wave of leadership from the business sector to usher in an era of new ideas and decision-making (Beardsley, 2018).

Changing demographics. According to Staley and Trinkle (2011), the shift in student expectations toward quality, service, and value may not only indicate a change in student attitude, but also a change in consumer demographic. The majority of higher education students were once between the ages of 18 and 24, a group labeled as full-time "traditional" students (Staley & Trinkle, 2011). The minority, or "non-traditional" student, were those over 25-years-

old who typically had full-time jobs (Staley & Trinkle, 2011). However, that trend has shifted drastically over the past decade, and the majority of higher education students are now older than 25-years and attend school while maintaining full-time employment status. Subsequently, Staley and Trinkle (2011) assert that institutions can no longer afford to generalize the needs of their student according to an outdated understanding of traditional and non-traditional students, and must acknowledge the demands of a new majority consumer base.

**Higher education as an investment: Cost/benefit considerations.** According to Abel, Deitz and Su (2014) those who are 25 and older, the new traditional student, are returning to college education as an investment to gain the knowledge and skillsets needed to find a high-paying job. Much of the time, these students are making that investment on borrowed money in the form of federal student aid with the hopes of quickly repaying that debt upon graduation (Lederman, 2010; Staley & Trinkle, 2011). In reality, however, the unemployment rate for recent graduates has been increasing in recent years, forcing many young adults into part-time or low-wage jobs (Abel et al., 2014). Furthermore, college graduates now outnumber available jobs in the fields they studied, and the mismatch between supply and demand is leaving almost half of recent college graduates working in jobs that do not even require a bachelor's degree (Weiner, 2014).

Lederman (2010) explains that unemployment in certain graduate sectors continues to increase driving many people consider returning to school for additional degrees. Enrollment across the industry continues to rise year after year and the fact that it is funded in large part with government financial aid, such as Pell Grants and federal student loans, has led to staunch consumer and government scrutiny (Lederman, 2010). Lederman (2010) argues that many federal and state policy makers believe higher education, across all sectors (for-profit, non-profit,

private, state, etc.) are underperforming at the expense of the consumer and taxpayers (government) alike. Lederman (2010) asserts that too many students are graduating with high debt and a poor outlook for employment. With rising tuition costs, the public is holding the institution responsible now more than ever for providing an educational product that delivers on employment expectations (Lederman, 2010).

Cappelli (2014) offers a different viewpoint on the root cause of increasing unemployment amongst recent graduates, but still places a majority of the responsibility on higher education institutions, arguing that unemployment and underemployment amongst recent graduates can be attributed to over-education and a mismatched supply and demand. Cappelli (2014) believes there are simply not enough jobs in the fields that large populations of students are choosing to study. This leads to a scenario in which students graduate with high hopes for finding employment, but are met with the reality of a highly competitive job market (Capelli, 2014). The situation is further complicated by the fact that those who do not find employment are often over educated, or over-qualified, for positions that are available, again, leading many graduates to accept low paying jobs outside of their area of study (Cappelli, 2014).

External pressures are only part of the challenges facing higher education; others are internal pressures, and both are discussed next.

### **Higher Education: Internal Challenges and Forces Driving Organizational Change**

According to Milian, Davies, and Zarifa (2016), leaders in higher education are under constant pressure to pursue change, but most leaders are underprepared to tackle the issues that face higher education and tend to have poor access to the value-adding information that informs good efficiency-seeking-decisions. Higher education institutions operate in a constant state of ambiguity and unlike most other organizations, which typically have a clear and unidimensional



objective, universities operate under multifaceted goals (Milian et al., 2016). For example, higher education leaders are responsible for advancing initiatives tied to various branding activities, such as teaching, research, and community service, in addition to initiatives tied to increasing business efficiency (Milian et al., 2016).

Spendlove (2007) argues that increasing business efficiency in the midst of shifting external pressures is not an easy task, but becomes even more challenging when needing to navigate internal dichotomy. Spendlove (2007) states that institutions of higher education have been described as “organized anarchies with high inertia, unclear technologies and problematic goals” (p. 407). Higher education is an extremely complex entity, which functions with a high level of internal discontent, often with competing agendas between academic and business units (Spendlove, 2007).

Whitchurch (2006) revealed that one reason for the internal turmoil in higher education stems from the fact that there are no clearly defined leadership development pathways. Whitchurch (2006) argues professional development pathways are needed to prepare leaders within higher education to be effective in such an extremely complex business and academic environment. Typically, leaders within higher education come from either a background in business management, or a background in academia (Whitchurch, 2006). However, only occasionally does a leader have a professional background that encompasses experience in both business and academia; but even then, due to the complex nature of higher education and the challenging mix of internal and external pressures, Whitchurch (2006) argues, it is not enough to cultivate the skillsets needed to be entirely effective in managing needed change.

Internal boundaries (between university departments) and external boundaries (between the university and the external environment) have become more *free-form* as institutions navigate

the evolving landscape of the higher education marketplace (Whitchurch, 2006). As such, traditional hierarchal structures of academic administrations are being replaced by models that favor a system of functional relationships between business and academic units (Whitchurch, 2006). Decisions are rarely made without input from various departments, leading to complex structures of shared governance (Whitchurch, 2006). As a result, Whitchurch (2006) argues that the modern university calls for a multi-professional leader, someone who has a keen understanding of different functional areas and can interface with a variety people to usher in new change.

However, according to Armstrong (2016), institutions have been slow to adopt change due to an internal perception that the American system of higher education already sets the global standard for excellence, which suggests it operates at an optimal level. Armstrong (2016) argues that prosperous institutions often attribute success to key characteristics of the institution's established business model; therefore, making changes to any key characteristic of that model is often associated with jeopardizing or lowering educational quality.

Further complicating matters is the reality that higher education leaders often hold dual roles that are both academic and administrative in nature (Armstrong, 2016). This dual-role system rewards sustaining business as usual, even when external forces, such as increasing competition, or dissatisfaction of students, call for disruptive or innovative change (Armstrong, 2016). Typically, disruptive change introduces a system in which old skills that served well are no longer as valuable; as such, leaders perceive disruptive change to have a component that deskills the workforce, subsequently negatively affecting competence levels of current staff and faculty (Armstrong, 2016). According to Armstrong (2016), the beliefs and concerns of university faculty are often mirrored in educational products. Academics who design and deliver

the core educational product, and who are also responsible for making business decisions that would change that product and its delivery are less likely to support disruptive change (Armstrong, 2016). Consequently, this internal dichotomy in higher education creates an environment in which external stakeholders who are demanding change perceive higher education as being unwilling to change—further increasing pressures to change (Armstrong, 2016).

### **Higher Education: Learning Organizations**

Due to the constant barrage of internal and external pressures that fuel an ever-changing landscape in higher education and force its leaders to pursue organizational change, Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) argue that institutions are and will continue to be in a constant state of flux. As such, it is appropriate to classify these institutions as learning organizations. Senge (1990) defined a learning organization as a company that must continually “expand its capacity to create its future” (p. 14). Learning organizations must constantly examine how they are operating and what they need to do differently in order to remain competitive. Institutions of higher education suffer ongoing struggles to remain relevant and must adopt organizational behaviors that allow them flexibility to respond quickly to internal and external pressures.

In the context of learning organizations, leaders must take the steps necessary to ensure employees do not become uncomfortable with the lack of vision and stress created by constant change (Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016). Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) state that in order to retain employees and curb negative experiences (often resulting in turnover) during a transition, leaders need to minimize change-related disruption.

Kiefer’s (2005) research on employee response to organizational change identified ongoing change as being associated with negative employee experiences and often incites less

favorable employee assessments in the areas of working conditions, personal situation, and treatment by the organization. Further, Kiefer (2005) argues that negative emotions related to these three areas are often experienced simultaneously, which hinders the employees' ability to support the change initiative and execute work on a daily basis. Accordingly, Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) argue that during periods of ongoing change leaders must abandon characteristics of static organizations and instead adopt characteristics of learning organizations, such as empowering employees and creating an environment of trust. Wang and Bain (2014) outlined the differences between static organizations and learning organizations in Table 1.

<b>Table 1</b>		
<i>Static Organizations Versus Learning Organizations</i>		
<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Characteristics of Static Organizations</b>	<b>Characteristics of Learning Organizations</b>
Structure	Rigid	Flexible
Atmosphere	Task-oriented	People-centered
Management Philosophy	Use of coercive power	Use of supportive power
Decision-making	High participation at top	High participation at all levels
Communication	Top-down, one way	Multidirectional

Boyce (2003) examined organizational change within higher education and found that organizational learning is a key component to sustaining institutional change. At a time when external pressures are increasing and institutional resources are diminishing, Boyce (2003) argues that universities need to ask the question, "How is strategic change achieved where objectives are divergent, power is diffused, and leadership roles are shared?" (p. 121). According to Clark (1998), universities not only need to develop the ability to respond flexibly, but also selectively, to mounting pressures. To accomplish this task, leaders need to cultivate new

competencies associated with a learning organization, such as examining assumptions, changing values, and developing new competencies (Boyce, 2003).

Examining assumptions, changing values, and developing new competencies are facets of organizational theory and grounded in cognitive and constructivist perspective (Boyce, 2003). Boyce (2003) asserts that individuals and groups come to understand events through their own perceptions rather than sharing a single organizational reality. Thus, change has an important component associated with inquiry and dialogue in which participants examine assumptions and strategies and draw conclusions based on personal experience and readily available information, including others' thoughts and attitudes (Boyce, 2003). This process of inquiry is also known as situational appraisals (Fugate et al., 2008; Kiefer, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and sense-making (Smollan & Sayers, 2009) and are reviewed in detail in subsequent sections of this review of literature.

### **Personal Construct Theory**

The role of cognitive and constructivist theory in organizational change has been examined by numerous researchers. As highlighted in the first chapter of this dissertation, Kelly's (1955) seminal body of work, Personal Construct Theory (PCT), argues that individuals may construe the same event in different ways predicated on their own unique and personal set of constructs. Kelly (1955) suggested that each individual is akin to a scientist that continually conducts experiments and develops personal theories about the world. For example, if a person reacts negatively to a situation, it is quite likely that person has had a number of previous encounters with similar situations that have ended negatively, subsequently validating a preconceived theory about the given situation's negative affect (Butt, 2008).

In this sense, Butt (2008) argues that it is futile to argue cause and effect in the context of

*explaining* how other people experience an event, or whether or not their feelings are justified. Instead, Butt (2008) writes that it is more beneficial for managers to seek *understanding* through a phenomenological approach, which places a focus on how others experience an event and why they experience it that way. Butt (2008) illustrates this point by stating that a billiard ball moves due to being struck by a cue (cause and effect), but it would be simplistic to assume that rules that apply to physics or chemistry also apply to human sciences. For example, Butt (2008) explains that those searching for cause and effect would state that World War II started because Germany invaded Poland (cause) and the Allies responded by declaring war (effect). However, the Allies did not have to take action, but did so because of many other determinants that led them to believe action was not only needed, but justified. Thus, a central tenet to PCT, which has important implications for managing affective dimensions of change, is that *understanding* is achieved by putting things into context, while *explanations* are achieved by identifying causal relationships (Butt, 2008; Kelly, 1955).

Another important facet to PCT, which differs from other personality theories, but important to mention in relation to changing values and developing new competencies (Boyce, 2003), is PCT's claim that individuals are not prisoners to their set of personal constructs (Butt, 2008). Rather, Kelly (1955) argued that people have a choice and are ultimately responsible for their actions. Further, if people have the ability to choose, then people have the ability to change their constructs and overcome adverse situations, appropriately adapting their emotional responses to external stimuli (Butt, 2008). A manager's role in helping their employees change is to seek for understanding by looking past behavior and identifying intent (Butt, 2008).

The process of adapting and overcoming challenging situations is commonly referred to in literature as *coping* (Fugate, Kinicki, & Prussia, 2008). Coping is discussed in a subsequent

section of this literature review, but first, in order to establish context, needed is a review of dispositional and affective factors of organizational change.

### **Affective Factors of Organizational Change**

According to Gelaidan et al. (2018), employees represent the main unit of analysis when examining the success or failure of an organizational change initiative. Literature suggests that failure rates for organizational change may be as high as 70% (Beer & Nohria, 2000); most often, failed change is not due to technical issues, but a result of personnel and human characteristics (Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

Successful change hinges on the employees' individual and collective abilities to execute change strategies initiated by management, requiring employees to let go of previous norms and embrace new ones. Additionally, according to Avey, Wernsing and Luthens (2008), organizational change often requires employees to learn new systems, acquire new skills, or adjust to redefined goals while scaling back resources. During organizational change employees not only need to be resilient in order to deal with shifting expectations, or possible setbacks, but they also need to have the efficacy to quickly adapt to new systems and processes (Avey et al., 2008). In order to meet the demands associated with change, employees would first need to have a belief that change is possible and, second, maintain the motivation to see it through.

Duck (1993) argues that organizational change is about feelings and leaders who expect positive change results have to accept that emotions play a significant role in how employees react to a given change initiative. Kiefer (2002) suggests that emotions are a central component to organizational change and reflect the employees' interpretation of ongoing events. Contrary to general literature, which often views emotion in terms of a deviation from the ideal state, or resistance that needs to be worked through, Kiefer (2002) argues that there are alternative ways

of understanding emotion.

According to Kiefer (2002), implicit and explicit assumptions about the role of emotions in organizational change are generally grouped into three categories. First, emotions are negative reactions to stress and fear. Second, emotions are negative reactions to changes to culture, which generate feelings of anger and distrust. Lastly, emotions are negative reactions that signify an irrational resistance or opposition to change. Kiefer (2002) argues that emotions are often seen as a problem that can be dealt with using managerial tactics; a perspective that hinders a leader's ability to draw upon employee experience to steer organizational actions. Therefore, Kiefer (2002) suggests, in addition to focusing on negative emotional processes throughout change, positive emotional processes also need to be considered. This review of literature further discusses positive and negative emotions, but first presented is a brief background on the general meaning and associated challenges of understanding emotions.

### **Emotions: Meaning and Associated Challenges with Understanding**

According to Gross (2010), since the early days of psychology, emotions have been and continue to be challenging to understand, both on a conceptual and empirical level. Part of the challenge is the diversity in definitions and interpretations of what an emotion is or is not. For example, the following are several definitions identified in recent literature as shown in Table 2.

<b>Table 2</b>	
<i>Definitions of Emotion Identified in Recent Literature</i>	
Author	Definition of Emotion
Gross (2010)	“responses to situations that are perceived as relevant to an individual’s current goals, and consist of appraisals (or ways of construing the situation) which give rise to loosely coordinated changes in experiential, behavioral, and physiological response channels” (p. 212-213).

(Continued)



Author	Definition of Emotion
Keltner and Gross (1999)	“episodic, relative short-term, biologically based patterns of perception, experience, physiology, action, and communication that occur in response to specific physical and social challenges and opportunities” (p. 468)
Smollan and Sayers (2009)	“direct responses to events, issues, relationships and objects that are important to people” (p. 436)
Friedrich and Wüstenhagen (2017)	“strong reactions in response to a decisive event” (p. 187)
Fugate et al. (2008)	“affective responses to information or experiences that change psychophysiological states” (p. 2).

Researchers use the term emotion in reference to a wide range of diverse happenings, ranging from simple expressions of fleeting moods, to more complex discussions of extended attitudes (Gross, 2010). However, lack of clarity surrounding the definition and application of emotion is only part of the challenge; another, as Gross (2010) explains, is the relatable terms used as alternative substitutes for emotion, such as affect, mood, and attitude. While these terms relate to emotion, Gross (2010) argues the importance of understanding the differences between them. *Affect* refers to a state of good versus bad, which has associated cognitive processes such as attitudes, moods, and emotions. *Attitude* is an individual’s belief about the “goodness or badness” of something, which influences how a person feels and reacts to a situation (Frijda, 1994). *Moods* are momentary and may not have a specific object (Gross, 2010). Lastly, emotions are short-lived responses triggered by a specific event (Gross, 2010).

Barrett (2006) termed the phrase *emotion paradox* in response to the scientific (conceptual and empirical) debate surrounding what constitutes an emotion and how one understands emotional experiences. People routinely identify and communicate their personal experiences with emotion, which suggests emotions are distinct events that can be recognized

with some level of certainty; however, there are no conventional or scientifically standardized criteria to identify when an emotion is present, or when an emotion is not present (Karnaze, 2013; Barrett, 2006).

In addition to challenges with defining emotion and accurately identifying when someone is experiencing an emotion, Barrett (2006) argues that people categorize their experiences with emotions differently—a phenomenon called *emotional granularity*. An individual with high emotional granularity uses specific terms to identify their emotions and is able to differentiate their experiences with emotions and the associated meanings (Barrett, 2006). Those who have low emotional granularity use broad terms representing a range of emotions in order to categorize their experience (Barrett, 2006). For example, someone who is low in emotional granularity may not be able to distinguish between mad, frustrated, or angry, which may result in that person using a general term, such as unhappy, to express their feelings.

Individual understanding, or as Kelly (1955) explained in his foundational work, personal and unique reality, is based on constructs that differ from person to person. Emotions, like color, are subjective by nature, which means they cannot be measured scientifically or objectively (Barrett, 2006). This assertion is supported by meta-analytic research that shows that peripheral nervous system responses, such as facial expressions, body position, and other physical behaviors, do not configure in distinct patterns that align to each specific emotion (Cacioppo, Berntson, Larsen, Poehlmann, & Ito, 2000). One reason is that emotions are thought to be largely unconscious reactions, which unknowingly influence people's behaviors (Barrett, 2006). Thus, externally observing someone's response mechanisms or behaviors *is not* a reliable tool to draw conclusions about discrete emotional experiences (Barrett, 2006). Additionally, emotions can be associated with multiple behaviors. For example, behaviors associated with joy can manifest in

various physical forms ranging from laughter for some to crying for others.

While research has yet to uncover a process to identify and categorize granular and distinct emotions (Barrett, 2006), recent studies found that peripheral nervous system responses *are* effective means to identify and categorize, and further track, more general emotive experiences, such as positive and negative affect (Barrett, 2006; Cacioppo et al., 2000; Lang, Greenwald, Bradley, & Hamm, 1993). Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) explain that positive affect reflects a person’s feelings of enthusiasm and engagement while negative affect reflects a person’s distress and withdrawal. Crawford and Henry (2004) argued that positive and negative affect is the activation of positively and negatively balanced emotional reactions. Accordingly, Watson et al. (1988) argued the importance of having a schedule that associates emotional dispositions with positive and negative affect, subsequently developing the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)—as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 <i>Positive and Negative Affect Schedule</i>	
Positive Affect	Negative Affect
Interested	Distressed
Alert	Upset
Attentive	Guilty
Excited	Ashamed
Enthusiastic	Hostile
Inspired	Irritable
Proud	Nervous
Determined	Jittery
Strong	Scared
Active	Afraid

In the context of organizational change, positive and negative affect and associated emotional responses directly reflects employee experiences (Smollan & Sayers, 2009). Barrett (2006) described positive and negative affect as a “barometer of the individual’s relation to an

environment at a given point in time” (p. 31). Further, positive and negative affect is an early predictor of change outcomes (Fugate et al., 2008). Positive and negative experiences influence employee behavior, including levels of commitment and engagement (Kiefer, 2002; Avey et al., 2008). Employees who experience positive emotions during change prove to have higher levels of engagement and organizational citizenship behaviors, both of which aid positive change (Avey et al., 2008). Similarly, Fugate et al. (2008) found that a lack of engagement prevents a company from obtaining the competitive advantage that initially motivated the change, subsequently wasting efforts and resources on an outcome that would have been realized even if changes were not pursued.

According to van den Heuvel, Schalk, & van Assen (2015), positive emotions are associated with readiness or openness for organizational change, while negative emotions are associated with resistance or cynicism toward organizational change. Friedrich and Wüstenhagen (2017) explain that employees often experience positive emotions and are open to change when the intended change is in line with their beliefs and perceived to be an opportunity. Conversely, employees tend to experience negative emotions and resist change when the change does not align to their beliefs, or when it is perceived to be a threat.

According to Kiefer (2005), the majority of qualitative and quantitative organizational change research is based on an assumption that change most often triggers negative emotions; however, Kiefer (2005) asserts that there is no scientific evidence that substantiates the belief that employees experience negative emotions at a higher rate than positive emotions. However, “support is always less visible than dissent” (Van Loon, 2001, p. 298) making it difficult to uncover and document positive experiences during change (Smollan & Sayers, 2009). Further, Scheck and Kinicki (2000) argue that positive emotions during organizational change are not as

relevant to change outcomes as negative emotions. One reason being, according to Fugate et al. (2008), negative emotions (frustration, helplessness, disappointment, fear, anxiety, and depression), or stress emotions (anger, anxiety, guilt, shame, sadness, envy, jealousy, and disgust), are destructive to both employees and employers, and disrupt the forward momentum of change efforts.

