

Organizational Change in Academic Programs:
A Case Study of Doctoral Students' Experiences

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Christina Coffee Frazier

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James M. Brown, Ph.D, Adviser

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents, George and Karen Coffee, who instilled in me the importance and value of education.

Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the experiences of doctoral students at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities as they transitioned from a fairly stable academic department experiencing significant changes. To achieve the purpose of the study, I investigated the experiences of doctoral students through an organizational development perspective and analyzed how they themselves interpret changes. This study attempted to expand research to include a conceptual foundation for organizational change, identify how departmental changes affect doctoral students, and strategies for an academic department transformation. Perceptions from doctoral students and document data as back up were seen as essential in furthering the understanding of organizational changes in higher education.

Using the interpretive case study methodology of Michael Quinn Patton, I devised a conceptual foundation for organizational change in an academic department about the core elements of doctoral students' needs during transition for continued progress toward degree completion. A missing link within and among the core elements would alter or impair a doctoral student's experiences and advancement toward degree completion. In the end, what continued to be an important stronghold for them before the transformation and then following the merger of the department remained critical. These doctoral students needed communications, considered the faculty relationships necessary, and looked for a sense of community. What was presented to and arranged for them caught them by surprise. Findings yielded an analysis of doctoral student unlike any mentioned in the literature.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

General Context of the Problem

In best estimates, nearly 50 percent of doctoral students fail to complete their doctoral programs prior to completion of their degrees (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008, Tinto, 1987). For an average doctoral student, it takes nearly six years from entry into the program until degree completion (Nettles & Millett, 2006). Academic discipline, student gender, and socialization and integration within the graduate experience attribute to varying ranges of attrition and degree completion rates (Golde, 2000/2005; Seagram, Gould, & Pike, 1998, Tinto, 1987). These figures are striking because they contradict a prevailing belief that higher education's contributions are central to the creation of scientific innovations, technological advances, and industrialized progress of our society due to its role in producing a highly trained, selective workforce. There are many factors, however, when looking into a doctoral student's experiences during various periods throughout the degree program that contribute to these disappointing outcomes. These could be financial, academic performance, research productivity, satisfaction level, predicted experiences, and interpretation of the field of study differences (Nettles & Millett, 2006). Further, institutional and departmental beliefs, assumptions, and values have an impact (Austin, 1996) along with students' sense-making of their experiences (Weick, 2001) and identity with academia, sense of belonging to a community, ability to handle change, and comprehension of the climate regarding the academic department and university (Gioia et al., 2000; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). How these factors

impact a student's experience is vastly different based on the discipline or field of study, the college or university, the academic department, and professional affiliations (Weick et al., 2005). A student may, or may not, persist in degree completion, but understanding various components of "why" will help academic leaders and faculty members to address doctoral students' issues or challenges that they face in their departments.

At the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, the Department of Work and Human Resource Education (WHRE) faced increased faculty retirements, shifted student demands, challenge economic environment, alterations to academic programs, and modified legislative mandates over the decades. A significant transformation of the WHRE Department began in July 2008 as a result of a heightened economic downturn occurring globally and locally, an increase in societal demands in the education arena, and shifts in educational policy within the state and across the institution (D.R. Johnson, personal communication, July 6, 2009). As a result, the WHRE Department was eliminated and faculty members in the academic department, thus, were shifted into a new organizational structure within a different department inside the collegiate unit in July 2009. Most academic program areas remained intact. For a few faculty members, their programmatic areas were shifted into different departments or collegiate units, which were repositioned away from their former core-faculty cohesive group or departmental unit. Though these academic program shifts had occurred periodically throughout the WHRE Department's history, July 2009 marked a final transformation of the department as an independent entity as it merged with the Education Policy and Administration (EdPA) Department within the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD). As a result, the structural transformation was carried forward by

academic leaders and faculty members within WHRE Department to create a merged departmental unit entitled Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development (OLPD).