### **Antecedents to Negative Emotion and Resistance to Change**

Whether an employee experiences positive or negative affect during organizational change is dictated by an individual's cognitive evaluation of the event, the individual attributes subjective meaning to a myriad of situational factors (Fugate et al., 2008; Terry & Jimmieson, 2003). This person-situation evaluation is widely referenced in organizational change research as *appraisal* (Fugate et al., 2008; Kiefer, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman 1984), but has also been referenced as *inquiry* (Boyce, 2003) and *sense-making* (Smollan and Sayers, 2009).

Terry and Jimmieson (2003) explain that appraisal is one of four factors that influence employee response (and coping) to change. These four factors including Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) two-stage appraisal process are discussed in further detail in the following section on *emotional coping*. However, due to the role employees' personal evaluations play as a precursor to emotions, appraisal is introduced and discussed here in the context of antecedents.

Lazarus' (1991) suggests that appraisals are natural antecedents of emotions, a contention that is generally supported by academics (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999; Smith, Haynes, & Lazarus, 1993; Fugate et al., 2008). People cannot begin to address their feelings about change without first appraising the meaning of that event in relation to their own personal well-being (Lazarus, 2006). In other words, appraisal is a cognitive precursor to positive or negative emotion (Smith et al., 1993). These person-situation judgments revolve around such areas as

expected (and realized) outcomes, proposed (and executed) change procedures, frequency and timing of change initiatives, trust in leadership, and individual and group predisposition to change (Smollan & Sayers, 2009). However, the reasons one may experience negative emotions are innumerable, and pinpointing the exact antecedent that has the highest predictive significance in rousing negative emotions is extremely difficult (Heuvel, Schalk, & van Assen, 2015).

Illustrating this point, Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis (2011) conducted a comprehensive review of 79 qualitative studies published between 1948 and 2007 and identified five primary antecedent categories uncovered in modern organizational change research.

Table 4 outlines the antecedent categories and associated variables which conceptualize the reasons for negative employee responses during change (Oreg et al., 2011, p. 20-25).

Table 4	
<i>Antecedents to Negative Employee Emotions During Organizational Change</i>	
Antecedent Category	Variable
Recipient Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personality traits</li> <li>• Self-efficacy</li> <li>• Positive/Negative Affectivity</li> <li>• Tolerance for Ambiguity</li> <li>• Dispositional resistance to change</li> <li>• Self-esteem</li> <li>• Attitude toward change</li> <li>• Openness to experience</li> <li>• Employee predisposition (e.g. cynicism)</li> <li>• Coping Style</li> <li>• Needs (higher order, feedback, interdependence)</li> <li>• Demographics (age, gender, tenure, status)</li> </ul>
Internal Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management support</li> <li>• Social support</li> <li>• Trust in management</li> <li>• Trust in colleagues</li> <li>• Organizational commitment</li> <li>• Organizational culture</li> <li>• Job characteristics</li> </ul>

(Continued)

Antecedent Category	Variable
Change Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Interactional and procedural justice</li> <li>• Principal support</li> <li>• Management change competence</li> </ul>
Perceived Benefit/Harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipation of negative or positive outcomes</li> <li>• Job insecurity</li> <li>• Disruptive justice</li> <li>• Career impact</li> <li>• Financial impact</li> <li>• Organization impact</li> </ul>
Change Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compensation system</li> <li>• Downsizing</li> <li>• Office design</li> <li>• Work schedule</li> <li>• Job redesign</li> <li>• Organizational practices</li> <li>• Merger</li> <li>• Extent of change</li> </ul>

The phrase *employee resistance to change* is frequently used in research and commonly cited in organizational change literature as an explanation for failed change (Oreg, 2006). However, Oreg (2006) cautions that submitting to the idea that *people resist change* hinders an organization's ability to fully comprehend and address legitimate organizational problems. According to Dent and Goldberg (1999), people do not resist change; rather, they resist threats or the negative consequences that often accompany change. Thus, understanding resistance requires a leader to explore the employees' subjective experiences and feelings. Accordingly, Oreg (2006) contends that resistance has three dimensions, negative in nature, that include affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. The *affective* component deals with employee emotions (e.g., angry, sad, anxious); the *cognitive* component deals with employee thoughts (e.g., is the change really needed?); and the *behavioral* component deals with employee intended and executed actions (e.g., speaking badly about the change and trying to demotivate others) (Oreg,

2006).

In the context of employee resistance to change, Heuvel et al. (2015) examined the mediating role between the three antecedents of negative emotion: psychological contract fulfillment, trust, and perceived need for change. The results of this research identified that psychological contract fulfillment and trust combined for 48% of the variance in employee attitude toward change, while perceived need for change accounted for 48%. Similarly, Van Loon (2001) conducted a case study of a major organizational change initiative at a mid-sized university (17,000 students) and identified that employees must genuinely be fearful for the survival of the institution in order to support change. However, according to Van Loon (2001), faculty and staff in higher education often disregard organization needs in favor of personal agendas. Consequently, Heuvel et al. (2015) argue that resistance and negative attitudes toward change can be mitigated by placing greater emphasis on psychological contracts and trust. Ford, Ford, and D'Amelio (2008) support this perspective explaining that resistance can best be understood as a reflection of the relationship between manager and employee, rather than a response to the change itself.

Smollan and Sayers (2009) examined micro-level experiences of 24 employees during a change process and found that when management acknowledged and showed regard for negative emotional experiences the employees' resistance was mitigated and subsequently, positive engagement increased. Accordingly, Kiefer (2005) argues that management needs to take employees' emotional expressions seriously and respond in a respectful manner, seeking for deeper understanding of individual experience rather than inately assuming that negative emotion is an expression of resistance or conscious unwillingness to change.

Using a phenomenological approach, Fugate et al. (2008) found that leaders play an



important role in helping employees sort through their emotional reactions and effectively cope with a negatively appraised situation. Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, and Gruen (1986) define coping as a “person’s cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage (reduce, minimize, or tolerate) the internal and external demands of the person-environment transaction that is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person’s resources” (p. 572). Fugate et al. (2008) explain that coping is a person’s cognitive and behavioral efforts to deal with a taxing situation, and is a “ubiquitous, frequent, and salient element of human experience” (p. 1). The manner in which employees cope can significantly increase or reduce consequences associated with a negatively appraised situation (Fugate et al., 2008).

### **Process of Coping with Organizational Change**

Lazarus’s (1993) work with stress and coping, which draws parallels to Kelly’s (1955) research on personal constructs, identifies two main approaches to coping: style and process. Style was the predominant theory to dealing with stress in the late 1960s and early 1970s; it refers to an individual’s personality traits and centers on the belief that people cope with stress through inherent psychoanalytic defenses acquired throughout the developmental phases of life. However, in late 1970s Lazarus (1993) found that style (personality) alone could not fully account for situational factors that influence a person’s response to stress. For example, if a person is asked how they will cope with an upcoming surgery, Lazarus (1993) argued it would be impossible to answer due to an infinite number of situational variables. Lazarus (1993) contended that coping has a supplemental component, called process, which accounts for a person’s efforts to conduct situational appraisals of ongoing events and manage their responses, in thought and action, throughout a situation that is deemed taxing or overwhelming. The two approaches, style and process, are not mutually exclusive, instead they are supplemental in

nature and work together to address different aspects of the problem (Lazarus, 1993).

Kelly's (1995) PCT and Lazarus' (1993) coping theories are complimentary; both theories state a person has a primary response to an event through a natural (innate) response, in addition to a nurtured (process) response.

Terry and Jimmieson (2003) conducted three field studies of separate organizational change initiatives in order to examine how employees adapt and deal with shifting emotions during organizational transitions. The findings showed that overwhelmingly, employees experience high levels of stress, resulting from uncertainty stemming from a wide variety of factors related to the changing environment. While leaders tend to view organizational change as an accepted norm, or general business practice, employees view change as a critical life event (Terry & Jimmieson, 2003). The announcement of change may raise immediate questions for employees in such areas as job security, financial well-being, role identification, career path, in addition to changes to intangible benefits like control, status, and culture (Terry & Jimmieson, 2003).

Terry and Jimmieson (2003) found that an employee's ability to cope with change-related-stress is greatly dependent on situational factors associated with, and interrelationships between: (a) event characteristics; (b) situational appraisals; (c) coping strategies; and (d) coping resources. These areas are addressed further in the following sections.

**Event characteristics.** According to Terry and Jimmieson (2003), stress outcomes are a mirrored result of the interaction between stable and situational factors. Organizational change is likely to have a high degree of situational variability, particularly in how the process implemented. Terry and Jimmieson (2003) identified three key characteristics that influence employee emotion levels during organizational change: employee participation, communication

processes, and leadership.

Organizational change can be executed in a manner that is either collaborative (participative) or coercive (non-participative). Research suggests that employee commitment and adjustment to change is affected by whether or not the employees perceive they have been consulted about the change and involved throughout its implementation (Coch & French, 1948; Morse & Reimer, 1956; Korunka, Weiss, Huemer, & Karetta, 1995). Another important characteristic that influences employee emotion is communication, or provision of information. Terry and Jimmieson (2003) state that during a period of organizational change, employees are vulnerable to rumors and speculation, especially if that information is obtained through informal channels of communication, such as coworkers. Clear and effective communication from formal leadership sources assist the process of sense-making, which is necessary for employees to come to terms with the situation (Terry & Jimmieson, 2003). Lastly, Terry and Jimmieson (2003) found that the employees' perceptions of leadership's effectiveness is a leading indicator of employee adjustment to a change initiative. A leader's ability to establish a clear vision and manage situational factors throughout a change process can lower threat associated with the change initiative.

**Situational appraisals.** In the context of organizational change, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argue that an individual engages in a two-stage cognitive process to assess the situation as it relates to his or her well-being. First, primary appraisal refers to the initial assessment of the event in which a person relies on their unique set of personal constructs (Kelly, 1955) to ascertain the appropriate level of internal stress. Secondary appraisal reflects the judgements about what can be done to manage the situation (Terry & Jimmieson, 2003). According to Terry and Jimmieson (2003), in secondary appraisal, two separate determinations govern a person's

stress response. First, perceived controllability is the extent that one believes they have ability to influence outcomes. Second, efficacy is a person's belief that they have the ability to meet the demands of the situation. In the context of organizational change, employee stress levels increase if the employee (a) feels outcomes cannot be influenced; (b) believes they do not have the competencies needed to be effective in the new world; or (c) questions what competencies, in general, are needed to be effective in the new world (Terry & Jimmieson, 2003).

Similarly, the qualitative phenomenographic research of Dasborough, Lamb, and Suseno (2015) identified that emotional reactions are not sedentary, but as Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest, emotional reactions over time according to pre (primary appraisal) and post (secondary appraisal) change stages. Employee emotional reactions become less intense over time, shifting from anticipatory emotions to realized emotions (Dasborough et al., 2015). These results, however, differ from the quantitative research of Fugate et al. (2002), who found that negative emotional reactions remained consistent throughout the progressive stages of change. Dasborough et al. (2015) attributes the inconsistency in results to the use of different research methodologies, arguing that the five-point qualitative Likert scale (employed by Fugate et al., 2002) did not capture and represent the nuanced nature of emotion.

Further, according to Pollard's (2001) research on employee mental well-being during workplace reorganization, employee distress is highest before a reorganization, followed by the next most distressful time shortly after reorganization. These findings align to Dasborough et al. (2015) identifying that employee emotions may in fact shift over time, but Pollard (2001) argues that employee distress, in measure of intensity, did not drastically shift over time. Rather, employee distress remained at elevated levels for more than six months following change implementation (Pollard, 2001).

While Dasborough et al. (2015), Fugate et al. (2002), and Pollard (2001) present varying results regarding emotions across time, each supports Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) assertion that as situations unfold, employees engage in more than one appraisal that may, or may not, shift their emotional reactions.

**Coping strategies.** Terry and Jimmieson (2003) found that employee adjustment to organizational change is also influenced by which coping strategies are adopted, and if those strategies are effective at reducing stress. Two widely accepted coping strategies are problem-focused, which aims to address the core issue causing stress, and emotion-focused, which aims to address the emotions without dealing with the problem. Generally, research has shown that dealing with the problem is more effective than focusing on the emotions brought on by the problem (Callan, 1993; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986).

**Coping resources.** Terry and Jimmieson (2003) argue that the employees' coping resources, or people's dispositions and environments, influence adjustment to organizational change. One main precursor to employee stress is their disposition, or internal personality characteristics, such as negative affect, or a person's susceptibility to negative emotions (Terry & Jimmieson, 2003). Self-esteem and control beliefs are also variables that greatly affect coping with organizational change. Terry and Jimmieson (2003) explain that individuals with a strong internal locus of control likely have little issue believing they can manage problems, which is associated with adaptability. Lastly, Terry and Jimmieson (2003) argue that an employee's relationships with others, or access to personal or social resources, is a valuable tool to lower stress. Further, research found that internal (work-related) support is more important to coping than external (non-work) sources (Terry & Jimmieson, 2003). Accordingly, an employee's immediate supervisor and coworkers provide an important network of emotional support and

guidance throughout an organizational change effort.

Terry and Jimmieson (2003) outline a number of applicable measures that organizations can implement to help employees cope throughout a period of change. Those measures are:

- Leaders, especially those in direct supervisory roles, should act as a source of support and encouragement to employees.
- Leaders should consult employees and allow them to provide feedback about the implementation of the change process.
- Leaders should ensure that informal channels of communication are supplied with accurate information to prevent the spread of rumors and speculation.
- Leaders should make every effort to counter the belief that the organizational change effort is threatening by encouraging and supporting problem and emotional-focused coping strategies.

### **Coping with Change: Five Stages of Grief**

As previously discussed, organizational change triggers intense emotions in employees (Gelaidan et al., 2018). According to Friedrich and Wüstenhagen (2017), one of the most common and strongest emotions employees experience during an organizational transition is grief. Grief is an emotional response that is triggered by the loss or expected loss of an important aspect of a person's environment (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017). Friedrich and Wüstenhagen (2017) argue that employees who are forced to make changes to their environment as part of an organizational change initiative often experience similar emotions and progress through a process of grieving (or coping) in the same manner as those dealing with death.

Zell (2003) examined an organizational change initiative at public higher education university and found evidence that supports Friedrich and Wüstenhagen's (2017) assertion.

Results revealed that both the individual and the organization progressed through the process of change in a corresponding fashion to Kübler-Ross' (1969) stages theory of grief. Zell (2003) found that that even while a number of external factors were threatening the health of the institution, most staff initially resisted changes to core processes. However, over a period of two years the organization as a whole came to support the change, but only after navigating the five stages of grief modeled by Kübler-Ross (1969) (Zell, 2003).

Kübler-Ross (1969) studied terminally ill patients and identified a five-stage grieving process associated with death and dying, also known as the stages of grief theory. The theory argues that a grieving person, while coping with loss, undergoes periods of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance. Zell (2003) states, as have others (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017), that the five stages of grief model has broad applicability in change management theory, but especially in the area of resistance to change. The following sections provide a brief background the five stages outlined by Kübler-Ross (1969) and its applicability to change management.

**Denial.** In the denial stage, a grieving person is unwilling to accept the change or acknowledge the effect the change has on said person's life (Kübler-Ross, 1974). An employee experiencing denial may respond to change by saying "things are fine" or "this is not happening" (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017). While in this phase, passive responses to change result in a lack of action and organizations are unable to advance change efforts (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017).

**Anger.** The second stage of grief is marked by feelings of anger, rage, and envy (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017). Anger is often accompanied by expressions such as "this is not fair" and employee thoughts may be centered on assigning blame, rather than accepting

reality (Kübler-Ross, 1974). In this stage employees begin to show actions, but energy is not always directed toward finding solutions (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017).

**Bargaining.** In the third stage of grief emotions stabilize as hopes and fears become more balanced, but employees may expend more energy on efforts to postponing, rather than supporting change (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017). A typical response in this stage might be “I understand things are different, but if I could just have a little more time...” (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017). For example, Zell (2003) found that faculty in the bargaining stage recognized research and pedagogical changes were necessary, but instead of embracing change, the faculty delayed the inevitable by searching for external funding to stay the course.

**Depression.** In the fourth stage of grief, reality begins to set in, and employees enter a state of gloom and sadness about the future (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017; Zell, 2003). An employee in this stage may respond with “we had a great run...” (Zell, 2003), but Friedrich and Wüstenhagen (2017) argue that employee responses in this stage are hard to predict as employees become dejected and withdraw from expressing feelings openly. Friedrich & Wüstenhagen (2017) found that negative emotional responses in this stage often prevented the organization from executing new strategic opportunities.

**Acceptance.** In the final stage of grief employees begin to show signs of acclimating to a new environment and embracing new norms (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017). Positive emotions begin to replace negative emotions, yet Kübler-Ross (1969) cautions against associating the acceptance stage as a happy stage. In this stage, employees may respond with positive sentiments, such as “things will be okay” or “it’s time to start a new chapter” (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017). Zell (2003) found that faculty in this stage began to problem solve and eventually turned a negatively appraised situation into an opportunity, subsequently creating new



research channels.

Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) explained that the five stages of grief are often misinterpreted and were never meant to group hard-to-understand emotions into neat packages. The five stages, which have evolved since their inception in 1969, “are not stops on a linear timeline” (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 7). Accordingly, a person may progress through the stages in a different order than outlined or possibly re-enter a stage more than once (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) also contend that each of the five stages are labeled with general emotions and that each stage contains sub-groups of additional emotions, for example, the anger stage may also exhibit emotions such as rage, bitterness, or annoyance.

### **Coping with Change: Fisher’s Personal Transition Curve**

Based on the work from both Kübler-Ross’s (1969) research on grief and personal transition and Kelly’s (1955) research on personal constructs, Fisher (2019) introduced the process of transition curve in 1999 while speaking at the Tenth International Personal Construct Congress in Berlin. The process of transition curve stemmed from Fisher’s work with service provision organizations and his research to better understand what motivates a person to embrace and successfully execute personal change (Chapman, 2019). The process of transition curve, when originally presented, expanded upon Kübler-Ross’s (1969) five stages of grief and modeled nine stages of emotion a person moves through when experiencing change. Since 1999 the process of transition has been revised multiple times, once in 2003 and again in 2012 (Chapman, 2019). The most recent model, depicted in Figure 1 (on the following page), outlines the original nine stages of emotion along the curve, with four additional emotional stages a person experiences during a change process (Chapman, 2019; Fisher, 2019).

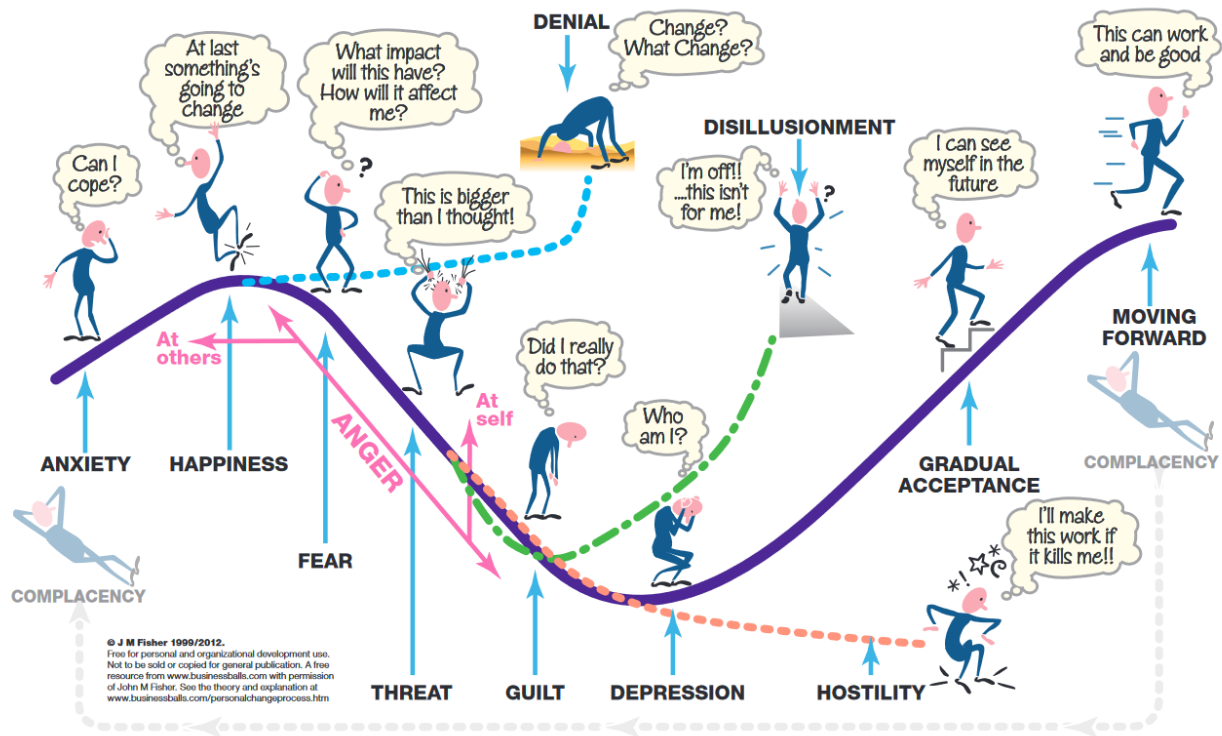


Figure 1. Process of Transition Curve. This figure outlines John Fisher’s illustration of the various emotions a person will experience when dealing with change. Adapted from <https://www.c2d.co.uk/techniques/process-of-transition/>. By J.Fisher, 2019. Copyright 2019 by John Fisher.