At the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, academic programs are clustered within a department. When a department experiences significant changes, the academic programs remain intact and faculty members continue their leadership and educational responsibilities within the academic program. In the case of this study, the WHRE Department merged with the EdPA Department and the academic programs were re-clustered with additional programs into the newly formed OLPD Development. As a whole, faculty leadership roles and administrative structures within the newly formed department were addressed within faculty ranks.

Organizational changes are not a new phenomenon to the former WHRE Department. The WHRE Department had a 99-year history at the University of Minnesota. Throughout this time, academic programs were founded, such as the agricultural education program in 1910, distributive education program in 1947, the vocational and technical division in 1962, and the training and development program in 1980 (Brown & Leske, 2009). At various times, academic programs were created and curriculum adjustments were made to respond to federal legislation (i.e., Smith-Hughes Act). Additionally, administrative leaders within the CEHD influenced the streamlining of departmental structures. In some instances, administrative leadership's influence for reorganizing structures may have been a way to design administrative ease, create opportunities for faculty retirements, and possibly reduce the impact of leadership and strength within fields of practice outside of the institution.

In 1995 and 2006, the WHRE Department was renamed. These changes were seen as a reflection of what was happening in the fields of practice as well as a response to the environment internal and external to the institution. Over a period of time, loyalties and realities of administrative leaders and faculty to the department led to internal tensions within and between fields (G. Leske, personal communication, December 16, 2010). Tensions developed between fields of study, such as industrial arts versus industrial education versus technical education, and home economics versus consumer and family science versus family education. These tensions reflected philosophical differences concerning the preparation for work roles of society versus a broader preparation that looked at the whole student; the Dewey-Snedden debate remained unresolved (G. Leske, personal communication, December 16, 2010). The past tensions, current challenges, and emerging issues within the department seem to have had an effect on the faculty, administrative leaders, and possibly students. The nature of the tensions and debates among the department's faculty may not have been recognized by administrative leaders or other faculty members outside of the department except in the change of the departmental name.

Significant national and local events also impacted the academic programs within the WHRE Department. The impacts were seen through the founding of the Business Education programs as well as the Special Needs Learners Initiative in the 1970's. Even with these emerging programs, declining enrollments and increasing costs to offer and support technical, lab-based classes for industrial education students became a reality in the 1980. The human resource development field was a springboard to recruitment and new collaborations among faculty members in the early 1980's. In the 1990's, Adult

Education program moved to the then-Work, Community, and Family Education (WCFE) Department, which provided additional depth and breadth of student offerings in line with the mission of the Department. However, the emergence of technical colleges across the state and a shift in federal funding that had once gone to the University was now being redirected externally. Further, funds directed toward the study of special education and vocational education were being redirected to targeted population groups and institutions that provide services to them. Faculty retirements became more frequent and few tenured and tenure track faculty were hired. The research funding was diminishing along with a reduced emphasis on practice in the field and a move toward a research emphasis. In combination with events, shifts of understanding, and new realities, as of July 1, 2009, the CEHD combined academic programs from the WHRE Department with the EdPA Department to create the OLPD Development. Yet, these historical changes and underlying debates within the WHRE fields of study have not have been openly discussed with students as a way of providing context for the transformation of the WHRE Department (G. Leske, personal communications, December 16, 2010).

In addition to the most recent fundamental organizational change to create the OLPD department within the CEHD, the college has undergone noteworthy organizational, structural changes that provide additional context to the phenomenon of organizational change in this study. On July 1, 2006, the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities campus created three new colleges, one being the newly organized and expanded CEHD (Bruininks, 2005). Three primary reasons or institutional challenges led to the reformation of the college: (a) shrinking pool of financial resources being allocated to higher education; (b) growing competition for high-quality students, staff, and faculty;