Fisher (2019), like Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), argues that a person progresses through the process of transition stages at varying levels of intensity and speed depending on their individual set of personal constructs. For example, someone who experienced change positively in the past may not spend as much time in the fear stage as someone who previously had negative experiences with change. Fisher’s (2019) research also coincides with the research of Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) in the fact that the curve does not represent linear steps—a person may go back and forth between stages or experience stages entirely out of order. However, Fisher (2019) and Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) differ in their belief on what stages a person experiences. Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) contend that a person may skip stages, such as anger, but Fisher (2019) states that a person experiences every unique stage, but that does

not mean that the stage is consciously recognized. Fisher (2019) acknowledged that a person may experience a number of stages at the same time, such as being happy the change is happening, but fearful that the person or colleagues may be negatively impacted.

Applying the Process of Transition Model in Organizational Change. Fisher (2019) explains that with any change there is potential for conflict to arise between the employees' existing values and beliefs and management's desired or anticipated values and beliefs. As such, in an effort to make the transition as painless as possible, the manager or change agent, should first strive to understand the employees' beliefs about change, what they stand to lose or gain, in addition to their perception of the past, present, and future (Fisher, 2019). Additionally, the manager should provide information, education/training, resources, and needed emotional support to help the employee progress through the process of transition stages as quickly and efficiently as possible (Fisher, 2019).

The goal is to help the employee *loosen* existing constructs that hinder the change process and help them identify the appropriate coping strategy that allows new constructs to emerge (Fisher, 2019). New thoughts and behaviors should be associated with positive rewards and seen by the employee as applicable to the "new world" (Fisher, 2019). However, Fisher (2019) acknowledges the difficulty in identifying the stage in which someone resides, explaining that even people going through the transition may not be consciously aware of what emotions they are experiencing. Accordingly, Fisher recommends that a manager, first, closely observe the employees' behavior, taking cues from their positive or negative responses, and second, simply ask the employees how they are doing (Scheer, 2000).

## **Gaps in Change Management Models, Leadership Skillsets, and Application of Leadership Theory**

Organizational change is a difficult endeavor that most leaders do not manage well—as a result, change efforts often fail (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Recent research, as cited below, points to three reasons for failed change within higher education: inadequate change models, leadership skill gaps, and leadership inability to execute leadership theory.

**Inadequate change models.** In an effort to control change outcomes and increase the likelihood of success, many leaders turn to readily available change literature to inform their change strategies (Beer & Nohria, 2000). However, Kezar and Eckel (2002) argue that current research is too generalized to address the nuance and complexity within higher education. Traditional organizational change models, or strategies, are presented as being universally-applicable, but when executed are often too broad and come across “empty” to leaders who require a more tailored and flexible model that aligns to higher education (Kezar and Eckel, 2002).

**Leadership skill gap.** According to Graetz (2000), successful organizational change calls for a two-pronged strategic approach that incorporates facets of both hard (strategy, structure, systems, and technology) and soft (vision, values, behaviors, and attitudes) matters. Iacovini (1993) refers to these aspects as the business side and human side of organizational change. Iacovini (1993) argues that change strategies should balance efforts between business and human factors, but managers most often only give “lip service” to human issues while focusing attention and effort on business issues. One reason for ignoring human factors is that corporations do not understand affective dimensions of change as well as they understand business dimensions; consequently, many corporations devote attention and resources to areas of internal expertise,

which are often aligned to business factors (Iacovini, 1993). Another reason corporate organizations ignore human factors is that many managers have educational backgrounds in business, but business programs rarely teach about the human side of change (Iacovini, 1993). Blanchard (2010) adds that managers often focus on the business side of change because they are more concerned with generating quick results through immediate business improvements. These actions tend to lead to lower productivity, wasted resources, employee discontent, and difficulty implementing future organizational change (Blanchard, 2010; Iacovini, 1993).

Kotter and Cohen (2002) argue that organizational change is primarily about people—stating that successful change depends on people making emotional shifts that align to a new reality. Organizations change when employees change, and employees change for emotional reasons and only when management successfully positions the change in a manner in which employees believe, in their hearts, it is necessary (Kotter and Cohen, 2002). However, managers tend to appeal to reason by using business tools (reports, budgets, or mission statements) to gain employee buy-in, but these tactics miss the “heart of change,” which resides in the employees’ emotional disposition (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 61). Kotter and Cohen (2002) explain that organizational change requires that management focuses attention on providing emotional support and creating an environment in which employees can find the motivation to alter their beliefs and align their emotions to a new reality.

Garvin and Roberto (2005) concur with Kotter and Cohen (2002), stating that leaders need to shift predictable management behaviors that concentrate efforts on people, pay, and process, and instead develop skills that catalyze a receptive climate for change through effective management of employee emotions. Accordingly, Iacovini (1993) and Blanchard (2010) stress the importance for leaders to develop management competencies that align to affective areas of

change and allow for an understanding and supportive culture to emerge throughout the employees' emotional transition. In table 5, Iacovini (1993) and Blanchard (2010) outlined a number of management skill sets needed to effectively control affective factors throughout a period of change.

Table 5	
<i>Management Skill Sets Needed to Control Affective Factors During Change</i>	
Researcher	Areas of Affective Skill Sets
Iacovini (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide consistent and visible support</li> <li>– Highlight areas that are not changing</li> <li>– Give employees the opportunity to interact informally</li> <li>– Build on the past rather than avoiding the past</li> <li>– Do not treat employees as one homogenous group rather understand that people will progress at differing paces</li> <li>– Support those who are in the process of letting go</li> <li>– Help employees identify what they are holding onto and why</li> <li>– Provide formal and informal information on a consistent basis</li> <li>– Allow mistakes and reward effort</li> <li>– Encourage creative thinking and embrace diversity of ideas</li> <li>– Support the employees' need to reminisce about the past while encouraging new ways to think about the future</li> <li>– Focus on feelings and provide emotional support</li> <li>– Consistently acknowledge and support new ideas</li> </ul>
Blanchard (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Accurately assess and address employee concerns</li> <li>– Be flexible and able to use a variety of change leadership strategies effectively</li> <li>– Treat employees as partners and allow them to provide feedback to change efforts and respond with support when needed</li> </ul>

**Leadership inability to execute leadership theory.** Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) and Blanchard (2010) argue the importance of equipping managers with effective leadership change theories to inform practice. Leaders who embark on a change initiative without a broad understanding of supporting change management theory may inevitably lead employees astray (Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016). However, Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) found that leaders

within higher education, even when equipped with well-reasoned and engineered leadership change theories, often fail to apply their knowledge to real-world organizational change efforts. This reality led Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) to question, in higher education where leadership change theory is taught and faculty are touted as experts, what causes the gap between organizational change theory and practice to continue to widen.

Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) found that the complexity of higher education system requires leaders who oversee change initiatives to have technical, human, and conceptual skills; however, finding leaders who have a combination of these skill sets is challenging. Universities often hire faculty with conceptual expertise into administrative roles only to find that their knowledge or expertise does not translate well into practice (Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016).

Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) refer to these leaders as “puppet administrators” explaining that these faculty are often promoted based on their internal connections, or similar thinking and shared beliefs with current administrators, or a long history of teaching excellence, but not based on merit or proven ability to lead. Alternatively, some universities search out technical know-how and hire leaders from external higher education sources who have specific change leadership expertise; however, these leaders often find difficulty applying their knowledge to higher education systems and navigating dual governance structures (Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016).

### **Leadership Theories: Emotional Intelligence and Mindfulness**

The complex and ever-changing environment of higher education, in which universities must continually shift strategies and expand capacity to meet market demands, calls for flexible and people-centered leaders with the ability to unite leadership theory with practice (Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016). Recent research on organization change in higher education confirms this

assertion and further explains that leaders need to deepen skill sets (and align their leadership approach to theory) in the areas of emotional intelligence (Gelaiden et al., 2018; Dasborough et al., 2015) and mindfulness (Hede, 2010; Baron, Rouleau, Gregoire, & Baron, 2018).

**Emotional intelligence.** Salovey and Mayer (1990) pioneered emotional intelligence and first defined the term as “social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (p. 189). Salovey and Mayer (1990) conceptualized emotional intelligence as (a) appraisal and expression of emotion (in self and others); (b) regulation of emotion (in self and others); and (c) utilization of emotion (in planning, thinking, redirecting attention, and motivation). Literature often attributes Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) with defining emotional intelligence and bringing awareness to the concept (Gelaiden et al., 2018), but Goleman (1995) is credited with popularizing emotional intelligence in modern research, in addition to expanding models to include (a) self-awareness; (b) managing emotions; (c) motivating oneself; (d) empathy; and (e) handling relationships. In the context of leadership, Goleman (1998) addressed each of the five components, which are outlined in Table 6.

Table 6	
<i>Components of Emotional Intelligence for Leaders</i>	
Component	Explanation
Self-awareness	Capacity to reconcile decisions with values, sense of purpose, and mission
Managing emotions	Ability to handle the “internal world of feeling”, especially anger, anxiety, and sadness
Motivating oneself	Aptitude to approach negative situations with optimism, fueling positive and inspiring actions
Empathy	Ability to read emotions in others and respond in a supportive manner
Handling relationships	Ability to use emotional power to defuse negative situations and set a positive example for people to emulate, avoiding destructive propensities for anger, arrogance, or insolence



Daborough et al. (2015) studied employee emotions in higher education change management and found that employee experiences are not grouped homogenously. Employees experience emotions differently (Barrett, 2006; Kelly, 1955) and progress through stages of emotions at varying rates (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005; Fisher, 2019). As such, Daborough et al. (2015) argue that leaders need high emotional intelligence in order to categorize individual experience correctly and help employees cope with change in a positive manner (*see also* Fisher, 2019).

Gelaiden et al. (2016) examined organizational change in higher education and found that leadership behavior and emotional intelligence are strong predictors of employee readiness and commitment to change. Further, Gelaiden et al. (2016) argue that leadership directly affects employee engagement and change results, explaining that when a leader adopts a flexible and human-centered leadership style, employee attitudes improve and readiness and support for change is increased.

In the context of managing emotions and using one's emotional intelligence as a tool to advance positive change outcomes, a discussion on mindfulness and its role in managerial decision making is needed.

**Mindfulness.** According to Hede (2010), leaders can increase their effectiveness in managing interpersonal situations by developing the capacity to recognize and deal with their emotions, and the emotions of others. The ability to recognize and manage one's emotions and the emotions of others is a defining characteristic of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), whereas mindfulness is a defining characteristic in the process of recognizing and managing emotions (Hede, 2010). More specifically, mindfulness can be defined as psychological freedom that is achieved by detaching oneself from a specific point of view and

remaining curious, open, and accepting from moment-to-moment (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Martin, 1997). Mindfulness is a key determinant of one's capacity for developing emotional intelligence (Hede, 2010).

Baron, Rouleau, Grégoire, and Baron (2018) found that leaders who develop mindfulness are better equipped to remain flexible in adapting their leadership style to situational needs as conditions within the business environment change. Specifically, Baron et al. (2018) identified that leaders who exercise mindfulness acknowledge thoughts and feelings, but do not let those thoughts and feelings dictate their reactions. Subsequently, when leaders refrained from taking immediate action, they reduced the use of automatic mental processes and extended response time, which then allowed greater flexibility in decision making (Baron et al., 2018). In addition, Baron et al. (2018) found that exercising mindfulness increased awareness, which allowed leaders to devote more attention to needed activities, from moment-to-moment, and resulted in better prioritization of goals.

### **Chapter Summary**

This literature review provided a comprehensive examination of research associated with affective dimensions of change within higher education. First, Chapter 2 established a foundation of research that examined the continually shifting environment within higher education, including the internal and external forces driving organizational change. Second, Chapter 2 examined current literature as it relates to organizational change and (a) employee affective responses to change; (b) effect of employee emotions on change outcomes; and (c) leadership role in managing the affective culture throughout a change initiative. Lastly, Chapter 2 included discussions of relevant theories that make up the theoretical framework for this study and discussed associated research that acts as a foundation to conduct this research.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to explore how affective factors during organizational transitions affect a leader's ability to effectively implement change at higher education institutions. This chapter provides an overview of the research design and corresponding methodology used to answer the study's research questions. It also includes a discussion on the appropriateness of the selected methodology and procedures that were utilized to ensure validity, reliability, and protection of research participants throughout the study.

#### **Restatement of Research Questions**

This study used a qualitative approach to investigate the following research questions:

1. How do leaders in higher education conceptualize and experience affective dimensions of organizational change?
2. What do leaders in higher education do, if anything, to manage the affective responses of their employees during an organizational transition?

#### **Research Design and Approach**

This study relied on a qualitative research approach in order to generate and gather empirical-field-data relating to the lived experiences of higher education leaders responsible for managing affective factors during a period of organizational change. According to Lakshman, Sinha, Biswas, Charles, and Arora (2000), qualitative research applies when the number of variables surrounding a phenomenon, or influencing an outcome are not apparent. Given the complex nature of change, and the innumerable emotional responses it provokes in employees, qualitative research, as outlined by Maxwell (2005), provides the needed flexibility to: (a) investigate how a person makes sense of an event, and how individual interpretations of that event influence behavior; (b) gain understanding about context surrounding a phenomenon, and

how specific events, actions, and meanings are influenced by sifting environments; (c) uncover and research unanticipated variables; (d) identify relationships between events and outcomes, and (e) explore the processes that led to a given outcome.

**Phenomenological approach versus phenomenographic approach.** Both phenomenology and phenomenography, as separate and distinct qualitative methodologies, are gaining traction and growing in popularity amongst qualitative researchers (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016). However, Cibangu and Hepworth (2016) explain that the two methodologies are often confused and subsequently, often used incorrectly. One area of confusion, and subject of much debate amongst scholars, is whether the more recent phenomenography is simply a subset of phenomenology (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016), or a unique qualitative research approach that is “far from what might be conceived of as phenomenological” (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997, p. 200).

In order to (a) mitigate confusion between phenomenology and phenomenography; and (b) establish the appropriateness of selecting phenomenography as this study’s methodology, it is necessary to outline of the core differences between the two qualitative approaches. Table 7 provides a clear side-by-side comparison of defining characteristics of both phenomenology and phenomenography, as explained in recent literature.

Table 7		
<i>Differences between phenomenology and phenomenography research methodologies as defined by in recent scholarly literature</i>		
Researcher	Phenomenology	Phenomenography
Barnard, McCosker, and Gerber (1999)	Identifies meaning of a phenomenon in individual experience	Identifies meaning of a phenomenon through a collective experience
	Aim is to understand experiences through a lens of a singular essence	Aim is to find understanding through variance in individual experiences

(Continued)

Researcher	Phenomenology	Phenomenography
Barnard, McCosker, and Gerber (1999)	First order perspective – researcher understands reality through direct access to the phenomena	Second order perspective – researcher understands reality through others experiences
Bentz and Shapiro (1998)	Research results are derived from the researcher’s unique understanding of the studied phenomena	Research results are derived from participants’ unique understanding of and experiences with the studied phenomena
	The researcher’s consciousness is the primary tool	The consciousness of others is the primary tool
	Gathered data often involves listening, watching, and engaging in “empathetic understanding,” but many phenomenological studies do not involve interacting with participants	Interacting with participants is key to gathering data for phenomenographic studies, as the unit of analysis is the various ways a person experiences a phenomenon
	To gain insight the researcher may immerse themselves in an experience that matches that of the participants	Researcher maintains a neutral perspective and interacts with participants after bracketing presuppositions to limit bias or personal narratives
Cibangu and Hepworth (2016)	<p><b>Trails of phenomenology:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Realistic</b>—study of the real-life issues affecting people</li> <li>2. <b>Constitutive</b>—constructivist approach emphasizing the idea that consciousness and the lifeworld interact and influence the other</li> <li>3. <b>Existential</b>—focuses on what individuals need to find happiness</li> <li>4. <b>Hermeneutic</b>—analyzes patterns of meaning in a given phenomena</li> <li>5. <b>Historical</b>—lived experiences that make up and influence meaning over time</li> <li>6. <b>Embodied</b> (or bodily)—the idea that manifestations of the body hold key understandings to a phenomenon</li> </ol>	<p><b>Trails of phenomenography:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Naturalistic</b>—observe and record natural environment or real-life situation and then analyze data without researcher data manipulation</li> <li>2. <b>Hermeneutic</b>—data is interpreted in ways that may not align to their original meaning, but provided critical insight</li> <li>3. <b>Phenomenological</b>—uses questions to examine experience and the essence of meaning</li> </ol>

(Continued)

Researcher	Phenomenology	Phenomenography
Cibangu and Hepworth (2016)	<p><b>Central Concepts of Phenomenology:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Intentionality</b>—the idea that consciousness does not exist in isolation</li> <li>2. <b>Intersubjectivity</b>—the idea that people are inherently social beings and exchange thoughts and feelings, both consciously and unconsciously</li> <li>3. <b>Bracketing</b>—the idea of setting aside presuppositions to gain fuller actualization of knowledge</li> </ol>	<p><b>Central Concepts of Phenomenography:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Surface and deep learning</b>—the idea that there are two forms of learning, mechanical and creative</li> <li>2. <b>Variation</b>—the idea that understanding of phenomena is gained through identification of the diverse ways of conceptualizing experience</li> <li>3. <b>Categories</b>—the idea that units of meaning are represented by grouped or coded experiences</li> <li>4. <b>Measure of reality</b>—the idea that understanding is found through other people’s experiences</li> </ol>

**Appropriateness of phenomenography methodology.** Trigwell (2006) defined phenomenography as a research approach that has “a relational, qualitative, second-order perspective, that aims to describe the key aspects of the variation of the collective experience of a phenomenon” (p. 369). Trigwell (2006) outlined five key differences between phenomenography and other qualitative research methods, which were used to test its suitability for this study’s research design. First, phenomenography has a non-dualist approach, rather than dualist, as it establishes meaning in the relationship between the individual and the phenomena. A dualist approach considers the individual and phenomena to be separate entities. Second, phenomenography is strictly a qualitative research approach and does not have any quantitative or mixed method components. Third, as stated previously, phenomenography has a second-order perspective, placing focus on an individual’s experience with a phenomenon, rather than the phenomenon itself. Fourth, phenomenography deliberately aims to identify variation between

how individuals within a group experience the same phenomenon. Lastly, not only are similarities between individual experiences with a phenomenon categorized, but also the differences between participant experiences (Trigwell, 2006).

### **History of Phenomenography**

The earliest reference to Phenomenography is attributed Ulrich Sonnemann (1954) who used the term to highlight a fundamental difference between the two separate phenomenological studies conducted by researchers Jaspers and Heidegger. Sonnemann (1954) argued that Heidegger's work was more traditionally phenomenological in that it relied on the researcher's personal observations (a first-order perspective) to examine individual lived experience, whereas Jaspers's research was more phenomenographic in that it relied on the subjects' descriptive analysis (a second-order perspective) to examine a range of individual experiences. Accordingly, Sonnemann (1954) qualified Heidegger's research as phenomenology and Jasper's research as phenomenography.

Later, Marton and Säljö (1976) adopted phenomenography as a qualitative research methodology in a series of studies at the University of Gothenburg that examined the different ways students process information and experience learning. These studies are credited with propagating phenomenography as a research specialization, which has since been applied extensively to research studies in the area of education dating back to the late 1970s. One practical reason for this, according to Dahlin (2007), is that phenomenography allows the researcher to delve into matters related to an individual's *conception of reality*, which has pedagogical implications associated with learning outcomes, whereas phenomenology is limited to studying *fixed factors of reality*.

More recently, phenomenography has been used to investigate other areas of education;

specifically (and closely related to this study), Dasborough et al. (2015) used phenomenography to study employee emotional responses to organizational change at an institution of higher education. Dasborough et al. (2015) credit the use of a phenomenography research methodology with providing a means to better examine and understand the range of feelings that accompany employee experiences during a change initiative. Further, Dasborough et al. (2015) call for researchers to adopt phenomenography in future studies that aim to explore both employee emotion and change, explaining that other research methods, such as phenomenology, view the employee emotions and change as separate entities, whereas phenomenography views them as being inseparable, allowing more flexibility to explore how people live an experience in qualitatively different ways.

### **Reflexivity and Statement of Personal Bias**

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), in qualitative studies the researcher acts as the primary data collection instrument. Consequently, the researcher's personal values, assumptions, and biases can unintentionally influence data gathering and analysis, ultimately skewing research results. However, Creswell and Creswell (2017) further explain that while a researcher's personal influence can never be completely mitigated, this aspect of qualitative research is not always damaging. Rather, a researcher's background, or experience, with a specific phenomenon can add perspective and aide research, but only if existing biases are acknowledged at the onset of the study and controlled throughout the study.

In qualitative studies the researcher is intimately involved in the process and the product and, as such, detachment from the research endeavor, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation is impossible (Horsburgh, 2003). Reflexivity, according to Horsburgh (2003), refers to active and ongoing acknowledgement that the researcher influences the meaning and



context of the phenomena being investigated. Further, Horsburgh (2003) argues that qualitative research is guided by interpreted facts, or theories that are specific in time and derived from interactions between the participant, the studied phenomena, and the researcher.

Berger (2015) states that the goal of reflexivity is to turn the “researcher lens back on oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one’s own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on...the data being collected and its interpretation” (p. 220). Berger (2015) argues that a researcher’s positioning, such as their gender, character, age, sexual orientation, personal experience, for example, impacts the research process in three ways. First, a researcher who has an understanding and who is sympathetic to a participant’s situation, or the studied phenomenon, may get better access to resources and participants who are more willing to share information. Second, a researcher’s positions may affect the researcher-participant relationship; for example, a female participant may not want to share personal information with a researcher of the opposite sex. Third, the worldview, or the researcher’s personal set of constructs, impacts the way questions are asked, responses are interpreted, and generally how a research process is executed, and how information is analyzed.

Reflexivity, or the act of continually acknowledging the researcher’s positions, including the actions and decisions that stem from those positions, during a research process is a needed measure to ensure “credibility, trustworthiness, and nonexploitative research” (Berger, 2015, p. 229). Accepted techniques for reflexivity, or maintaining a balance between the researcher and the participants personal experiences are (a) keeping a log throughout the interview process that documents how participant responses relate to the researcher’s own experience, and what emotions the responses excite; (b) repeated review of the interview material to ensure personal interpretations do not interfere with accurately understanding the participant’s experience; and

(c) allowing peers to review the analysis to identify areas where the researcher's personal experience is wrongly projecting meaning on results or interpretations.

These three approaches to reflexivity (keeping a log, repeated review, and peer review) was practiced throughout the research study and is further addressed in the following sections: Analysis and Means to Ensure Study Validity.

**Researcher's background.** The researcher has approximately fifteen years of administrative leadership experience within the higher education sector and has held management roles at both for-profit and not-for-profit universities. The researcher, until recently, was employed at a regionally accredited, private, non-profit, business school within a nationally ranked university (according to U.S. News and World Report university rankings). The researcher was the Head of Recruitment and Corporate Relations and was a member of the business school's executive leadership team. Recently, the researcher started a new executive leadership position with a private large-scale healthcare company with responsibilities focused on partnering with higher education institutions to develop education resources for the healthcare industry.

While employed within higher education, the researcher has both planned and executed organizational change from a leadership perspective, in addition to experiencing organizational change from an employee perspective. Due to these experiences, it was expected that the researcher would bring certain biases to the study, which could shape the way data are understood and experiences are interpreted. Every effort was made to control these biases and ensure objectivity throughout the study by employing the techniques of bracketing and epoche.

#### **Sources of Data**

**Target population.** This study investigated the lived experiences of select leaders within

higher education who have experienced and managed affective responses of employees throughout a period of change within the organization. The target population, including the study's criteria for inclusion, and criteria for exclusion, are as follows:

***Criteria for inclusion.*** The criteria for participant inclusion in the study included:

- Has planned and executed an organizational change initiative while employed at a regionally accredited institution of higher education
- Holds legitimate management power over a team, department, or school (within a college or university), and is or was, responsible for decision-making and employee well-being throughout a change process
- Is or was employed by a regionally accredited institution of higher education within the United States at the time of his or her involvement and management of an organizational change initiative
- Respond to invitation to participate in the study and agree to terms of the study
- Available for a one-hour web-based interview
- Agree to be audio recorded
- Agree to stipulations outlined in the informed consent document.

***Criteria for exclusion.*** If potential participants fail to meet any of the criteria outlined in the criteria for inclusion, they were excluded from participation in the study. Additional exclusion criteria include:

- Not available during data collection timeframe
- Not able to align researcher and participant schedules for a one-hour block
- Does not agree to be audio recorded
- Does not agree to stipulations outlined in the informed consent document.

Additionally, higher education does not have uniformly-adopted and reliable naming conventions for industry job titles. As such, job title was not included as a distinguishing factor in the participant selection criteria. However, it was assumed that the targeted leaders, who align to the outlined criteria, would have a title equivalent to (a) director; (b) executive director; (c) associate dean; (d) assistant dean; or (e) dean. Accordingly, these titles were used as pre-screening criteria to initially narrow the list of possible participants.

**Sampling method.** According to Weiss (1994), in a qualitative research study, participants are most often identified and selected due to their expert knowledge of a particular area, or their unique perspective of a phenomena gained through witnessing a specific event. Selecting participants who meet one, or both of these qualifiers is known as purposeful sampling, or criterion-based sampling. Purposeful sampling was used to construct a participant-panel comprised of select higher education leaders. The researcher deliberately selected participants who align to pre-identified standards, and who are deemed qualified to answer to the study's research questions. These standards are outlined in the aforementioned section, target population.

**Sample size.** Trigwell (2006) explained that phenomenographic studies are substantial research undertakings that typically include anywhere from 10 to 30 participants. However, Åkerlind (2005) warned that too many participants can potentially hinder the researcher's ability to effectively manage the data analysis process. Phenomenographic studies rely on the researcher as a tool to compare, contrast, and code data, a task that Åkerlind (2005) says becomes too daunting with a sample size greater than 20 participants. Accordingly, this study targeted a sample size of 10 participants, with a minimum of 8 participants and a maximum of 12 participants. A sample size of 8 to 12 participants is sufficient to attain saturation.

**Participant selection.** The identification and selection of participants was executed in

two phases. First, the researcher relied on an existing network of personal contacts within higher education to: (a) request participation of those who meet the identified criteria; and (b) source additional participants by asking for referrals. The researcher relied on the method of “snowballing,” which is a process of not only requesting referrals from those who choose to participate, but also those who decline participation.

Sourcing participants through the researcher’s personal network and snowballing tactics was effective at generating most of the study’s participants, however the researcher also utilized the professional networking site, LinkedIn, to source and proposition additional participants to meet the identified target of 8 to 12 participants. LinkedIn offered a specialized tool, called Sales Navigator, that afforded the researcher increased functionality within the site to target and make direct contact with potential participants who met the specified participant criteria. This technique generated hundreds of leads, which the researcher then narrowed for fit and variation.

The process for identifying prospects via LinkedIn Sales Navigator was executed according to the following methodology. The researcher:

- Logged into the Sales Navigator application via traditional LinkedIn login portal
- Opened the advanced search function located within the Sales Navigator application
- Populated search criteria aligning to the study’s outlined participant selection criteria:
  - Industry (Higher Education)
  - Geography (United States)
  - Seniority level (Director and above)
  - Years of experience
- Generated preliminary list of “leads” that potentially meet the research participant selection requirements

- Narrowed the “lead” list to 50 potential candidates by scrubbing individual professional profiles and selecting those who are likely to meet the study’s parameters, again, according to the study’s outlined participant selection criteria.

Once a list of potential participants was generated through the techniques of relying on personal network, snowballing, and utilizing LinkedIn Sales Navigator, the researcher emailed each participant to make initial contact. A standard script (see Appendix A) was utilized to explain the study’s purpose, in addition to the participants’ expectations and rights. This initial interaction also provided the researcher an opportunity to determine the participants’ willingness for inclusion and make final determinations about each candidate’s fit for the study.

### **Data Collection and Analysis: Strategies and Procedures**

This study employed a slightly adapted five-step-model of data collection and analysis, originally outlined by Hasselgren and Beach (1997). Hasselgren and Beach’s (1997) model is designed for use in phenomenography research and consists of (a) audio-recording semi-structured interviews (adapted from *conversation*); (b) transcribing audio-recorded interviews; (c) compiling transcripts; (d) conducting analysis; and (e) developing conceptions. The steps in this model, including associated strategies, procedures, and protocols, are described in detail in the following sections.

**Data collection method: semi-structured interviews.** The qualitative raw data in this research study was collected utilizing semi-structured interviews. Trigwell (2006) explained that phenomenographic studies use interviews to fully explore a participant’s lived experience with a phenomenon by asking a series of questions that center on the contextual aspects of the phenomenon, how the participant reacted and handled the situation, why he/she reacted and handled it that way, what he/she hoped to achieve, and the result of situation. Accordingly, each

participant was asked a standardized set of 10 identical questions (see Appendix B) aligning to these five areas identified by Trigwell (2006).

Additionally, according to semi-structured interview techniques, follow-up or clarifying questions were asked to ensure the participants' experiences were fully explored and ample data was collected. According to Kelly (1955), individual constructs, which shape how a person construes a phenomenon, are linked to a hierarchical structure of human experience. Thus, a researcher may need to ask follow up questions in order to help the study participant describe their experience at higher and higher levels of abstraction (Fransella & Dalton, 2000). This process is called *laddering* (Hinkle, 1965), and is typically executed by asking follow up questions phrased with “why,” e.g., “why do you feel that way?” or, “why did that you respond to the situation in that manner?”

**Data collection protocol.** After receiving IRB approval and obtaining expressed voluntarily agreement by each participant to be included in the study, a web-based interview was scheduled. The researcher sent a confirmation email to each participant and attached the informed consent document (see Appendix C). The Informed Consent Form included the expectations of the interview, along with the roles and rights of each participant, as:

- Involvement in the study is entirely voluntary
- Withdrawal is permitted without repercussion or expressed reason
- How confidentiality is maintained
- Interview recordings
- Audio files and notes will be destroyed

**Semi-structured interview protocol.** This study used standard and replicable procedures for interacting with each participant throughout the interviewing process. First, each interview

started with the researcher thanking the participant for their time and inclusion, in addition providing a quick recap of the study's purpose and the participant's role. Second, the criteria for subject participation was reviewed and subject fit and voluntary participation was verified. Third, demographic data was be collected (professional title, organization classification, participant sex, affiliation, age, and years of work experience), which is presented in Chapter 4. Fourth, participants were asked to introduce themselves by describing their professional background. Lastly, the researcher asked the prepared list of questions.

### **Tools and Instruments**

Raw data during the semi-structured interview process was collected via hard-copy notes and digital video and audio recordings, utilizing the web-based meeting software, Zoom. During each interview, the researcher utilized a writing utensil and notebook to maintain a running log of general ideas, impressions, and symbols. Hard-copy notes were scanned and saved to a password protected file on the researcher's personal laptop and referenced during the data coding process. Original hard-copy notes were stored in the researcher's private file cabinet, which remained locked throughout the study and until research materials were destroyed.

The digital recording application embedded within the Zoom webinar platform was utilized to record the interview dialogue and was password protected on the researcher's personal laptop—only accessible by the researcher. A second audio recording device was used as a backup, utilizing the application VoiceMemo. The audio device was password protected.

***Reliability and validation of tool.*** The interview protocol and tools were validated by doctoral-level peer researchers, who are familiar with qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interview techniques and protocol. Peer-review validity is achieved by having qualified peers, review and offer feedback on whether or not the interview questions are relevant



and appropriately address the research questions (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 2013).

To conduct peer-review validity, the researcher requested the assistance of two alumni from the Doctorate of Organizational Leadership (EDOL) program at Pepperdine Graduate School of Education and Psychology (GSEP). These content experts were asked to offer feedback on the research questions and corresponding interview questions. The researcher provided the table created during the prima-facie process, in addition to directions on how to complete the review process (see Appendix D). The content experts were asked to read each research question, then each corresponding interview question, and state whether or not they believed the interview question aligned and was relevant. Specifically, the content experts were asked if each question should be (a) kept as stated; (b) modified with suggestions; (c) deleted; and (d) asked if additional questions are needed or if an area was left unaddressed.

The original set of questions and revised set of questions are included in a following section.

### **Human Subject Considerations**

This research study involved human subjects and as such, it was important to ensure the rights, welfare, and safety of participants throughout the study. Ethical considerations were addressed and managed throughout this research study in accordance and adherence to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Minimal risks were involved with this research study. All subjects were adult professionals and answering questions about their personal experiences with managing the affective responses to organizational change posed no more risk than what would be expected in their day-to-day professional responsibilities. As such, this study was approved by the IRB (see Appendix E) and qualified as Exempt under *IRB Category 2: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not*

*limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies (Pepperdine IRB, 2020).*

The protection of human subjects, or participants, was managed by minimizing risk in the following areas:

- All personal identifying information was redacted from the transcriptions of the interviews and researcher field notes. In its place, general information, such as professional titles, was used to identify participants.
- General information regarding the participants' workplace, such as company or institutional name, was omitted from all results in order to minimize the risk of a participant being indirectly connected to the study.
- Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, which was stored separately from the recorded interviews.
- Participants had the right to withhold responses to questions, or withdraw from participating in the study entirely, at any point during the research process.
- The researcher personally transcribed the digital recordings and coded the data to prevent improper use from any third party.
- All digital recordings, which contain the participants' voices were stored on a password-protected device and destroyed by a process of data-wiping immediately upon the completion of the research, and within a three-year period from the time of recording.
- All research data collected was stored in a locked file cabinet for a period no longer than three years. These files were destroyed upon the completion of this research project, and

within a three-year period from the time of original generation.

## **Analysis**

**Interview transcription.** Following the five-step model of data collection and analysis outlined by Hasselgren and Beach (1997), after all semi-structured interviews were completed and before data analysis commenced, each participant interview audio recording was transcribed. The researcher personally transcribed each digital audio recording orthographically, utilizing the online audio transcription software, Trint. Each interview audio recording was uploaded to the Trint's online platform, or user interface, and an initial transcription was automatically generated by the program. To ensure accuracy of the interview transcriptions, the researcher listened to the original digital recording while simultaneously proof reading the transcription. Edits or corrections were made, where necessary.

Transcriptions were saved to separate, but uniformly-formatted Microsoft Word documents. Each document included (a) interviewer dialogue; and (b) interviewee responses.

**Thematic analysis.** According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is a method of data analysis commonly used in qualitative research for its adaptability and accessibility. The thematic method of analysis follows a systematic process to identify, organize, and offer insight into emerging themes across a data set, or detect noticeable variation therein (Braun & Clarke (2012). Sharma, Stewart, and Prosser (2004) note that phenomenographic studies do not search for pre-determined patterns in data, rather patterns emerge through analysis and are grouped and categorized in a coding process.

Thematic analysis is flexible by nature and allows the researcher to focus on a broad data set or hone in on a specific aspect of a phenomenon; to report the obvious or question latent undertones; to analyze what is said or search for ideas behind what is explicitly mentioned

(Braun & Clarke, 2012). Depending on the study's aim, thematic analysis has a broad methodological scope that allows different perspectives to be applied to data analysis, such as (a) inductive versus deductive (data coding); (b) experiential versus critical orientation, and (c) essentialist versus constructionist theoretical perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

This study adopted a thematic approach to data analysis utilizing inductive data coding procedures. According to Maxwell (2005), data coding is the main technique used to analyze and draw conclusions from qualitative raw data. The goal, as Maxwell (2005) explained "is not to produce counts of things, but to fracture the data and rearrange it into categories that facilitate the comparison of data within and between these categories [in order to] aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (p. 79). With inductive data coding, as opposed to deductive data coding, the researcher does not approach the coding process with ideas and concepts used to interpret data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This means that themes are derived from the direct responses provided by the study participants, resulting in a final analysis that closely mirrors the study's raw data content.

Braun and Clarke (2012) explain that thematic analysis is a commonly-used qualitative method of analysis, but until recently, its procedures have been largely unclear. As a result, many researchers tend to either conduct analysis without a supporting reference or generate a mixed analysis approach comprised of different qualitative research methods. This argument is supported by Entwistle (1997) who explain that many phenomenographic studies are conducted without the necessary rigor and using imprecise descriptions of the procedures executed throughout the data coding and analysis process. Accordingly, to increase the reliability and validity of this study, the researcher adhered to the six-phase approach to data analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012):

- a. **Phase 1**—*Familiarizing yourself with the data*: To ensure the researcher had a firm understanding of the interview responses, for purposes of data familiarity and reflexivity, each transcript was read through twice. During the first read-through, notes were taken to record impressions or ideas. The researcher then read-through the transcripts again while listening to each digital recording. This process allowed the researcher to make notes on any nuance and identify spoken context.
- b. **Phase 2**—*Generating initial codes*: The researcher generated and logged descriptive or interpretive codes derived from the researcher's impressions, ideas, or conceptions. Each code was recorded and linked to the corresponding statement in each transcript. Codes were refined as needed throughout the coding progresses.
- c. **Phase 3**—*Searching for themes*: Braun and Clarke (2012) explain that themes emerge from patterned responses in the data set, which capture information that is important to answering the study's research questions. Themes were generated by reviewing the coded data and actively searching for overlap, or areas of similarity. Once an area of overlap or similarity has been identified, the corresponding codes were grouped into a theme, subsequently creating a cluster that may have attached subgroups.
- d. **Phase 4**—*Reviewing potential themes*: during this phase the researcher reviewed the developed themes and compared them to the original coded data set. The researcher tested the extracted themes with the following questions outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012):
  - Can the theme be considered a simple code?
  - Does the theme suggest anything useful about the data set and research questions?
  - Are there enough data in the coded data set to classify the idea as a theme?

- Does the theme correlate to other themes, or is the data too wide-ranging?
  - Can the theme be collapsed into other themes?
  - Themes that do not pass these questions were discarded.
- e. **Phase 5—*Defining and naming the themes***: This phase involves creating an analytic narrative with supporting data that is directly extracted from participant responses (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The researcher interpreted the themes and drew connections to the research questions that answer the question “so what” (Braun & Clarke, 2012).
- f. **Phase 6—*Producing the report***: The final phase of analysis includes connecting themes in a logical and meaningful way that shows a scholarly level of rigor and provides a compelling argument in response to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The researcher included a final report in this study’s research results.

Additionally, to support the iterative process of coding and provide documentation of the codes and themes, the qualitative analysis software *HyperRESEARCH* was used. Utilizing HyperRESEARCH enabled the use of a peer-reviewer to ensure reliability and increase the validity of the coded transcripts.

### **Means to Ensure Study Validity**

In order for research to be valid it is not enough to follow only a set of commonly accepted procedures or techniques; rather the research conclusions must have the right relationship to what is expected in the real world (Maxwell, 2005). Furthermore, this research subscribed to Maxwell’s (2005) definition of validity which “refers to the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 87). In order to ensure a level of correctness that is expected in the real world this study employed the techniques of (a) bracketing and epoche; (b) interrater reliability and validity; and

(c) prima-facie and content validity.

***Bracketing and epoche.*** In order to increase reflexivity and mitigate the risk that personal bias may skew the study's results, the researcher acknowledged experiences or preconceived ideas about the studied phenomena by utilizing the techniques of bracketing or epoche (Richards & Morse, 2013; Moustakas, 2011). Bracketing or epoche requires that a researcher's personal presuppositions about the phenomena be written down in a journal and addressed in the study's analysis and results; this process helped the researcher approach data authentically and aid research transparency (Moustakas, 2011).

***Interrater reliability and validity.*** A three-step interrater process was employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the data analysis. First, the researcher personally coded two interviews according to the process previously outlined. Second, two experienced doctorate-level professionals with training in qualitative research methods examined the coding process and results generated from the first two coded interviews. Third, the researcher and external professionals discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the coding process and adjustments were made to the coding protocol to ensure validity of the data analysis procedures. The revised coding protocol was then applied to the remaining set of interviews.

***Prima-facie and content validity.*** To further ensure legitimacy of this study prima-facie validity, or content validity, was applied. Prima-facie validity is achieved by evaluating the connection between the research questions and the intended purpose, or aim, of the research study. This was achieved by the creation of a table (see Table 8) that provided a clear representation of each research question with corresponding interview questions. Presenting the information in this fashion allowed the researcher to confirm that purposeful data, which aligns to the study's aim, would be derived by data gathering process.