and (c) increasing amounts of research funding being awarded to institutions engaged in multidisciplinary and collaborative work (Coventry, 2006). Efforts to identify cost saving options, improve curriculum quality, and increase collaborative research offered the potential to save millions of dollars over the next several years while still promoting effective and efficient services and internal process, quality education, and innovative research (Bruininks, 2005). A significant and perhaps more impactful transformation at the University was the elimination of General College, which, by tradition, provided entry to the University for students who needed more academic development. In its place the CEHD created the Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning as a place “preparing students to transfer to other colleges of the university or to other postsecondary institutions” (Lehmborg& Pflaum, 2001, p. 271). Additional departments from other transformed college structures were combined into the structure of the new colleges, including the CEHD. CEHD began admitting first-year students into its academic programs which changed the way it served students throughout their undergraduate academic careers. The structural changes, therefore, have been intermittent and significant at the college level since 2006, and the perceived necessity to create the OLPD Department may not have been anticipated during the 2006 realignment but became compelling by 2009.

Doctoral students could have been or continue to be impacted based on expectations and anticipation for “newness” even through their academic programmatic area remained constant, unchanged due to the restructuring of the department. Though the impact is unknown, the students’ experiences may be positive, neutral, or negative. In the midst of transformation, as students in the newly integrated department move into their

first semester, they may be leaving behind their known beliefs, assumptions, and values of the “what it was”. This raises the question of how doctoral students identify with their past and current experiences during an academic departmental merger, and adjust to changes in, not only the physical environment, but also the new experiences of integrating into a different departmental structure. Hence, this was a real opportunity to study this experience in a time of transformation.

After a review of available literature, it is evident that abundant student and faculty literature in this area were available in various scholarly writings (e.g., psychological, sociological, and organizational), but yet a gap in the literature was apparent. A considerable amount of literature existed about graduate student experiences, such as student persistence (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Gasman, Hirschfeld, & Vultaggio, 2008; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Tinto, 1987), socialization in higher education (Astin, 1977), and student satisfaction in their programs (Astin, 1993). Further, faculty experiences (Austin, 1996, 2003), academic identity (Gioia et al., 2000; Winter, 2009), and institutional and departmental cultures (Austin, 1996; Peterson & Spenser, 1990; Tierney, 1997) were available. A vast array of literature is available about student and faculty cultural elements in academia and the issues therein, but there was a missing component in the literature regarding what challenges the doctoral student faces as a result of academic department changes. By studying the literature and carrying out an investigation into these new factors, using the organizational development perspective, I intended to bring new contributions to the field for researchers, academic leaders, faculty, and for doctoral students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experiences of doctoral students at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities as they transition from a fairly stable academic department experiencing significant changes as a result of a department merger. To achieve this goal, this study investigated the experiences of doctoral students through an organizational development perspective, and how they themselves interpret changes in an organization. My vision was to be able to contribute valid insights into preparing doctoral students for a different learning environment due to a major transition, and how understanding organizational change was part of this preparation. I also intended to offer a conceptual framework and strategies for the University’s use that would allow this new information regarding the students’ experiences to support doctoral education in meeting its vision and commitment to excellence.

The conceptual framework I used for this study, based on organizational theory, would lead to a theoretical perspective that would serve as a lens in assessing organizational change in academia and the distinguishing patterns among phenomena that make up a doctoral student’s experience. The meaning doctoral students give to their experiences, how they interpret those experiences, and their process of interpretation are all “essential and constructive, not accidental or secondary to what the experience is” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 27). I did not use an experimental design or operationalize variables for control of groups because the events being studied already happened and are not subject to manipulation (Kerlinger, 1979). Rather than aimlessly or unsystematically collecting accounts of participants’ experiences, a theoretical base helped collect, cohere, and analyze data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The structure for this qualitative study came from an interpretive philosophical orientation. The methodology for this study was a case study approach, which places emphasis bounded in time and place. Participants were urged to describe their experiences during interviews and, in addition, documents were reviewed. The goal of the analysis was to record their experiences after their first semester following programmatic area shifts to another academic department, and to identify common themes that have emerged from the interviews. Interviews, document analysis, and member checking as to the accuracy and completeness of the report were used in this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2005).