Table 8

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions (Original—prior to revision)*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
<p>RQ1: How do leaders in higher education conceptualize and experience affective dimensions of organizational change?</p>	<p>IQ 1: Please describe your experience(s) managing employee emotional responses during a change initiative.</p> <p>IQ 5: In what ways did employee reactions aid or hinder your ability to implement the change?</p> <p>IQ 6: What surprised you most, if anything, about employee emotional reactions during the process of change?</p> <p>IQ 9: Was managing the change initiative a fulfilling experience for you?</p> <p>IQ 10: What advice or recommendations, would you give to aspiring higher education leaders who will be managing change initiatives in the future?</p>
<p>RQ 2: What do leaders in higher education do, if anything, to manage the affective responses of their employees during an organizational transition?</p>	<p>IQ 2: What steps did you take to prepare <i>yourself</i> to manage employee emotional reactions to an upcoming change initiative?</p> <p>IQ 3: What steps did you take to prepare your <i>employees</i>, emotionally, before initiating the change initiative?</p> <p>IQ 4: Discuss your interactions with your employees during the change initiative.</p> <p>IQ 7: What tactics did you employ that helped, or hurt, your ability to manage employee emotional responses?</p> <p>IQ 8: Were you able to manage employee emotional reactions to your desired level of expectation?</p>

The aforementioned interview questions (above in Table 8) were slightly modified, following a peer-review process to test reliability and validate the research tool. The revised



interview questions are included in the following table (see Table 9).

Table 9

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions (Revised)*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
<p>RQ1: How do leaders in higher education conceptualize and experience affective dimensions of organizational change?</p>	<p>IQ 1: <i>(not modified)</i> Please describe your experience(s) managing employee emotional responses during a change initiative.</p> <p>IQ 5: <i>(not modified)</i> In what ways did employee reactions aid or hinder your ability to implement the change?</p> <p>IQ 6: <i>(not modified)</i> What surprised you most, if anything, about employee emotional reactions during the process of change?</p> <p>IQ 9: <i>(modified)</i> Please explain how managing the change initiative was, or was not, a fulfilling experience for you?</p> <p>IQ 10: <i>(not modified)</i> What advice or recommendations, would you give to aspiring higher education leaders who will be managing change initiatives in the future?</p>
<p>RQ 2: What do leaders in higher education do, if anything, to manage the affective responses of their employees during an organizational transition?</p>	<p>IQ 2: <i>(modified)</i> What steps did you take, if any, to prepare <i>yourself</i> to manage employee emotional reactions to an upcoming change initiative?</p> <p>IQ 3: <i>(modified)</i> What steps did you take, if any, to prepare your <i>employees</i>, emotionally, before initiating the change initiative?</p> <p>IQ 4: <i>(not modified)</i> Discuss your interactions with your employees during the change initiative.</p>

(Continued)

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	<p data-bbox="703 279 964 312">IQ 7: <i>(not modified)</i></p> <p data-bbox="703 317 1333 422">What tactics did you employ that helped, or hurt, your ability to manage employee emotional responses?</p> <p data-bbox="703 464 915 497">IQ 8: <i>(modified)</i></p> <p data-bbox="703 501 1349 606">Please explain if, throughout the change initiative, you were able to manage employee emotional reactions to your desired level of expectation?</p>

### Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the research methodology for this study and provided the rationale behind selecting a qualitative phenomenographic research design. Due to the nature of change and human emotions, a qualitative approach provides flexibility in order to more deeply investigate how affective factors affect a leader’s ability to implement organizational change. This chapter also covered the construct behind data gathering, analysis, validity, and reliability practices. Lastly, IRB procedures are discussed, including the steps this researcher took to ensure protection of all human subjects, or participants.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

This chapter contains the results of the qualitative phenomenographic study which examined the research questions:

**RQ1:** How do leaders in higher education conceptualize and experience affective dimensions of organizational change?

**RQ2:** What do leaders in higher education do, if anything, to manage the affective responses of their employees during an organizational transition?

Included in this chapter are the procedures used to examine the research questions. First, it provides a brief summary of the research sample, using a table to illustrate participant demographic information. Next, it reviews the data collection and analysis protocol, which aligned to the qualitative phenomenographic methodology outlined in Chapter 3. Lastly, this chapter provides a discussion of the results generated from the coding-analysis process.

### Participants

Eight higher education professionals agreed to participate in this study. The participants' demographics are summarized below representing the minimum participation requirements determined by the researcher in the design. Of the eight research participants selected, five stemmed from the researcher's personal network, two stemmed from outreach conducted on the professional social media platform, LinkedIn, and one participant stemmed from the technique of snowballing (or participant referral). An additional two candidates initially agreed to participate, but failed to respond to the researcher's attempts to schedule interviews during the available data collection window.

All eight participants planned and executed an organizational change initiative while

employed at a regionally accredited institution of higher education. Three of the eight participants led organizational change at public institutions. Three of the eight participants led organizational change at private, not-for-profit institutions. The remaining two participants led organizational change at private, for-profit institutions.

Each of the eight participants directly managed employees during the time of organizational change and responsibility for employee well-being throughout the change process. One of the eight participants held a director-level title. Three of the eight participants held a vice president level title. The remaining four participants held a dean level title, or above. All participants work at regionally accredited universities that reside in one of the three geographical regions of the United States: West (participants from California and Utah), Central (participants from Texas and Illinois), and East (participants from Pennsylvania and Maryland).

Further, the participants ranged between 39 and 67 years-of-age, with the average participant age being 49 years. The participants held between 9 and 36 years of professional experience within higher education, with the average professional experience being 19 years.

Table 10 provides a summary and comparison of participant demographics.

Table 10						
<i>Participant Demographics</i>						
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Higher Ed. Work Experience</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Organization Classification</b>	<b>Location</b>
Participant #1	Area President	40	17 Years	Male	Private for-profit, degree-granting	CA
Participant #2	Assistant Dean	39	16 Years	Male	Private not-for-profit, degree-granting	PA

(Continued)

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Higher Ed. Work Experience</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Organization Classification</b>	<b>Location</b>
Participant #3	Associate Dean	39	15 Years	Male	Private not-for-profit, degree-granting	MD
Participant #4	Dean	67	36 Years	Male	Public, degree-granting	CA
Participant #5	Vice President	51	9 Years	Male	Public, degree-granting	IL
Participant #6	Associate Vice President	48	25 Years	Fem.	Private not-for-profit, degree-granting	CA
Participant #7	Associate Vice President	42	16 Years	Male	Private for-profit, degree-granting	TX
Participant #8	Dept. Director	64	17 Years	Fem.	Public, degree-granting	UT

### **Data Collection**

Data collection commenced with sourcing, selecting, and scheduling participant interviews with higher education professionals who met the study's criteria for inclusion. The eight participant interviews satisfied the study's minimum participant number and served as the primary source of data. Each participant interviewed separately and responded to a set of 10 semi-structured interview questions. According to semi-structured interview protocol, the researcher asked follow up questions, where necessary, to uncover the nuance associated with the participants' experiences.

The interviews were conducted on the Zoom video conferencing application and took place between December 11, 2019 and January 2, 2020. Each interview varied in length and lasted between 25 and 42 minutes. The interviews were recorded on two separate audio-devices: Zoom video conferencing audio/video recording feature and iPhone Voice Memo. Zoom audio recordings represented seven of the eight transcriptions, and the backup audio on iPhone

represented one, in place of the Zoom audio, which was poor in quality.

The following table provides a breakdown of each participant’s interview: date, method, and length.

Table 11			
<i>Participant Interview Dates, Interview Method, and Length of Recorded Interview</i>			
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Interview Method</b>	<b>Length of Recorded Interview</b>
Participant #1	December 11, 2019	Zoom Video Conference	36:13
Participant #2	December 13, 2019	Zoom Video Conference	40:23
Participant #3	December 16, 2019	Zoom Video Conference	25:46
Participant #4	December 16, 2019	Zoom Video Conference	38:53
Participant #5	December 17, 2019	Zoom Video Conference	39:55
Participant #6	December 18, 2019	Zoom Video Conference	23:29
Participant #7	December 19, 2019	Zoom Video Conference	24:57
Participant #8	January 2, 2020	Zoom Video Conference	41:07

### **Interview Transcription and Data Analysis**

Following the participant interviews, the researcher transcribed each audio file for ensuing coding and analysis. The interviews’ MP4 audio files, recorded via Zoom, were uploaded to the web-based transcription software—Trint. To ensure accuracy of the texts, the interview transcription process included two rounds of review. In the first round the researcher used software to transcribe each interview and generate a text document. Next, the researcher listened to each audio recording while reading along with the Trint-generated transcription. This allowed the researcher to identify errors and make needed corrections.

Once the interviews were transcribed and prepared for coding, the researcher reviewed previously documented assumptions to help control and mitigate the influence of personal biases on the analysis process, in accordance with qualitative reflexivity techniques. Further, an inter-rater review process also helped control and mitigate the influence of personal biases.

Next, two interview transcriptions were uploaded to the coding software HyperRESEARCH and reviewed for key concepts. The researcher examined the interview texts thoroughly to extract relevant keywords or thoughts. These keywords and thoughts were catalogued in HyperRESEARCH's codebook and grouped into common themes.

**Inter-rater reliability review process.** Two doctorate-level peers with training in qualitative methods reviewed the coding procedures and initial coding results from the first two interviews. To ensure validity, the peer-reviewers provided written feedback, in addition to meeting with the researcher to engage in dialogue about the coding protocol. The group discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the initial coding process and came to a consensus on needed adjustments. For example, the researcher learned that the high volume of themes extracted from the text could potentially distract the researcher from connecting to the essence of the message or story being told by the participant. According to the inter-rater reliability feedback, the researcher applied recommended modifications to the remaining interviews.

## Discussion of Results

The initial analysis of the eight interview transcripts yielded a total of 198 key concepts, or codes. Figure 2 provides a visual representation, or word cloud, of 40 of the most frequently occurring keywords that resulted from the initial analysis process.

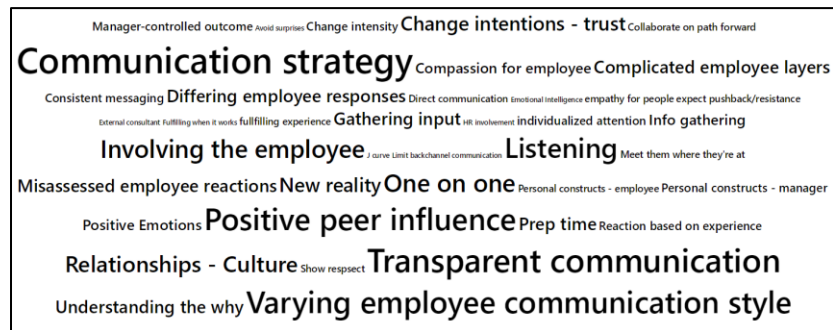


Figure 2. Keyword Frequency Cloud. The terms found in the frequency cloud represent the most commonly occurring keywords that were used by study participants. The figure was generated using HyperRESEARCH software.

Further analysis of the 198 initial codes yielded 64 first level categories, which were reduced to 23 second level categories. Those categories generated eight themes that correspond to the research and interview questions and ultimately represent the affective dimensions that leaders experience during a organizational change process. The eight themes are: (1) situational variables; (2) communication strategies; (3) leader readiness; (4) culture; (5) leader behaviors and attitudes; (6) leader beliefs (constructs); (7) leader competencies; and (8) unexpected affective responses. These themes, including the first and second level categories, are represented in Table 12.

Table 12		
<i>Analysis Results: Affective Dimensions of Change</i>		
Level 1 Categories	Level 2 Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Light impact – e.g. changes to facilities</li> <li>- Medium change – e.g. changes to policies or procedures</li> <li>- High impact – e.g. staff reductions</li> </ul>	Change intensity	(1) Situational Variables
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employees’ pre-existing constructs on change</li> <li>- Employee’s tenure</li> <li>- Employee/Leader relationships</li> </ul>	Individual (employee) characteristics	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time of year</li> <li>- Timeline for executing the change</li> <li>- Time available for preparation</li> </ul>	Timing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employee layers (org structure)</li> <li>- Faculty vs. staff</li> <li>- Managing supervisor (or HR) expectations</li> </ul>	Organizational layers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individualized communication</li> <li>- Group communication</li> </ul>	Communication method	(2) Communication Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Frequent vs infrequent</li> <li>- Formal and informal</li> </ul>	Communication frequency	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Direct communication</li> <li>- Transparent communication</li> <li>- Gathering feedback</li> <li>- Establishing vision</li> <li>- Tailoring feedback</li> <li>- Consistent messaging</li> </ul>	Message Positioning	

(Continued)



Level 1 Categories	Level 2 Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leader needs time to struggle with emotions</li> <li>- Act with emotional intelligence by setting own emotions aside—focus on employees</li> </ul>	Mindfulness (Psychological Freedom)	(3) Leader readiness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gathering information</li> <li>- Preparing for different personalities (conduct assessments)</li> <li>- Preparing for different styles of communication</li> <li>- Preparing talking points</li> <li>- Role playing</li> </ul>	Communication readiness	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empowering employees to feel level of control</li> <li>- Collaborating on path forward</li> <li>- Dealing with tough groups (executive decision)</li> </ul>	Employee involvement	(4) Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reinforcing positive affect</li> <li>- Controlling for negative affect</li> <li>- Establishing new norms</li> </ul>	Environmental considerations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bringing on external consultant</li> <li>- Getting feedback and coaching</li> </ul>	Guiding support	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meet them where the employee is at (emotionally)</li> <li>- Understanding the employees' personal situation</li> <li>- Approach with sensitivity (less rigid) with empathy</li> </ul>	Compassion	(5) Leader behaviors and attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change intentions – trustworthiness</li> <li>- Relatability to employee</li> <li>- Respecting employee experiences</li> </ul>	Authenticity and Relatability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Remaining patient</li> <li>- Being open to pivoting often</li> <li>- Having courage to change</li> </ul>	Adaptability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Validating employee emotions</li> <li>- Acknowledging positive emotions</li> </ul>	Emotional Focus	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excessive change in higher education</li> <li>- Negative perceptions and emotions (make the best of it)</li> </ul>	Environment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hard, but fulfilling experience (personal growth opportunity)</li> <li>- Hard, conflict between executing duty and being authentic</li> </ul>	Self	(6) Leader beliefs (constructs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employees do not like change (pushback and resistance)</li> </ul>	Employee	

(Continued)

Level 1 Categories	Level 2 Categories	Themes
- Challenging to predict employee response	Predicting employee emotion	(7) Leader competencies
- Misdiagnosing employee emotional reactions - Difficulty assessing 'absence' of emotions - Acknowledge changing emotions throughout time	Assessing employee emotion	
- Formal training vs no training - Acknowledgement of skills gap	Managing employee emotion	
- Employee unwavering allegiance to past - Negative emotions overshadowed positive - Employees' positive support - Not surprised - Employees' desire to resist (even when change mandated)	Areas of surprise (unexpected employee reactions)	(8) Unexpected Affective Responses

**1. Situational variables.** Situational variables are those that are unique to each change event and played a role in influencing the leader's behavior, including how the leader planned and executed the event. Under this theme, four categories were represented in the data: (a) change intensity; (b) individual (employee) characteristics; (c) organizational layers; and (d) timing.

**Change intensity.** Four participants expressed that the type of change being implemented has bearing on the experience of both the manager and the employee. Sentiments among the participants were that all change is not equal, and each have varying levels of intensities that do not only impact employees' emotional responses, but also impact the leader's specific experience. For example, Participant 2 shared that changes to the campus layout required the elimination of a staff break room, which yielded mixed reactions from the employees, but ultimately emotions were short lived. Participant 5 oversaw a major reduction in staff, which resulted in deep emotional impact for him and his staff.

Participant 6 explains that higher education change varies greatly:

We're seeing all different levels of change. There is this very small-minded change, which might be a particular procedure and how we handle something. And then there can be a little bit bigger change, something that's...more of a policy change that impacts many of the staff or students. And then there's even the bigger level change. Maybe, you know, university wide or within our division, whether it be in management or maybe an executive order that came down from the [organization] system (P6).

**Individual (employee) characteristics.** All participants highlighted individual characteristics, such as, preexisting constructs, employee tenure, and employee/leader relationships as a leading factor in the leader's ability to execute change. Participant 2 stated, "I'll tell you, it's really better when you have [employee] tenure. And really good relationships amongst that tenure." Six participants cited relationships as an important factor. Participant 6 states:

You have to have a great amount of respect for your staff and colleagues, and in turn they will respect you, and so we may not always all agree on something, but when there's that underlying, there's the respect that just exists and that always makes it easier to go through the change....I'm just a strong believer in building relationships and always having that deep respect for my staff and my colleagues. Yeah. And hopefully that way, when you're faced with these initiatives and change, that can be difficult for some to embrace. In the end, they can still just respect you and that helps move the process along (P6).

**Timing.** Another situational variable that impacts leader experience is timing. Four participants mentioned *time* as an affective dimension of organizational change. Three key concepts discussed were: (a) time of year; (b) the timeline of the change initiative; and (c) preparation time. Participant 5 recalled a situation in which the time of year impacted his experience with the change initiative.

...we laid off probably 30 people two weeks before Christmas. It was the worst thing I've ever had to do. And you almost wanted to drop your pen and just walk out because you knew you were letting people go with a two-week severance, two weeks before Christmas. And it just felt horrible. And so that's where, you know, as a leader, you have to follow through and make the best of it you can, which is what I did. But those thoughts are hard and you bring those home a little bit....You know, you look back in hindsight

and try to play it over again and realize that maybe I should have been a little more vocal and pushed not to do it, you know, to try to change leadership's decision, not to do it two weeks before Christmas, that's what I took away from it...because time of year really matters (P5).

Participant 4 shared an experience with the amount time it took to implement a student learning management system and process to track and report on student learning outcomes. A certain level of resistance was expected, but Participant 4 stated that he was frustrated and “shocked” by how long it took. Further, he explained that “faculty said, no, this is not a critical thing,” even though the state governing body mandated the change. Participant 4 explained, “faculty don’t like to be told what to do. They don’t want to be held accountable. It was just a lot more difficult than I thought it would be.”

**Organizational layers.** Six participants highlighted organizational layers as a situational variable that adds to the complexity of managing affective factors. Participant 2 explained that as a leader, he not only had to think and plan for how frontline staff would respond, but also how the managers who were tasked with communicating that change would respond. Further, Participant 2 explained that this adds another element to executing the change because not only does the leader have to control for the emotional reactions of his or her managers, but they also need to ensure their managers who oversee change are trained to control for the emotions of the frontline staff.

Participant 2 and 4 oversaw both staff and faculty, which added another affective dimension for these leaders to manage. Participant 4 explained:

You can tell a staff person. This is where we're going to go. And by and large, they're willing to move towards that goal. But a faculty member, you need to have this consultative process. You need to make sure that they feel like you're part of the decision (P2).

Further, Participant 5 shared an experience where he had to plan and implement the change, but the planned change was an executive order from his boss and came with expectations, not only from the boss, but also from human resources. As such, in addition to managing staff, there is an element associated with managing up and ensuring that stakeholders' expectations are also being met. Participant 5 explained that after planning and implementing a change that he felt was wrong, would "in hindsight" be "more vocal and...try to change leadership's decision."

**2. Communication strategies.** The most prevalent theme across the data set, mentioned by all eight participants, is communication. Broadly, participants' sentiments suggest that a leaders' handling of factors related to communication is a leading determinant of emotional responses to change. Within the overarching theme of communication strategies, four unique categories were derived from 41 key concepts. Those categories are: (a) communication modality; (b) communication frequency; (c) communication techniques; (d) and message positioning. Another category related to communication strategy is communication readiness; this concept is addressed in a discussion of the theme: Preparation.

**Communication method.** Four participants identified their employees' varying communication styles as a challenge to effectively choosing a single mode of communication. In an effort to overcome this challenge, all participants expressed the use of a mixed or blended approach to communicating, balancing individualized and group communication, including both informal (conversations in the hall) and formal (planned presentations) approaches. The use of these modalities varied greatly depending on the communication style of the leader, the type of change being announced, and subsequently, the degree of expected emotional responses. For example, Participant 2 announced the change to the group and then met with employees

individually.

I like to announce big changes broadly so that everyone hears [about the change] at the same time in the same forum. The high level. And then what I like to do is circle back to each one because each of them have a different propensity and sort of tolerance for change. And, they're all at different levels of the irritability scale. Maybe where a couple are more like, "oh, yeah, I'm good, like, whatever works," versus, "I am so mad about this because ABC." So, I think if you do too [much hashing out of unique individual responses] in a public setting, it can get sideways very quickly (P2).

Participant 3 met with individuals one on one, then announced the change to the group.

You start planting a smaller seed at a local level, leading up to larger presentation, larger announcements, and larger kind of system-wide email that will eventually come out communicating the change. So that when someone who is affected receives the ultimate news, there's no major surprises.... It starts small, one on one conversations and then works bigger, like small presentations to a department, maybe to a conglomerate, a group of departments and into a division, and then ultimately to the school and so on and so forth. So you kind of build it up so that there's never a surprise along the way (P3).

Participant 6 used both individualized and group communication simultaneously.

So in some cases, that meant having one on one meetings, sharing the information. In some cases it was with groups of people large and small, but it was just important to get the information out as much as possible.... I think we were very, very diligent about talking to all of these different groups of numerous, numerous meetings across campus and some individual meetings, as I mentioned, some in small groups and in large groups or presentations. And it really was a very wide variety of types of meetings (P6).

**Communication frequency.** Three participants expressed the need to communicate regularly, or follow up, throughout the change process in order to limit "back channel communication." Participant 8 explained that consistent follow up helps mitigate speculation, which "can be terribly destructive and stop progress." Participant 1 reinforced this position by explaining that a stalled change effort could have been avoided by providing more frequent communication.

There wasn't a lot of communication, frequent communication updates that were being provided to the groups as some of the changes were happening. And so, I believe if there had been more frequent communication...that absolutely could have helped people along in the change process.... So, I think that lessons helped us kind of, I guess, move at a faster pace as we continue to evolve over the past three to four years (P1).

**Message Positioning.** All participants indicated that the leader's approach to communication, and how they positioned the message, are important facets to managing employee emotional responses. Six key categories were identified within this theme: direct communication, transparent communication, gathering feedback, establishing vision, tailoring feedback, and consistent messaging.

Seven of eight participants highlighted the need to have open and transparent communication, which is frequently occurring and consistent concept throughout much of the data set. The group explained that employees reacted negatively to being surprised, provoking doubt and cynicism. Participant 8 stated that a lack of transparency damaged the employees' trust, and Participant 6 mentioned withholding information limited her ability to create buy-in. Participant 4 recounted how he used transparent communication to resolve the concern of an employee who misinterpreted leadership's intention for removing faculty from the student advising process.

I talked to her quite often to let her know why we were doing what we were doing. She's a... I guess, I shouldn't say she's a conspiracy theorist person, she's not really. But in this case, she saw a conspiracy, right? We're trying to take her out of the advising [students]. And we're trying to take her students away. That's how she saw it and I had to keep reinforcing, no, that's not the intent, that's not the purpose. It's not. It worked pretty well (P4).

While sentiments amongst the participants commonly aligned on the need to be transparent in communication, some believed there are limitations and degrees to which certain messages can be shared. Participant 3 explained that a leader can be transparent while still withholding information.

I've learned [since the change] that it's OK to say that there's going to be impacts that won't be spoken about publicly and, really, it's out of respect for the individuals that that information is being withheld to begin with. So that's one is that you acknowledge there will be change, you acknowledge there will be some pain potentially, and then you

acknowledge that those individuals who've been notified individually out of respect to them (P3).

A slightly differing view is that relaying information too early, could potentially cause more disruption than withholding that information. Speaking about an impending layoff, Participant 5 explained,

HR and the leadership is pushing for you not to say anything until that moment. And that makes it incredibly tough. You talk about blindsiding somebody. I usually try to negotiate with HR that I want to bring my team into to socialize with them. And I found it best when the employees weren't told ahead of time, but their leaders were. It helps prepare them, because typically the event would be done by me. But then they'll always follow up with their leaders. So, if they're not prepared for that, it can kind of go awry. But my experience is if you give a heads up to the employees on that kind of situation, it becomes a bit of a wildfire...push back, back channel conversations. And a lot of times it's a lot of inaccuracy. So, it's hard to kind of walk a line in that (P5).

Six participants expressed the importance of gathering feedback and listening to their employees throughout the change process. Participant 2 explained that in response to a negative reaction from an employee, he simply ignored the situation and believed the employee would resolve the concern on their own. Later he learned that the employee's negative emotions could have been mitigated much sooner had he given the employee a forum to voice their opinion and be "heard out."

Leaders listed a number of techniques they used to gather feedback, such as town hall meetings, surveys, walkabouts, focus groups, and one-on-ones.

Five participants highlighted their role in establishing a clear vision. This involved goal setting, establishing new values, redirecting attention to the future, and helping the team understand why the change is needed.

Another aspect of setting a clear vision, according to Participant 1, was helping his team overcome the feelings association with the loss of something familiar by helping them refocus on developing new norms that would guide desired behaviors—a process of establishing a common



set of values, which he called giving the employees a “true north”.

So we established six core values as a group rather quickly, within the first 90 days...that's what we would point back to when we felt like we were dealing with the emotions of “I'm not really quite sure what to do or this is different now.” Let's go back to some of those key things that we're all focused on.... And so, kind of finding a common language right off the bat (P1).

3. **Leader readiness.** Seven participants identified leader readiness, the extent to which a leader is prepared to plan, organize, lead change, as a key factor in managing the affective dimensions of change. Two types of readiness were derived from participant responses: (a) psychological readiness, mentioned by six participants, and (b) communication readiness, mentioned by five participants.

*Mindfulness (psychological freedom).* Mindfulness is categorized as a leader’s ability to detach themselves psychologically from a certain situation in order to recognize and manage emotions, or respond with a high level of emotional intelligence (Hede, 2010). Leaders described this process as first, wrestling with their own emotions in order to reach a place of psychological freedom, before they could respond in an emotionally intelligent manner and effectively respond to others’ emotional needs. Participant 7 emphasized:

I think it’s important to ride that change roller coaster first, so that you’ve gone through the stages [of emotion], you’ve reconciled and processed and all the sort of machinations, the emotional machinations of dealing with change, so that your tank is full (P7).

Participant 8 warned that if the leader fails to become emotionally centered, change efforts could be damaged, or potentially worse.

As a leader, if you haven't gotten yourself in the right place, you're not going to be able to lead [employees]. You have to have worked through basically the dynamics of change yourself and then having the information as best you can to be able to lead with confidence and without understanding that yourself, and if you're walking through with them at the same time, it slows it down. You lose a lot of good people. It becomes very chunky. You get a lot of resistance (P8).

**Communication readiness.** As previously highlighted, communication is a prominent theme in the research data, and participants acknowledged that communication was a dimension that encompassed much of their preparations. Preparation for each of the participants varied depending on their unique situation and the population of employees they oversaw. For example, Participant 4 implemented change that impacted both staff and faculty. However, unlike many other participants, Participant 4 focused his attention on the faculty:

I think you have to do the research and data analysis that can support the change that you're trying to do. Why do you want to do something? Show me the evidence that it's important. That's what the faculty question's going to be. So, you've got to have that survey research. You've got to have the data. You've got to have the literature review. Other people have done something similar. Here's what they found. Those kinds of things, Right? And then you can bring it to the faculty, and you can say, OK, here's what other people have tried to do to make this happen. Here's what our own data say (P4).

Further, Participant 4 stated he did not spend much time preparing communication for the staff because in his experience, you do not need to “appeal to reason,” rather, you simply need to give them direction, then provide them the resources and tools to be successful.

Similarly, participants who led change with staff members also prepared by gathering as much information as possible. However, Participant 6 explained, her intent was *not* to generate reports and appeal to reason, it was to prepare for the wide range of possible staff responses. She emphasized:

...you're going to have your group of people that are onboard and team players and ready to go with you. You're going to have those that might be a little hesitant and leery about the change. Then, of course, you're going to have...kind of the naysayers, right? Those that are going to be against it. And so it's important once again to be as informed as possible. And part of that, being informed, is also being prepared to respond to each of those groups. It's those naysayers that are probably the most obviously challenging to respond to, because actually it's a change that's inevitable, it's going to happen either way. Somehow, you've got to figure out how to still work with those people and to help them understand that (P6).

In addition to gathering information, participant preparation included preparing talking points, creating a communication strategy (similar to steps in a sales strategy), role playing with colleagues, and having the team take personality assessments in order to know their personal communication styles.

4. **Culture.** Participant responses indicated that factors related to culture and employee experience are important affective dimensions that impacted both the employee and leader experience. Three categories were derived from the data that aligned to culture: (a) employee involvement, (b) environment considerations, and (c) guiding support.

**Employee involvement.** Seven participants highlighted factors tied to the level of employee involvement after the change is announced. The level of involvement ranged from no involvement, bypassing the employee altogether, to heavy involvement, such as including the employee in the planning process and future steering efforts.

Participant 7 stated, “people don’t want to be steered all the time. They want to [feel] like they’re kind of in control.” Further, Participant 7 emphasized that having a sense of control also helps the employee buy into the change and own the outcome. Participant 2 stressed that even in situations where a decision has already been made, creating the appearance of employee control, even if that control is a facade, is still better than circumventing the employees’ involvement.

...even if they think they're part of making the decision, even as the decision sometimes already made, that makes that change so much easier (P2).

Participant 6 shared similar sentiments about creating buy-in through employee involvement, adding that, not only should employee be made to “feel” in control, they should have real choices:

It's never a matter of just saying this is how it's going to be. I think it's important to present change, whatever the changes, as an option. “Here's something we are considering. What are your thoughts?” And because, maybe, there is a better way. It

allows an opportunity to brainstorm some ideas. And if there is something that someone else can come up with that would work better. Fantastic. Once again, it's going for that buy-in too (P6).

Participant 4 mentioned that staff are too often overlooked, but typically interested in helping the leader execute the needed change. However, they need to be given the opportunity to provide input, and the resources to enable their support.

Other participants experienced situations where employee involvement was not possible. For example, Participant 8 stated that no matter what the manager does, some employees will simply not cooperate. In those instances, Participant 8, in addition to participants 4 and 6, stated that an executive decision needed to be made, and in order to make progress, tough groups need to be bypassed. In that instance, Participant 8 mentioned that people have an active choice and either need to “move on or get on board”—and the leader needs to help them come to that realization.

***Environmental considerations.*** Four participants highlighted the need to control factors related to the environment as a part of controlling the culture. This included areas such as: (a) reinforcing positive affect; (b) controlling for negative affect; and (c) setting employee expectations (creating new norms).

Group sentiments aligned to higher education being an environment of continual change, which creates a taxing environment in which employees are expected to perform at a high level, but always have shifting expectations. To combat this challenge, Participant 1 shared a few tactics:

...we instituted a lot of kind of professional development opportunities, conference attendance workshops. And then we've had a little bit of fun with sporting events. And, you know, let's all grab some lunch and take off for the rest of the day and have community-based activities. And so, kind of creating that environment, a culture that likes to win but also happens a little bit of fun, I think has helped kind of bring us back to kind of finding a new norm (P1).

Other tactics shared by the participants to reinforce positive affect are to identify and highlight employee strengths (things they are doing well), acknowledge and celebrate those employees who are having positive experiences, and identify change champions to model desired behaviors. Participant 6 emphasized the power of peer influence:

...there's just that one exponential factor, right? People being in support of the change. In the end it helps to send a positive attitude about, whatever the change is, so that's certainly beneficial (P6).

Six participants emphasized the importance of relying on positive employee emotions in order to influence and garner additional support. This concept was mentioned 16 times throughout the data and represents the most cited tactic to create a culture of positive affect. Participant 8 shared that employees will more than likely believe their peers before they believe their leader.

...who are those one or two people that people tend to follow? Bring them in early on, help them be part of the change and help you kind of see the positive elements of that going forward. So, finding those early adopters or those unofficial leaders and bringing them on board to help with that process is important because they have to work through their fears, too. But people will believe them more than they'll believe you as a leader (P8).

In addition to controlling for positive affect, four participants emphasized the importance of controlling and mitigating negative affect. These participants explained that employees will share bad experiences with others, which can be destructive and stop progress. Participant 8 highlighted that employees “tied up in the fear space...often want friends to go to that space with them.”

Tactics leaders used to mitigate negative affect are treating employees with respect, limit backchannel speculation (by providing frequent and transparent communication), build authentic relationships, and lean on outside consultation.

**Guiding support.** Three participants leaned on outside help to guide their efforts. For example, after identifying roadblocks that might prevent progress, Participant 4 brought in external help who had the ability to speak to staff and faculty on both a personal and professional level:

...the person I had work with me...she's really calm. She's able to talk to people. talk people down off the fence. She works in our counseling department. It worked pretty well (P4).

Participant 2 also relied on outside help, but in the form of his supervisor. When addressed with an issue that he felt he handled incorrectly, he approached his supervisor for coaching and feedback. He explained this guidance helped him pivot and identify a new path forward with the employee who, until that time, was not responding well to the change.

**5. Leader behaviors and attitudes.** Participant sentiments around the way in which a leader acts and responds to others has a measured impact on managing affective dimensions of change. This theme comprises four key concepts: (a) compassion; (b) authenticity and relatability; (c) adaptability; and (d) emotional intelligence.

**Compassion.** Eight participants indicated compassion for employees as a factor related to managing affective dimensions of change. Sentiments in this area aligned to having a caring and selfless approach to implementing change and included discussions around, being empathetic, knowing and being interested in the employees' personal situations, meeting the employee where they are at (emotionally), and being less rigid with progress. Participant 5 emphasized:

You have to have real empathy for people or it comes across sterile, and even with people, you have to understand that this is a serious event for them.... And so if you don't take it seriously, you are inviting a really bad outcome (P5).

Participant 8 mentioned that she had to remind herself to focus on the team's success and discussed her tendency to worry about how people were making her look, rather than worrying

about how she was making her team look.

...when you make it about yourself, you can't be successful as a leader. But through change, when you can move past yourself, when you reach that level of maturity and that's not about age, that's about recognizing that, OK...success is going to come in bite sized pieces, they're not going to just flip everything tomorrow.... And throughout a change process, it's not as defined as it might have been in the old process. So being very conscious about recognizing and identifying those baby steps to the grant, greater success (P8).

**Authenticity and Relatability.** Six participants discussed the desire to be authentic and relatable to employees and included discussions around being honest and trustworthy, maintaining decorum, and sharing personal examples to help employees cope. Participant 5 mentioned that, in an effort to be authentic, he will go against human resource guidance and try to help people find roles if they are no longer happy in their current role, post change. Participant 6 described how being authentic helped her develop relationships, which in turn provided a foundation to push through disagreements.

I'm a real believer in the importance of building relationships. And so, I think in doing so, you know. You have to have a great amount of respect for your staff and colleagues, and in turn they will respect you, and so we may not always all agree on something, but when there's that underlying, there's that respect, that just exists and that always makes it easier to go through the change (P6).

**Adaptability.** Four participants discussed the need to remain adaptable throughout change. Key concepts related to this category included having patience, manager courage, and pivoting when necessary.

Participant 3 explained that change should never be a direct or linear process, rather he sees it an organic process of consistent transformation:

...as something goes out there, you get some sort of response. Then you continue to push forward, but you might refine how you're doing it or what you're saying or the method. And so it's just a matter of constantly refining either the message, the format, the duration, time line, stuff like that. You're kind of working with, never losing sight of the goal, but always trying to find a path forward that that moves it forward (P3).

Participant 2 shared that not being willing to listen to feedback led to an employee's intensified negative response. He corrected the situation by taking the employee's feedback into consideration, subsequently admitting he was wrong and adapting his approach.

Participant 7 explained that he needed to adapt his expectations around an aggressive timeline, which required an increased level of patience.

...not everyone can grasp a concept or buy into a concept as quickly as you, or has the strategic purview to understand how it fits into a bigger puzzle.... if [the employees] are going to live up to your expectations, you've got to measure them [with the same standard] that you gave yourself, versus expecting them to understand it in five minutes, even though it took you a month (P7).

**Emotional Focus.** Six participants discussed aspects related to the leader's acknowledgement of, and focus on, emotional factors. The key concept brought forward by participants was that employee emotions are real to them, even if the leader believes they are unnecessary. Participant 8 emphasized:

...the biggest thing is recognizing their feelings and validating that they're that they're real and they have a right to [those feelings]. Because I think oftentimes, leaders will invalidate that or say, "well, it'll be fine, don't worry about it." And if somebody is really feeling an emotional response, respect that, validate that and hear it out. Allow them to work their way through that and help find where that block, where that fear, is and help as much as you can. But it's when we invalidate [their emotions] or [treat them as if] it's not that important that [negative responses] lingers and it lasts (P8).

In contrast, Participant 7 believed that emotions can often distract employees from the big picture, or the organization's ultimate goal, and downplaying emotional responses can help refocus the employee. Participant 7 stated:

Without putting too much gloss on it, say...at the end of the day...it's really not that big a deal. So I try to downplay [the employees' emotional responses] and just let them see the bigger picture (P7).

Participant 2 stated that leaders need to keep a balance and pay attention to "both sides of the [emotional] fence." He shared an example of being too hyper-focused on negative responses



that he missed an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate positive emotions. Consequently, Participant 2 missed an opportunity to “build that individual up and empower them to help deliver the information to the team or even be part of the communication plan.”

**6. Leader Beliefs (constructs).** Leaders did not hold a single perspective on organizational change, rather each leader held multiple viewpoints and compartmentalized their beliefs, or feelings, about organizational change into three categories: (a) impact on environment; (b) impact on self; and (c) impact on employee.

*Leader’s perspective about organizational change and the environment.* Five participants discussed the impact change has on the environment within higher education. Participants shared a common belief that higher education experiences change at a rapid and continual pace but split into two groups on whether change was good or bad. The first group generally discussed change in higher education from a negative affective viewpoint, positioning their comments from a place of cynicism and negative experiences.

Participant 8 explained that the constant change in higher education has created an environment in which leaders and employees have become desensitized, which threatens a leader’s ability to create buy in. She states:

...over time when you have this consistency of change, there's a certain numbness that occurs after a while. But it also stalls. Because it's like, “okay, well, this is the latest change, I'll wait and see how that goes before I get fully onboard. I'll play your game.” (P8).

Further damaging employee buy in, participant 8 shared that the continual shifts (revolving door) of leadership regimes in higher education has situation in which created a cycle the organization goes through a repeating cycle of ineffective changes, often ending back where things started.

...at [xyz company, there were] quite a multitude of changes from leadership changes to

strategy changes...taking what has been there and changing it virtually every year with new leadership and typically oftentimes going back to practices that were in place before. So, it's like they'll set up one strategy, somebody will come in and change it, because they've got a better idea. Somebody else will have a better idea. The next person will come [in], and their better idea is what you were doing five years ago. So, there's not a lot of effective change, but there is a consistency of change (P8).

Participant 1 shared that his boss, who reached a place of “change-burn-out,” opted for retirement instead of leading additional change.

I've had bosses who have said to me... “you know what? I just can't do it anymore.” And I've had three different bosses in the last four years. One of them who's just like, “hey, you know, I'm at that age, I'm going to retire. I just can't handle dealing with all of the continuous change here.” And for them, [leading change] was fine at the time, but they just kind of grew out of it. They just couldn't handle it anymore (P1).

Participant 7 explained that he helps his team build emotional resilience and directs their attention to the positive outcomes realized from previous change efforts.

[The employee is] always asking, “OK. Is this it? Is this our final change? Can we settle in?” And you can't promise that, you have to build the fortitude around change. And then also remind them that, “hey, with the last five changes, that also felt uncomfortable early on, you've forgotten about those because they're your norm now.” So always going back to say, “hey, look at how previous similar changes has made you better, us better, faster, more customer responsive, or whatever” that then helps their emotions go... “all right. I just got to grin and bear it for a day or two week or two. Gotta learn something. Got to let go.” And I'll move on from there (P7).

***Leader's perspective about organizational change and self.*** Eight participants, when speaking about change from a personal viewpoint, expressed fulfillment in leading change and shared, with conditions, that change is good. The leaders' sentiments were that change is hard, and often unwelcomed, but it provides a professional development opportunity, either for themselves, or their employees. Further, leaders, when speaking about personal fulfillment leading change, focused on the desired or realized outcome, rather than the process of executing change. Participant 1 emphasized that he enjoyed change because it helped his employees reach higher levels of success:

...when you understand that changing, you understand how that change can help your people be even better at what they're doing. And they can be more successful and you can even bring it to him in that way and help them get there. It's tremendously satisfying (P1).

Participant 7 shared a similar viewpoint:

...I think [change is] a [good] challenge, because getting people to wrap their minds around something new, or to pivot or to do something different...is a bit of a challenge. It's a powerful example of how human behavior can be impacted through influence and articulation. So, I do find it fulfilling when it works (P7).