Research Question

The research question of this study is: What experiences have doctoral students in the Department of WHRE encountered during their first semester after the merger of that department? The overall goal of this study was to improve the understanding of experiences that doctoral students have encountered during their first semester after the merger of their academic department with another at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities. Preliminary investigation into the literature dealing with organizational change indicates that skepticism exists in the minds of academic leaders and faculty members about the need for change and how change would affect them. More so, there was little understanding of how these changes affected doctoral students.

Rationale of the Study

The topic of this investigation was relevant to the field of human resource education for the three major reasons:

1. It provided a conceptual foundation for organizational change at the University and academic departments.
2. It investigated how academic departmental changes affect doctoral students.
3. It proposed strategies to plan for academic department transformation and how doctoral students' needs and concerns would be better supported in their graduate education during such a transformation.

This section includes specifics concerning each point above.

A Conceptual Foundation for Organizational Change

The University of Minnesota–Twin Cities engaged in work to reorganize and transform its administrative operations and create new academic strategic endeavors in 2004, and was subsequently mandated by the University of Minnesota Board of Regents “to improve and transform fundamentally the University to greater academic distinction” (Marshak, 2005; University of Minnesota Board of Regents, 2005). Though academic and administrative recommendations and subsequent implementation of initiatives proceeded and were supported by the Board of Regents over the next few years, the University did not develop a sound conceptual understanding of how change affected students within the bounds of the major reorganization. For a conceptual understanding to occur, “a general notion or idea” about organizational change “would be formed by mentally combining all its characteristics or particulars” (Concept, n.d.).

University documents illustrated the inevitability of change and what specific actions to use for creating the changes, but analyses in providing a conceptual understanding of the culture, nuances, influences, and emerging challenges were not

evident in the literature or other documentation (Campbell, J. et al., 2009; University of Minnesota, Administrative Service and Productivity Task Forces & Steering Committee, 2006; University of Minnesota, President's Emerging Leaders Program, 2006). Further, with emphasis toward greater efficiencies across the campus, those types of academic department shifts occurred. As researchers indicated, the environmental complexities in higher education should be carefully contemplated and analyzed prior to launching a process for major changes and possible alterations to the organizational environment (Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997; Rowley & Sherman, 2001; Tierney, 1997). There exists explicit rationale for embarking on strategic changes, but there was a lack of documentation about University leaders' efforts to analyze, evaluate, or contemplate how complex change within the University affects its doctoral students; the primary basis or foundation of a concept was not evident.

How Departmental Changes Affect Doctoral Students

The research regarding doctoral students would involve a study of how departmental changes affect them. Studies such as this one will help further define what happens to doctoral students and contribute to theory development regarding the effects of academic departmental changes as student's progress toward degree completion. The increased knowledge obtained in studies like this one provides graduate students with some documentation about the experiences of doctoral students who have preceded them. This study sought to identify plights and or rewards they faced due to the shift in their academic departmental structures that were unfamiliar to other graduate students in the same situation.

Strategies to Plan for Academic Department Transformation

Faculty, academic leaders, and administrators have engaged in discussions about graduate education of doctoral students at the university-level, but discussions most recently have been limited with regard to the impact of departmental intervention and strategies on increased completion rates and reduced attrition, such as through selection practices, mentoring, financial support, program expectations, and process and procedures (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008). The absence of discussions about departmental merger or programmatic shifts attributed to the lack of knowledge about the distinctive needs or concerns of doctoral students. Educating faculty and administrative leaders who work in graduate programs regarding the possible needs and concerns of these students enables these leaders to better support all students in graduate education because they will better serve doctoral students.

Assumptions and Delimitations

I identified several assumptions and delimitations of the study, which are detailed in this section.

Assumptions

- The perspective of the interview participant was meaningful as it was captured in language, and truthful and correct following verification (Sokolowski, 2000). Through the audit review by the doctoral committee to verify my work, triangulation of data sources and analytical perspectives were used to develop an accurate, solid description, and an analysis that brings credibility to the findings (Patton, 2002).