While all participants found fulfillment in leading change, many expressed their level of enjoyment depended on two factors: whether they believed in the change and whether it was successful. Participant 7 identified that leading change can, at times, create conflict between fulfilling his role as a leader and being authentic, sharing:

...the hard part is sometimes you have to implement change that you don't believe in. And as an authentic leader, that's hard because you always want to be authentic and real. But yet the situation compels for you to maybe not lie, but just put a spin on it that maybe deep, deep, deep down in your heart, you don't know if you're sure if it's right and just balancing that authenticity with the reality that we got to press forward. That's when I think it's not fulfilling is when you sort of feel like you're carrying out the bidding of something that you yourself wouldn't sign up for (P7).

***Leader's perspective about organizational change and employee.*** Five participants shared that they expect employees to react negatively toward change efforts. Participant 3 stated, "I always expect the worst case" and Participant 5 explained he has developed, "a veneer...of expecting negative outcomes from people in times of change." The most used terms to describe expected employee reactions to change were "pushback" and "resistance." Participant 7 emphasized he expects pushback and resistance because:

...people are prisoners of the moment. They have recency bias where they don't see the long game.... If you're in leadership, you're inherently managing more junior people that may not have the full purview of the why behind [the change]. And so, they're just a prisoner of the moment. They're beholden to what is comfortable and that's human nature. (P7)

**7. Leader competencies.** Two emotional dimensions were represented in the data. First,

five participants acknowledged their employees experienced different emotions, when compared to one another. Second, three participants acknowledged that each employee experienced differing emotions within themselves, throughout time. The broad and shifting nature of emotions, from employee to employee, in addition to changing emotions over time, presented challenges to leaders in the areas of: (a) predicting; (b) assessing; and (c) managing employee emotions.

***Predicting employee emotion.*** Participant 5 stated that predicting employee emotions, “is a bit of crapshoot.” Participant 3 described a scenario in which he was surprised by the negative responses from his employees after he implemented structured process for setting and measuring progress toward goals:

I had kind of naively thought that everyone would want to be well disciplined in how we do that and the process by which we go through when logging in our activities and keeping track of effort, and really measuring our progress towards a completion of tasks. But in fact, there's many different levels of interpretation (P3).

***Assessing employee emotion.*** Four participants shared struggles assessing employee emotion. Participant 2 described misdiagnosing an employee’s response to change, which led to a more intense negative response from the employee. As a result, Participant 2 stated that he went through a period of self-reflection and searched out professional development. Participant 4 explained it is not only difficult to assess emotions that are present, but even more difficult to assess emotions that are not present.

...if you get a reaction and a response, that's that is more helpful than not because silent detractors are the worst, because you don't know what you're fighting against. And so when you have the information about what is causing the sticking point, you can more directly address it (P4).

***Managing employee emotion.*** One participant had formal training and certification in identifying and managing emotional response. The remaining 7 participants had no formal

training. Participant 1 shared that during change, while dealing with the competing demands of dealing with emotions, he did not know where to spend his time. Further, Participant 1 shared, “I don’t really do well in this [emotional] space, but it is something that I actually spend time thinking about.” Participant 2 mentioned that he considered change management and dealing with emotions as a “forever improving process”.

**8. Unexpected Affective Responses.** Eight participants described unexpected reactions, areas of surprise, or no surprises related to their experience managing the affective dimensions of change. Table 13 lists each participant and the corresponding areas of surprise. [another good example of phenomenographic variation]

Table 13	
<i>Unexpected Areas of Change and Employee Affective Responses</i>	
Participant #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surprised by employees’ fierce allegiance to the past—negative emotions still present more than five years after change initiative</li> <li>• Surprised by unlikely ‘heroes’—unexpected positive support from employees initially labeled a concern</li> </ul>
Participant #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surprised by the amount of time dedicated to dealing with negative emotions—acted as a distraction from acknowledging positive emotions</li> </ul>
Participant #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surprised by the strong presence of employees’ positive emotions and immediate support—expected more resistance</li> </ul>
Participant #4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surprised that even though change is mandated from external forces, employees will still resist</li> </ul>
Participant #5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surprised by the unpredictability in employee responses and the how damaging change can be to the employee/leader relationship</li> <li>• Surprised that despite rigorous preparation—change often fails</li> </ul>
Participant #6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not surprised—been in higher education leadership a long time and expected various responses</li> </ul>
Participant #7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surprised by strong negative responses to seemingly trivial change</li> </ul>
Participant #8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not surprised—been in higher education leadership a long time and expected various responses</li> </ul>

## Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 provides the results from the data collection and analysis process. In alignment with principles of phenomenography, this chapter aimed to capture the similarities and dissimilarities between the participants' experiences managing affective factors of organizational change in higher education. Chapter 5 provides a detailed assessment and discussion of this study's conclusions, in addition to implications of the study and further research recommendation.

## Chapter 5: Findings, Conclusions, Implications, Further Research

The current state of higher education is characterized by frequent change driven by a struggle to adapt to mounting internal and external forces (Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016). These forces, such as globalization, increasing competition, rising operational costs, technology advancements, and shifting education models (Clark, 1998; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Guskin & Marcy, 2003; Beardsley, 2018) provoke leaders to abandon casual shifts to strategy in pursuit of more aggressive organizational change initiatives (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). These change initiatives often fail due to complexities associated with leading change at extremely dynamic higher education organizations.

Unsuccessful change often stems from the lack of attention paid to affective dimensions, such as employees' feelings, moods, and attitudes (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Employees' emotional experiences are difficult to predict, plan for, and manage, which often results in a change management strategy that does not meet the needs of employees (Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017). Leaders often become overwhelmed by the multidimensional nature of change, leading to a situation in which they overcompensate with reports and facts while attempting to appeal to employee reason, rather than appealing to the employees' emotions (Hardy-Vallee, 2012; Kotter and Cohen, 2002).

This study aimed to shed additional light on this phenomenon by exploring how affective factors during organizational transitions affect a leader's ability to effectively implement change at higher education institutions. The following sections in this final chapter provide an overview of the study, address findings and conclusions, discuss implications of this research, and outline areas for future research.

## **Limitations of the Study**

As with all research, certain limitations exist in this study that should be considered. First, the field of change management is vast with an extensive databank of previous research. While this study focused on a gap in current research as it pertains specifically to managing employee affective responses to change in higher education, it did not aim to further prove how or what affective factors affect change. Consequently, this research relied on the participants' personal perceptions and judgments about their employees' emotional reactions to the change process, which limits the research to generalized conclusions.

Second, due to the nature of this qualitative study, the interview process relied on the participants' ability to recall and voluntarily share specific details relating to their personal experiences with leading organizational change. It is common, however, for memories to fade, or unintentionally shift over a period of time. This could potentially lead to diluted, or generalized responses that fail to capture detail.

Third, Boeije (2010) explains that the socio-communicative orientation of each participant is influenced by the interaction between the interviewer and that participant. Additionally, participants can be embarrassed by failures and distort facts in order to "present themselves in the way they wish to be perceived" (p. 69).

Fourth, affective factors observed during a period of change cannot definitively be linked with a cause and effect relationship. Any number of internal and external variables can influence someone's emotional response, which is continually subjected to changing stimuli. Leaders may wrongly attribute an employee's shift in behavior to the introduction of change, when in actuality the employee could be responding to forces outside of the leader's control, or sphere of influence.



Lastly, the possibility exists that the small sample size may not reflect the diversity of experiences of educational leaders. Higher education is a diverse field, with various types of institutions and vast geography.

### **Summary of the Study**

This qualitative research study examined interview responses of a group of leaders who were individually responsible for managing the affective dimensions of organizational change within higher education. This study addressed the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do leaders in higher education conceptualize and experience affective dimensions of organizational change?

**RQ2:** What do leaders in higher education do, if anything, to manage the affective responses of their employees during an organizational transition?

This study employed a phenomenographic research methodology to examine the aforementioned research questions. A phenomenographic methodology allowed the researcher flexibility to explore variance between leader experiences and better understand leader-reality as it relates to the studied phenomenon.

A method of purposeful sampling allowed for variation in participant backgrounds and experiences. Participants were sourced through one of three channels: the researcher's personal network, participant referrals, or outreach conducted via LinkedIn. Eight participants agreed to participate and went through a screening process to ensure each met the study's minimum requirements for inclusion.

Personal interaction between the researcher and study participants is a central characteristic of a phenomenographic approach (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998); as such, the researcher utilized a semi-structured interview protocol to collect data. Interviews included 10 questions

that aligned to one of the two research questions and went through a prima-facie and peer-review process to ensure validity. Participants consented to having their responses audio recorded, which were subsequently transcribed by the researcher, aided by transcription software.

Interview transcriptions were analyzed and coded to determine themes within the data. The analysis and coding procedures underwent a process of interrater review to ensure validity and reliability. Analysis results were summarized and presented to highlight similarities and dissimilarities in participant experience.

### **Discussion of Key Findings**

The following section outlines this study's key findings as they relate to the research questions, including discussions on how the key findings align to the existing body of literature. Research in the area organizational change and affective dimensions is vast, and many of the participants' experiences were found to be representational of previous research. However, this research identifies further nuance associated with leaders' experiences that is not represented in existing literature, specifically as it relates to managing affective dimensions of organizational change in higher education.

**Discussion of key findings for RQ1.** The first research question was designed to elicit information in order to explore the essence of a how a leader conceptualizes and experiences the affective dimensions of change. Analysis of the participants' interviews yielded four themes that relate to this research question: (a) leader readiness (mindfulness and emotional intelligence), (b) situational variables, (c) leader beliefs, and (d) unexpected affective responses.

***Leader readiness.*** A theme that emerged from the interview data is leader readiness. This theme has two related categories: (a) mindfulness (psychological freedom), and (b) communication readiness. Leader readiness, in relation to mindfulness, is associated with

emotional experiences a leader endures while preparing for change. As such, it was determined that mindfulness would be discussed as a key finding for RQ1. Leader readiness, in relation to communication, however, better relates to preparation for change, which is a key finding for RQ2, and will be addressed in a later section.

*Mindfulness.* Participants expressed a process of becoming ready to lead change, during which they wrestled with various emotional factors in pursuit of becoming emotionally centered. During this process, leaders, first, applied emotional intelligence to reach a place of mindfulness or *psychological freedom*. This aligns to research conducted by Hede (2010), who found that leaders who exercised emotional intelligence, in pursuit of reaching a place of psychological freedom, were more flexible and adaptable to their employees' emotional needs. Second, once leaders had struggled with their own emotions and were subsequently prepared to operate from a place of mindfulness, they set their own emotions aside and turned their attention managing affective factors associated with their employees.

The following table provides a representation of the types of questions leaders asked themselves while in pursuit of mindfulness or psychological freedom. The questions align to categories derived from data analysis, in addition to the related components of emotional intelligence.

Table 14		
<i>Questions Leaders Asked Themselves in Pursuit of Mindfulness</i>		
Focus on self—pursuing psychological readiness to lead organizational change		
Categories Derived from Analysis	Questions Participants 'Struggled' with...	Associated Area of Emotional Intelligence
Setting own emotions aside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do I agree with this change?</li> </ul>	(1) Managing emotions
Excessive change in higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do I have the energy to lead change again?</li> </ul>	(2) Motivating oneself

(Continued)

Categories Derived from Analysis	Questions Participants ‘Struggled’ with...	Associated Area of Emotional Intelligence
Communication readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do I have the right information?</li> <li>Have I set expectations with external stakeholders (leadership and HR)?</li> <li>How will I communicate the change?</li> <li>What are the ‘time’ considerations?</li> <li>Do any of my leaders need training/coaching?</li> </ul>	(3) Self-awareness
Compassion & authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do I understand how this change will impact the employee both on a personal and business level?</li> </ul>	(4) Empathy
Individual employee characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do I have personal relationships with my team?</li> <li>Do I need external help?</li> </ul>	(5) Handling relationships

Once leaders were able to operate from a place of psychological freedom, they used mindfulness to help their employees cope with emotions. The following table provides a representation of the types of questions leaders asked themselves while in pursuit of mindfulness. The questions align to categories derived from data analysis, in addition to the related components of emotional intelligence.

Table 15		
<i>Questions Leaders Asked Themselves When Operating from a Place of Mindfulness</i>		
Focus on Employee—using mindfulness to help employees cope with organizational change		
Categories Derived from Analysis	Questions Leader Participants ‘Struggled’ with...	Associated Area of Emotional Intelligence
Acknowledging emotions, assessing employee emotions, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Am I validating or dismissing employee emotions?</li> <li>Am I diagnosing employee feelings correctly?</li> <li>Am I acknowledging and rewarding positive emotions?</li> </ul>	(1) Managing emotions
Culture—establishing vision and setting new norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Am I creating an environment in which people can thrive?</li> <li>Am I involving the employee and keeping the team engaged?</li> </ul>	(2) Motivating oneself

(Continued)

Categories Derived from Analysis	Questions Leader Participants 'Struggled' with...	Associated Area of Emotional Intelligence
Communication strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Am I accessible and responsive to employee needs?</li> <li>• Am I being transparent and providing consistent information?</li> </ul>	(3) Self-awareness
Compassion and authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Am I focused on my employees' success, or my own?</li> <li>• Am I showing concern for my employees' personal situations?</li> </ul>	(4) Empathy
Authenticity and relatability, individualized communication, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do my employees' trust my intentions?</li> <li>• Am I being authentic and relatable?</li> <li>• Am I approaching the employees as a homogenous group, or individually?</li> </ul>	(5) Handling relationships

**Situational variables.** Participants' negative affects increased when feelings of control and efficacy decreased. This aligns to research conducted by Terry and Jimmieson (2003), which explained that the degree of situational variability in organizational change is associated with stress level—the more situational variability the higher level of stress. Within this theme, participants identified four factors that shaped experience: change intensity, individual (employee) characteristics, time, and organizational layers.

**Change intensity and individual characteristics.** Change intensity and individual (employee) characteristics are situational factors well represented in existing literature. Oreg et al. (2011) discuss change intensity (referenced as change content) as a leading antecedent to negative affect, while multiple researchers explain that an employee's existing constructs will greatly determine employee interpretation and responses to an event (Kelly, 1955; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Oreg et al., 2011). These assertions were generally confirmed by participant experiences, but additional nuance related individual characteristics, specifically the leader-employee relationship, had significant impact on the leader's experience.

Leaders who had existing relationships with employees reported higher levels of

employee trust, mitigating employee negative responses and improving the rate of change adoption. Leaders who were new to their role reported being met with employees' questions about 'intent,' whether in relation to leader or the change itself, and ultimately experienced heightened employee negative response and an extended change adoption rate. In those situations where the leader did not have established relationships with their team, it helped to bring in external support to champion the change effort and back the leader's actions.

*Timing and organizational layers.* Two situational variables not well represented in literature but were identified as having significance in leader experience in higher education were: timing and organizational layers. Timing played a significant role in increasing negative affect when the leader did not feel they were given sufficient time to plan for the change initiative. This may relate to the aforementioned area and need for leaders to have ample time to prepare and become emotionally centered before leading change. Organizational layers impacted those who had managers that would be 'positioning' the change and executing the change plan. In those circumstances, leaders expressed added difficulty, not only having to worry about their own preparedness, but the preparedness of their managers.

*Leader beliefs.* Research highlights a dichotomy between leaders and employees in relation to their feelings about change. Strelbel (1996) argued that leaders often embrace change, expecting it to have a positive impact on the company's success; while employees, on the other hand, generally resist change, believing it is disruptive and unpleasant. There is evidence to support the assertion that higher education leaders embrace change, but there is a wide degree of variance in the reasons for leadership support. Leader beliefs about change was broken down into three categories: self, employee, and environment.

*Beliefs about change—self.* Select leaders in higher education embrace change because,

according to Participant 8, “he who has the gold, makes the decisions.” Thus, leader support was more closely aligned to “duty,” than a belief that change will lead to the organization’s future success. In fact, while these leaders supported the change with their actions, they did so with a feeling of internal discontent, or conflict. The leaders felt they often had to choose between fulfilling their “duty” and being “authentic”—the two being mutually exclusive. Ultimately, participants chose to fulfill their duty to organization, which left them feeling inauthentic, creating feelings of cynicism about leadership decision making and damaging their ability to lead.

Leaders also embraced change due to their appetite to learn via challenging situations. Leaders showed an inherent desire to meet challenges head on, believing “hard situations” helped them achieve advanced levels of professional development. These leaders did not necessarily embrace change, as much as they embraced the opportunity that change presents—the opportunity to develop and hone their skill sets. Their focus was not on the process, it was on the result.

*Beliefs about change—employee.* Second, another group of leaders embraced change due to an altruistic commitment to guide their staff toward success, which is also associated to duty. This group supported Strebel’s (1996) assertion that employees do not like change, expressing that employees are often “prisoners of the moment” and cannot see beyond the immediate discomfort that change brings. Accordingly, leaders saw the employees as young and professionally inexperienced, and their resistance was a result of their lagging professional development, holding a belief that “employees don’t know what’s best for themselves.” This led leaders to ignore or downplay the employees’ negative affects, in an attempt to redirect the employees’ attention toward having faith that it would work out, and if nothing else, they would

learn and grow from the experience. When successful, the leaders felt a level of fulfillment for helping their employees overcome initial apprehension.

Downplaying employee emotions in order to redirect their focus toward growth opportunities was a contrasting viewpoint compared to the majority of leaders. Many leaders believe that ignoring or invalidating employee response would create unrepairable damage that would not only delay the adoption of change, but also damage the employee-leader relationship. These leaders subscribed to Kelly's (1955) theory that reality is entirely subjective, and each employee has unique constructs that shape their experiences and understanding.

*Beliefs about change—environment.* Lastly, there is a subgroup of leaders who are inclined to embrace change, but believe the rapid pace of change in higher education has created a culture of indifference or apathy. This group expressed an overall “numbness” toward change, in addition to voicing belief that what exists today will more than likely change again tomorrow. The success of any change initiative depends on a high level of employee engagement (Mack et al., 1998), leaving many leaders with the task of helping their employees first deal with affective responses tied to the culture of frequent change (burn out), before they can address affective response tied to the change itself.

*Unexpected affective factors.* An area of variance between leader experiences were the areas of unexpected affective responses. One group of leaders associated the surprise with negative experiences, such as they did not expect such high levels of resistance, or the change process took longer than expected due to employee pushback. However, some leaders expressed that they were not surprised by their employee responses. This group stated that due to experience leading previous change efforts, they expected their employees to act in the manner in which they did.



**Discussion of key findings for RQ2.** The second research question was designed to elicit information related to how a leader manages affective dimensions of change. Analysis of the participants' interviews yielded four themes that relate to this research question: (a) communication strategies, (b) leader competencies, (c) leader behaviors and attitudes, and (d) culture. These themes are summarized in the below table, followed by a brief discussion.

*Communication Strategies.* Communication is heavily referenced in literature as both an important element of organizational change (Oreg et al., 2011) and a tool needed to express emotion and elicit information about emotions (Keltner & Gross, 1999). Participants subscribed to this perspective and expressed sentiments that aligned to communication being both a tactic and a strategy. The element of communication appears in this research as both a theme, communication strategy, and a category associated with the theme, leader readiness. Communication as a strategy is well represented in current research, whereas communication, in relation to leader readiness, is unique to higher education.

*Communication—leader readiness.* Higher education, compared to external industries, is multifaceted and complex. Accordingly, research calls attention to the various skillsets higher education leaders must have to effectively navigate organizational change within these dynamic organizations (Davies & Zarifa, 2016). Illustrating this point, leaders who oversaw both faculty and staff expressed difficulty preparing to communicate the change. The reason being, faculty and staff responded to change differently, which forced leaders to approach each group with unique communication tactics in order to manage affective responses. This references the need to prepare for different communication styles.

When dealing with faculty, leaders found they needed to “appeal to reason,” with reports, surveys, literature, and success stories. Faculty, like staff, initially displayed negative affective

responses, but those responses were mitigated by providing evidence that supported the reason change was needed and where similar changes had proven successful at driving the intended result. This is a contrasting perspective from current literature, which argues that reports, plans, or mission statements prove inefficient at gaining employee buy in (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Conversely, when dealing with staff, leaders needed to “appeal to emotions,” through engagement, communication, providing resources/tools, and acknowledging positive support.

*Communication—as a strategy.* The theme communication strategy incorporates three categories: (a) method; (b) frequency; and (c) positioning. While there was a high degree of variance between leader responses in relation to the exact method, frequency, and positioning of communication, the group was unified on communication being of utmost importance to managing affective dimensions throughout the change process. When speaking about communication strategy, leaders discussed the need to be direct, transparent, and consistent, in addition to involving the employee where possible. Further, communication was typically cited as the first, and often the only, tool the leader would deploy when addressing negative emotional responses.

*Leader competencies.* Leaders both acknowledged employee individuality and recognized they have an obligation to respond to employees in a personalized manner; in essence, meeting each employee “where they are at” on the emotional continuum. This aligns to Fisher’s (2018) theory of personal transition, which details thirteen stages of emotion employees will experience while coping with change, in addition to the research of Dasborough et al. (2015) and Iacovini (1993), which argues that leaders should avoid approaching and treating the employees as a homogenous group.

However, while leaders recognized their role in helping each employee progress through

various stages of emotion, they were met with challenges that hindered their effectiveness in three areas: (a) predicting employee emotions, (b) assessing employee emotions, and (c) managing employee emotions. Some leaders shared that they misdiagnosed an employee's emotional response, others expressed difficulty associated with diagnosing emotions of employees that did not have visible reactions. And lastly, in alignment with literature, some leaders stated that the employees' emotions were not static, but changed over time, resulting in difficulty knowing what support they needed throughout time.

Generally, leaders exhibited a lack of emotional granularity (Barrett, 2006), using generalized terms, such as "pushback" or "resistance," to speak about and categorize employee emotional reactions. While these terms are adequate to classify affect (state of positive vs negative response), they are not suitable in diagnosing and addressing specific employee emotions. Generalizing emotion into broad buckets led leaders to respond to emotions as a homogenous group, rather than addressing them separately.

***Leader behaviors and attitude.*** The leader's behavior and attitude toward change was identified as a significant determinant to the employees' positive or negative affect. Within this theme, leaders expressed a need to be compassionate, authentic (relatable), adaptable, and focused on emotions. These areas align well to characteristics Wang and Bain (2014) associated with learning organizations. Due to the rapid pace of change in higher education, Wang and Bain (2014) found that leaders who were flexible, people-centered, supportive, and respected their employees' experiences better mitigated negative affective responses.

While the participants expressed agreement that compassion, authenticity, and adaptability are leader behaviors that mitigate negative emotional responses, there were different understandings of what it meant to be compassionate, authentic, and adaptable. For example,

some leaders believed it was compassionate to validate the employees' emotions in order to help them cope. Other leaders believed that validating the employee's emotion kept them immersed in a negative environment. Accordingly, these leaders believed the more compassionate approach was to redirect the employees focus away from their emotions in order to help them cope.

**Culture.** Culture is heavily referenced in literature as a key component of organizational change that needs to be managed in order to control employee emotional responses. Leaders expressed the need to quickly create a culture of positivity after a change has been implemented. They did this by involving the employee, acknowledging and celebrating positive responses, and quickly establishing new norms. This aligns to Kiefer (2002), who found that negative affect, associated with changes to culture, could be mitigated by involving the employee and allowing them to collaborate on the path forward.

One finding that separates higher education from external industries, in relation to culture, is the impact continual organizational change has on creating feelings of apathy and indifference toward change efforts. Leaders confirmed sentiments discussed in literature that higher education is in the midst of continual change. Reasons for the change varied from university to university, but a constant theme across interviews was that participants expressed having to first deal with the employees' negative feelings toward change, which generally created a lack of employee engagement, before they could help employees address and cope with specific emotions in relation to the actual changes they were facing.

## **Research Conclusions**

**Conclusion 1: Leaders need to become emotionally centered.** Leaders are not only managing change, but act as active participants in the change process. Therefore, before leaders can successfully manage others' emotional reactions, they need to, first, become emotionally

centered themselves. During this process, the leader employs emotional intelligence, weighing situational factors in attempt to reach a place of psychological freedom. This process is important as it allows the leader to be present, supportive, and authentic—in addition to being flexible and adaptable—all of which are leadership characteristics emphasized in literature as being essential to managing affective dimensions.

As a cornerstone is the first stone laid in a foundation, and acts as the single point of reference to determine the position of all other stones, then mindfulness and emotional intelligence should be considered the cornerstone of managing affective dimensions, or the reference point that will guide leader actions throughout the entirety of the change process. Leaders who act with a high level of emotional intelligence are more capable of managing from a place of mindfulness, or psychological freedom, which better positions their ‘structure’ to withstand the emotional winds associated with change.

In higher education, and as a result of constant organizational change, the process of becoming emotionally centered is becoming increasingly difficult for leaders as they struggle with combating personal feelings of apathy toward change. Thus, it is of absolute importance that leaders first deal with their own emotions toward change, before addressing others’ feelings. Without doing so, they jeopardize the engagement and buy of their employees. This is further addressed in the following, conclusion 2.

**Conclusion 2: Leaders in higher education face unique affective factors during organizational change.** In addition to traditional affective dimensions of organizational change, leaders in higher education encountered affective factors that are unique to higher education. First, this study identified that faculty and staff respond to change differently. Literature argues that employees universally experience organizational change on an emotional level; therefore, in

order to mitigate employee negative affective responses, the leader should employ tactics that appeal to emotion rather than tactics that appeal to reason (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). This argument, however, was only substantiated in situations in which leaders only oversaw staff. Leaders who oversaw faculty, on the other hand, expressed not only the importance, but the need, to provide a clear business case, with business reports or otherwise supporting materials, that demonstrate the reason organizational change is warranted. Leaders that oversaw both faculty and staff experienced further complexity by having to juggle various communication tactics, appealing to emotion, for staff, and appealing to reason, for faculty.

Another affective dimension of organizational change that is unique to higher education is a culture of apathy resulting from constant and unyielding organizational change. Successful organizational change requires employee buy in and engagement, which is immediately threatened by employee feelings of indifference about change initiatives. Employees have become numb toward, what has become, “routine,” organizational shifts. This creates a situation in which leaders in higher education often have to address negative affective factors in relation to change, in general, before they can address affective factors related to what is being changed. As such, leaders must be prepared to address lack of buy in and engagement from the onset of a change initiative.

**Conclusion 3: Leaders in higher education need additional training and development to effectively manage affective dimensions of organizational change.** Leaders in higher education lack the skill sets needed to successfully manage affective dimensions of organizational change. The complexity associated with understanding emotions led to challenges for the leaders in the areas of predicting, assessing, and then responding to affective factors throughout the organizational change process.

***Predicting emotions.*** While leaders recognized the risks associated with treating employees as a homogenous group, their predisposition and expectation to experience negative employee responses acted as a distraction from acknowledging and rewarding specific positive employee responses. This hyper-focus on and expectation of encountering negative responses resulted in the following associated consequences:

- Decreased leader mindfulness, which increased the likelihood of responding to employee concerns rigidly, or with a lack of compassion.
- Prevented the leaders from leaning on employee support to garner and drive additional employee positive engagement.
- Employees who initially experience positive affective responses and showed support for the change, became demoralized and affective responses shifted toward negative.

***Assessing emotions.*** Leaders often generalized their approach to dealing with emotion, responding to the employees' observed affective state (positive vs negative response) rather than the employees' individualized and distinct emotions (anxiety, guilt, happiness, threat, depression, disillusionment, denial, acceptance, etc.). This led to oversimplified change strategies and universal response tools that failed to meet the unique emotional needs of employees. This indicates, as Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) argued, leaders in higher education are either ill-equipped, unskilled, or simply may not know how to connect change theory to practice.

***Responding to emotions.*** Leaders relied on and reference communication as being a strategy, rather than a tactic within a strategy. Literature highlights communication as a valuable and needed organizational change tool to assist leaders in diagnosing emotion and assessing coping needs. However, communication, is not a standalone tool, and should be accompanied by

supporting tactics, such as education, training, emotional support resources (Fisher, 2019).

Leaders showed an overall lack of depth of understanding in different responses, outside of communication, that could be used to address distinct emotional experiences.

**Managing emotions.** Lastly, to illustrate areas where training and development would be beneficial to leaders in higher education, it is helpful to revisit the research of Iacovini (1993) and Blanchard (2010), which is cited in Chapter 2. The table below outlines various skillsets leaders need to manage affective factors associated with change. The table has been updated to show the areas of deficient or lacking skillsets that were identified within the participants interviewed for this study.

Table 16	
<i>Areas of Deficiency in Leader Skill Sets</i>	
Researcher	Needed Areas of Training and Development
Iacovini (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide consistent and visible support</li> <li>• Highlight areas that are not changing</li> <li>• Build on the past rather than avoiding the past</li> <li>• Do not treat employees as one homogenous group rather understand that people will progress at differing paces</li> <li>• Support those who are in the process of letting go</li> <li>• Help employees identify what they are holding onto and why</li> <li>• Focus on feelings and provide emotional support</li> <li>• Consistently acknowledge and support new ideas</li> </ul>
Blanchard (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accurately assess and address employee concerns</li> <li>• Be flexible and able to use a variety of change leadership strategies effectively</li> <li>• Treat employees as partners and allow them to provide feedback to change efforts and respond with support when needed</li> </ul>

### Implications of the Study

This phenomenographic study adds to the existing field of change research and broadens understanding of the leader's experience managing affective dimensions of organizational change within higher education. While there is a wealth of literature available in the areas of (a)



organizational change; and (b) affective dimensions of organizational change, there is little research that is specific to higher education and focused on the leaders' experience.

This research is important because higher education is enduring a period of constant change brought upon by unrelenting internal and external pressures. These pressures are forcing leaders to adopt aggressive change strategies, often without the resources, tools, or adequate training to manage the complexities associated with leading change. As a result, many change initiatives fail.

One well-documented reason for the high rate of unsuccessful change is the mismanagement of affective factors related to the employee experience. Yet, despite this, current change theory remains heavily focused on business factors and neglects the human experience. Consequently, there is a gap in current research that concentrates on human, or affective, elements and provides understanding of the leader's role in mitigating emotional fallout.

By focusing on leaders' experiences with managing affective responses during change, this literature is the first step toward identifying areas of need, from the perspective of affective dimensions, for those who are responsible for helping employees' cope during an organizational transition. This research explores the leaders' unique perspectives and creates new knowledge around the challenges that leaders face while managing affective dimensions of organizational change. It further provides a foundation to inform future research.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study found that leaders in higher education not only acknowledge, but also have a keen understanding of, the importance of effectively managing affective factors in order to improve organizational change outcomes. Even still, these leaders struggled to prepare and execute change strategies that sufficiently addressed affective factors associated with employee

experiences. Future research should concentrate on identifying the specific reasons leaders fail to connect theory to practice in this area.

Further, this study found that leaders approach organizational change with a low level of emotional granularity. Leaders may benefit from a deeper understanding of the various emotions that employees experience throughout the change process, in addition to procedures to mitigate negative outcomes associated with affective factors. While preparing to lead change, leaders would benefit from a supplemental change management model that focuses on emotional factors and acts as a guiding resource. Research that informs further exploration of such a tool would be beneficial.

Lastly, this researcher found that the constant rate of change in higher education has created an environment of numbness, cynicism, and burnout. This warrants a closer look at whether change is acting as a destructive or beneficial practice. Further, given higher education's purpose as a service industry, it would be beneficial to learn of how students experience these academic organizational changes and how, or if, the leaders and employees' experiences are informing student experiences relative to the change.

### **Final Thoughts**

While research in the area of organizational change is vast, this research demonstrates a needed a focus on the human element of change. Organizational change models are powerful tools, but arguably only address part of the challenge that leaders face, especially in industries such as higher education when change is constant and human elements are more prominent.

The data collection process for this study was extremely rich, making it difficult to connect the various ideas that emerged from the analysis process. Organizational change and emotions are two very broad topics, and many of the relevant discussion points were outside the

scope of this research. While further research is needed, this study confirms the core role of affective responses, not only in change adoption rates amongst the employees, but also in how leaders approach change. While leaders struggled to manage the emotions of others, they also struggled to come to terms with their own. No two managers had the same experience with this process, highlighting the differing perspectives and variance in individual experiences.

This research also highlights the need for managerial tools, such as organizational change models that provide best practices to leaders who oversee organizational change initiatives and need guidance on managing affective dimensions.

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## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Email Script

Dear [Name],

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is Brad Kennington, and I am a doctoral student in the Organizational Leadership program at Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education and Psychology.

In pursuit my degree I am conducting a qualitative research study that examines leadership experiences with managing affective (emotional) dimensions of organizational change in higher education. As part of this study, I plan to meet with higher education leaders who have led an organizational change initiative, and who are willing to provide their insight during an up-to-one hour-long web-based interview. I am reaching out because your name surfaced as a potential fit for this study through [“my personal network” or “a mutual contact” or “LinkedIn’s Sales Navigator search tool”].

In order to participate in this study, the criteria for individuals are as follows:

- You have experience managing an organizational change initiative while employed at an institution of higher education, located within the U.S.; and,
- During the organizational change initiative, you held legitimate power over institution employees, and was responsible for decision making and employee wellbeing throughout the change process; and,
- You agree to terms of the study outlined in the attached informed consent document.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary; however, your time is greatly appreciated, and your insight will be extremely valuable to practitioners and scholars of change management in higher education.

The researcher requests:

1. If you accept participation in this study, please respond with your availability the week(s) of \_\_\_\_\_ .
2. If you decline participation in this study, please respond “decline”.

Lastly, this research depends on sourcing a diverse population of qualified candidates who meet the aforementioned study requirements. As such, I would be most appreciative if you could assist me in generating candidate referrals by kindly forwarding this email to others in your professional network of higher education leaders who meet the study requirements.

Thank you for your consideration and help!

*Brad Kennington*

Brad Kennington  
Doctoral Student, Graduate School of Education and Psychology  
Pepperdine University  
[REDACTED]

Dr. Barbara Mather  
Professor and Dissertation Chair  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology  
Pepperdine University  
[REDACTED]

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions

- IQ 1: Please describe your experience managing employee emotional responses during a change initiative.
- IQ 2: Was managing the change initiative a fulfilling experience for you?
- IQ 3: What surprised you most, if anything, about employee emotional reactions during the process of change?
- IQ 4: What steps did you take to prepare *yourself* to manage employee emotional reactions to an upcoming change initiative?
- IQ 5: What steps did you take to prepare your *employees*, emotionally, before initiating the change initiative?
- IQ 6: Discuss your interactions with your employees during the change initiative.
- IQ 7: Were you able to manage employee emotional reactions to your desired level of expectation?
- IQ 8: What tactics did you employ that helped, or hurt, your ability to manage employee emotional responses?
- IQ 9: In what ways did employee reactions aid or hinder your ability to implement the change?
- IQ 10: What advice or recommendations, would you give to aspiring higher education leaders who will be managing change initiatives in the future?

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form



Graduate School of Education and Psychology

### **INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Brad Kennington, doctoral candidate, and Dr. Barbara Mather at Pepperdine University. This invitation has been extended because you are, or were, involved with managing organizational change at an institution of higher education. Please read through the provided information in this document and inquire with the researcher [REDACTED] should you have any questions. Your participation is voluntary. If you are comfortable participating in this research study, it is requested that you sign and return this informed consent document via email.

#### **RESEARCH STUDY TITLE**

Managing the Affective Responses of Employees during Organizational Change in Higher Education

IRB Approved - Protocol ID# 19-07-1087

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore how affective factors during organizational transitions affect a leader's ability to implement change at higher education institutions.

#### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

Involvement in this study requires an approximate one-hour time commitment and agreement to participate in a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview is comprised of 8 to 10 core research questions, and may include additional clarifying questions when necessary. The interview will be conducted over the internet, via Zoom, and will be recorded for data transcription purposes.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This study is expected to generate a minimal level of risk and discomfort for participants; comparatively equivalent to normal risk and discomfort levels associated with daily living. Participants should expect to reflect on difficult lived experiences associated with leading an



organizational change initiative, which may elicit negative affective states, such as feelings of embarrassment or regret.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

This study does not offer direct benefits to study participants, but it is expected that involvement may trigger positive cathartic feelings, or outcomes, associated with sharing personal lived experiences for the benefit of (a) education communities; (b) management and leadership communities; and (c) society at large.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Rigid procedures will be followed to ensure no identifying information is collected during the data gathering process or presented in the research findings for this study.

- Pseudonyms will be assigned to participants and used throughout data gathering, analysis, and final reporting. Participant's organization name will be replaced by generic organization name.
- Recordings will be saved under assigned pseudonym and will password protected on a digital device; recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the study and within a three-year period from the time of original recording.
- Data transcription and analysis (coding) will be conducted by the researcher, with no third-party involvement
- Research-related forms and documents will be maintained in a locked drawer and will be destroyed upon completion of the study and within a three-year period from the time of original generation.

\*Written and recorded data will be kept confidential as permitted by US law, except in cases in which said law requires disclosure of collected information, e.g. child or elder abuse.

### **HSPB REVIEW**

Written and recorded data may be reviewed by the Pepperdine University Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPB). HSPB reserves the right to review student research studies in order to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation is entirely voluntary; there is no penalty, or loss of benefit to which the participant is otherwise entitled, for refusing involvement. Further, the participant is entitled to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any point throughout the study without consequence.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION**

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating, for which there is no consequence.

### **EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY**

There is no expected risk of injury for participation in this study. In the unlikely instance an injury should occur, the researcher and researcher's organization, Pepperdine University, will not be liable for monetary or other compensation. Any injury to a participant and associated treatment will be the sole responsibility of the participant.

**INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

The researcher, and research chair, will be available to answer questions or respond to concerns throughout the study at [brad.kennington@pepperdine.edu](mailto:brad.kennington@pepperdine.edu) and [barbara.mather@pepperdine.edu](mailto:barbara.mather@pepperdine.edu) .

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or any general research questions, please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of Pepperdine University Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board @ [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu).

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

I have explained the research to the participants and answered all of his/her questions. In my judgment the participants are knowingly, willingly, and intelligently agreeing to participate in this study. They have the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study and all of the various components. They also have been informed participation is voluntarily and that they may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person Obtaining Consent (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

### Peer Review Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study by conducting a peer review. This analysis tool is designed to ensure the study’s research questions are suitably addressed through corresponding interview questions. Directions to complete review are detailed below.

In the table provided below:

- Read each research question and the corresponding interview question thoroughly, then make an assessment on whether or not the interview question aptly addresses the research question.
- If the interview question is relevant to the research question, please mark “Keep as stated.”
- If the interview question is irrelevant to the research question, please mark “Delete it.”
- If the interview question can be modified to better address the research question, please provide your suggested modifications in the space provided. You may also recommend additional interview questions you deem necessary.

Once you have completed your analysis, please return the completed form to

████████████████████

Thank you,

Brad Kennington, Researcher

<b>Research Question 1:</b>							
<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Corresponding Interview Questions</b>						
<p><b>RQ1:</b> How do leaders in higher education conceptualize and experience affective (emotional) dimensions of organizational change?</p>	<p><b><u>IQ 1:</u></b> Please describe your experience managing employee emotional responses during a change initiative.</p> <p>Feedback:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">• Keep as stated</td> <td style="width: 150px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">• Delete it</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">• Modify by:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p><b><u>IQ 2:</u></b> Was managing the change initiative a fulfilling experience for you?</p>	• Keep as stated		• Delete it		• Modify by:	
• Keep as stated							
• Delete it							
• Modify by:							

Feedback:

• Keep as stated	
• Delete it	
• Modify by:	

**IQ 3:** What surprised you most, if anything, about employee emotional reactions during the process of change?

Feedback:

• Keep as stated	
• Delete it	
• Modify by:	

**IQ 9:** In what ways did employee reactions aid or hinder your ability to implement the change?

Feedback:

• Keep as stated	
• Delete it	
• Modify by:	

**IQ 10:** What advice or recommendations, would you give to aspiring higher education leaders who will be managing change initiatives in the future?

Feedback:

• Keep as stated	
• Delete it	
• Modify by:	

Research Question 2:

Research Questions

Corresponding Interview Questions

**RQ 2:** What do leaders in higher education do, if anything, to manage the affective responses of their employees during an organizational transition?

**IQ 4:** What steps did you take to prepare *yourself* to manage employee emotional reactions to an upcoming change initiative?

Feedback:

• Keep as stated	
• Delete it	
• Modify by:	

**IQ 5:** What steps did you take to prepare your *employees*, emotionally, before initiating the change initiative?

Feedback:

• Keep as stated	
• Delete it	
• Modify by:	

**IQ 6:** Discuss your interactions with your employees during the change initiative.

Feedback:

• Keep as stated	
• Delete it	
• Modify by:	

**IQ 7:** Were you able to manage employee emotional reactions to your desired level of expectation?

Feedback:

• Keep as stated	
• Delete it	
• Modify by:	

**IQ 8:** What tactics did you employ that helped, or hurt, your ability to manage employee emotional responses?

Feedback:

• Keep as stated	
• Delete it	
• Modify by:	

## APPENDIX E

### IRB Research Approval Letter



Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

#### NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: November 04, 2019

Protocol Investigator Name: Bradley Kennington

Protocol #: 19-07-1087

Project Title: Managing the Affective Responses of Employees During Organizational Change in Higher Education

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Bradley Kennington:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research