- What an individual interprets about a given situation, experience, or object was not free of perspective, standpoint, or situational context (Crotty, 1998).
- The method of inquiry and evidence gathering was inductive and naturalistic for approaching a setting without predetermined assumptions or hypotheses (Gerring, 2007).
- Those selected for this purposeful sample wanted to contribute and participate in the research study. The participants were able to express themselves freely on their own views, feelings, and perspectives.
- The results of the study were generated from doctoral students in a single academic department at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities. As a *limited case* relevant to this situation, findings were only assumptions or “hypotheses for future applicability and testing rather than as definitive” (Patton, 2002, p. 583).
- Doctoral students were in a constant flux and continuous state of growth both academically and professionally (Astin, 1977).

Delimitations

- The purposeful sample included participants from the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities doctoral student population. The participants in the study reflected the demographic profile of the academic department as much as possible.
- In the interpretative philosophical approach, the results were not generalizable because there are numerous elements specific to the case

(Gillham, 2000). The reader would determine whether the results apply to a particular population.

- This study would not include data or analysis about individuals who have not been a doctoral student prior to September 2007. This limitation improved the identification of students who have experienced the former Department of WHRE prior to its merger and shifting of academic programs to a preexisting academic department.
- This study would not include an analysis and evaluation of the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities cultural and environmental foundations.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms were defined in the context in which they were used in this study:

Advanced doctoral candidates refers to doctoral students who have “completed all their program coursework and required thesis credits, but still are working full-time on the research or writing of their thesis, papers, capstone project or dissertation” (University of Minnesota Graduate School, 2007).

Audit review refers to using experts to assess the quality of the analysis (Patton, 2002).

Bounded system refers to the finiteness of a particular case or unit of study. Can I “fence in” what I am going to study? “Bounded means that the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or physical boundaries” (Creswell, 2005, p. 439).

Cases refer to “a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time over some period of time” (Gerring, 2007, p. 19). A case can be an

individual, group, institution, or a community (Gillham, 2000; Stake, 1995). Merriam (1998) and Yin (2003) refer to cases as an in-depth procedure for inquiry of a bounded system (e.g., an event, process, or individuals) utilizing extensive data collection procedures.

Change refers to an alteration in the status quo (Havelock, 1973). Change is typically unstructured, less grounded by fact, but it can be purposefully induced to shape the unknown to a preferred sequence into the future (Birnbaum, 2000; Rowley et al., 1997).

Doctoral student refers to “students who hold the bachelor's or first-professional degree, or the equivalent, and who are working towards a doctor's degree... Instruction may be provided by direct student–teacher interaction or by some other approved medium such as television, radio, telephone, and correspondence” (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.)

Full-time student refers to “as being enrolled for a minimum of six credits” (University of Minnesota Graduate School, 2006).

Human resource education is the “study and related experiences to develop, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the practices and problems of education within these contexts; and to assess the social, technological, cultural, and psychological issues of this field” (WHRE, n.d.).

Organizational culture is defined as “taken-for-granted values, underlying assumptions, expectations, and definitions that characterize organizations and their members” (Cameron, 2008, p. 431). The organization’s culture is reflected in “what is

done, how it is done, and who is involved doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication on both an instrumental and a symbolic level (Tierney, 1997, p. 26).

Saturation refers to a point in which the research has identified major themes and no new information or detail will contribute to the development of themes or add existing details (Creswell, 2005). This is a subjective determination by the researcher when the realization occurs.

Theme is described as a “concept or theory that emerges from your data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 201), such as a master concept or distinction.

Triangulation refers to “strategies for reducing systematic bias and distortion during data analysis...the strategy involves checking findings against other sources and perspectives. Triangulation, in whatever form, increases credibility and quality. . .” (Patton, 2002, p. 563).

Transcription refers to the transfer of the audio files from the recorder into text data (Creswell, 2005).

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of the literature review was to go through available literature regarding the organizational change of an academic department and its impact on doctoral students. While there was a great amount of literature about environmental changes and doctoral student experiences in higher education, there existed limited information about how structural changes of an academic department impact doctoral students. This study used the voice of doctoral students to describe their experiences as the organizational structure goes through change.

In this chapter, the review of literature was extensive enough to provide context for the study, but not so widespread as to make the ability to remain unbiased impossible. It was organized in a two-part review of literature: (a) organizational changes in a higher education institution and (b) academic departmental changes affecting doctoral students.

Organizational Changes in a Higher Education Institution

Recognizing, understanding, and interpreting organizational cultures and environmental changes are critical to the organization's performance and its ability to shift operational and strategic directions (Draft & Weick, 1984; Rowley & Sherman, 2001; Tierney, 1997; Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Academic leaders must notice changes in their organizational environment and determine if those changes merit some adaption of strategic goals, initiatives, and activities in order to maintain a stable level of productivity and performance (Milliken, 1990). As colleges and academic departments make dramatic

organizational and structural adjustments, university and academic leaders may need to make important adjustments to their organizational strategies.

In this paper, I referred to an organization as meaning: “open systems in constant interaction with many environments, and they consist of many subgroups, occupational units, hierarchical layers, and geographically dispersed segments” (Schein, 1996, p. 432). This definition provides the reader with a common understanding of a higher education institution as an organization.

Although more than 150 definitions of “culture” exist in the literature (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952), a sociological perspective (e.g., organizations have culture) was taken throughout this paper rather than an anthropological perspective (e.g., organizations are culture). The sociological perspective assumes that researchers and organizational leaders can identify differences between organization cultures and can change cultures (Cameron, 2008; Tierney, 1997). According to Cameron (2008), researchers and writers who study organizational culture agree that “culture refers to the taken-for-granted values, underlying assumptions, expectations, and definitions that characterize organizations and their members (i.e., they have adopted a functional, sociological perspective)” (p. 431). As socially-constructed phenomena are present in an organization, Schein (1996) stated culture as:

A pattern of basic assumptions—invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration—that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 433).

As culture exists within an organization, the majority of people are unconscious of their culture until it is challenged or until a new culture is experienced.

In an effort to delineate culture to describe human behavior in the workplace, Trice (1993) identified five characteristics about what organizational culture is not:

1. Organizational culture is not referred to as organizational climate, which refers to the “psychological environments in which the behaviors of individuals occurred” (p. 19). These are the perceived experiences of individuals rather than the immediate experiences of members within the organization.
2. Organizational culture is not groupthink, as groupthink describes situations or occurrences where people think both similarity by hiding differences in how they feel or think in order to actualize the goals on which the group has agreed (Kochery, 1993).
3. Organizational culture is not social structure, which consists of “tangible and specific ways that human beings order their observable relations with each other” (p. 20). Culture consists of systems of abstract, unobserved meanings that systematize and uphold beliefs about how to manage physical and social needs.
4. Organizational culture is not a metaphor for describing organizations or other cultural groups. “Cultures exist; they are naturally occurring, real systems of thought, feeling, and behavior that inevitably result from sustained human interactions” (p. 21).
5. Organizational culture is not necessarily the key to success. Trice (1993) indicated that organizational cultures are inclined to add in some way to the equilibrium and effectiveness of an organization.

In higher education, the organizational culture is critical in the formation of new innovations and discoveries, implementation of institutional initiatives, advancement of curricular and instructional technologies, and delivery of knowledge to students. Schein (1996) claimed that “organizational cultures are developed by leaders, and one of the most decisive functions of leadership may well be the creation, the management, and—if and when that may become necessary—the destruction of culture” (p. 430). In a higher education institution, there are several cultures operating within the whole institution that are based on functional groups (e.g., faculty, administrative staff, civil service staff, and students) and that have proximity to each other (e.g., colleges, departments, student union, and classrooms). Rowley and Sherman (2001) described higher education culture as (a) a pattern of behaviors that “describes the attitudes, motivations, and predispositions that people throughout an organization tend to conform to when they do their work;” (p. 190) (b) an observable pattern in behaviors of day-to-day activities; and (c) a person’s comfort in his surroundings and operational methods. The overall institution may have a collective culture if there is a shared story or significant experience that brings people together, but it cannot be assumed a collective culture exists prior to examination of it (Schein, 1996).

Higher education changes as new internal and external influences (e.g., economic, social, and environmental) become evident. Efforts to change a culture are more complex and involve understanding the dynamics of learning processes—these entail the knowledge about learning and unlearning beliefs and assumptions that cause modifications to social behavior (O’Meara, Kaufman, & Kuntz, 2003; Trice, 1993; Schein, 1996). Since culture is commonly unrecognizable and a common set of

interpretations, values, and experiences are difficult to modify, the complexity of changing a culture exists (Cameron, 2008). From a qualitative philosophical perspective, understanding the phenomenon of the culture leads to a “dynamic view of how things work, how culture begins, evolves, changes, and sometimes disintegrates” (Schein, 1996, p. 440).

There exist competing perspectives regarding the ability to change an organizational culture. Cameron (2008) highlighted that if culture change is the desired outcome, leaders of an organization can engage in a process to move an organization’s culture into a new direction. Interventions and strategies for culture change within an organization and in people create the momentum for modification of an organization’s culture to occur (Kotter, 1996). In contrast, Schein (1996) claimed that changing a culture cannot be done deliberately by leaders since various perspectives and learning processes create the complexity involved in an organization. Changing a culture involves modifying a person’s daily activities and behavior, modifying the heart and soul of the culture, this being difficult for people to do (Rowley & Sherman, 2001; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977). If higher education leaders are forced to address changes in their culture, a failure to recognize and adapt to cultural differences (e.g., faculty and administrator cultures) will bring significant challenges in their efforts to bring about transformation. Cognizance of the culture and implementing change within the boundaries of the culture will advance leaders’ abilities to implement change in the institution or department.

Implementing change in a culture requires a contextual understanding of the organization’s environment. Environment refers to “external elements and forces that affect an organization’s ability to attain strategic objectives” (Cummings & Feyerherm,

1995, p. 203). Examples of higher education environment include student, faculty, and competing universities, as well as cultural, political, and economic forces (Cummings & Feyerherm, 1995). “The task of interpreting an environment is a highly ambiguous one that is complicated by the potential costliness of error” (Milliken, 1990, p. 42). If leaders misread or misconstrue an emerging or evident change within the organizational environment that turns out to be critical, they may fail to make an important decision for the organization’s strategy or action (Milliken, 1990). The lack of understanding of the organizational environment could result in missed strategic opportunities, declines in funding or organizational performance, and other types of significant challenges (Weick, 1987). With an understanding and contextual knowledge of the organization, environmental change is not only a strong driver for organizational innovation, but it is also explicitly a driver for organizational adaption or generation of new ideas or discoveries and equilibrium within the environment (i.e., modification of strategies, structures, and processes in response to and in coordination with the external environment) (Damanpour & Gopalakrishnan, 1995).

Academic Departmental Changes Affecting Doctoral Students

Spirited debates in the 1800s over political, social, and academic areas regarding the feasibility, value, and design of doctoral education finally led to the first doctoral degree to be awarded from Yale University in 1860 (Geiger, 1997; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Nearly fifteen years later, in 1876, John Hopkins University established the first graduate school (Geiger, 1997). “Initially modeled after the German Ph.D, the American doctorate was conceived as the degree awarded to an elite cadre of serious students for extended study as they prepared for careers as scholars and researchers” (Nettles &

Millett, 2006, p. 1). As synergies emerged to broaden the availability of doctoral programs across the country, governmental and institutional policy decisions shaped higher education. For instance, Astin (1977) identified two primary policy objectives during the 1950s and 1960s: (a) to provide access to individuals previously not served by higher education and (b) to produce additional highly trained professionals for fields considered critical to national interests. Between 1958 and 1972, the creation of new doctoral programs was the result of an unprecedented increase in the number of doctorate degrees conferred and extraordinary growth of new doctoral programs in the United States (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992). However, the increase in cost of maintaining a growing higher education system, connected with a severe economic crisis in the 1970's led to a national policy change—to reduce costs and increase operational efficiencies in colleges and universities (Astin, 1977).

In mid-2000, an economic crisis occurred nationally and globally and it was similar to the crisis in the 1970s. Precautionary cuts, state government retrenchments, and permanent reductions occurred in colleges and universities across the country (Lee & Eisen, 2009). Administrative and academic leaders made hard choices to downsize, accentuate opportunities (and de-emphasize other areas), retain a commitment to the core mission, and develop efficient and time-compressed contingency plans (Lee & Eisen, 2009; Bruininks, 2009, June 17; Fain, 2008). At both the institutional and academic departmental levels, shifts in what was once known or perceived as a stable environment was altered as a result of new economic, social, and institutional policy changes.

Higher education has undoubtedly changed in the past century, but academic graduate programs have remained relatively unscathed in terms of course content,

recommended work experiences, and requirements (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

However, reform initiatives and criticism about whether and how doctoral education should change were voiced in various reports and conferences throughout the 1990s.

Golde and Dore (2001) identified three primary issues:

1. A smaller academic job market results in less employment of new Ph.Ds, since there are fewer tenure-track positions but a continuing number of new Ph.Ds awarded.
2. Overly specialized training leaves future faculty ill-equipped to perform other responsibilities as faculty members.
3. Ph.D holders often struggle to make the transition out of academia and into the workforce where business, government, and other sectors seek skilled employees.

As in the 1990s, a renewed interest in graduate education most recently has been for varying reasons, spanning from aging faculty and resulting need for replacements, to the reoccurring issues of overproduction of Ph.Ds who never obtain a tenure-track position (Bieber & Worley, 2006).

The experiences of doctoral students during a period of change within the academic department are unknown; available literature is scant. Research scholars have contributed to the research literature in the following five primary areas:

- Scholars emphasized doctoral students' social and academic integration into the department and discipline (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Lovitts, 2001; Tinto; 1987).

- Astin (1977) stated that undergraduate students who aspired to seek graduate or professional education at the time of their initial college enrollment provided a strong predictor of enrollment in a doctoral or professional degree program. From the proliferation of doctoral programs available to student with baccalaureate degrees across the country since the 1970's, the opportunity to excel and reach personal academic achievement seemed more promising (Astin, 1977).
- Doctoral student attrition and persistence (Lovitts, 2001; Golde, 2001, 2005; Tinto, 1998) is shaped by educational communities within the department and their professional affiliations and national involvement (Clark, 1984).
- Bowen & Rubenstien (1992), Gumpert (1993, 2000) and other researchers identified that organizationally, the locus of control in doctoral education is within the department rather than the institution as a whole.
- An individual's decision process and factors influencing choice decisions to enroll in or seek graduate education also have been primary components in research about doctoral students (Astin, 1971, 1977; Kallio, 1995; Kohn, Manski, & Mundel, 1976).

While research literature is abundant vis-à-vis doctoral student predictions for success, attrition and persistence, and decision processes, limited resources were available regarding departmental or institutional changes which occur, and their influence or impact on the doctoral students' experiences.

In an attempt to garner an understanding of how other aspects involve the doctoral education and experience of change within an academic department, I narrowed my literature search to gain greater understanding of key components of doctoral students' experiences in an academic program. In particular, a doctoral student's resistance to change, the sense of community and belonging, and the concept of socialization are salient in a changing organizational environment.

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change is both widely speculated about and universally assumed as it relates to organizational life. Change, per se, is "a process or series of events occurring over a period of time...though it involves the reactions of individuals, it also entails reorganization of group, organization, or even community behavior patterns and requires some alteration of social values..." (Bennis et al., 1976, p. 118). Dismantling the meaning behind resistance leads to a more conventional wisdom in which people do not resist change in isolation. Dent & Goldberg (1999) stated:

People may resist loss of status, loss of pay, or loss of comfort, but these are not the same as resisting to change...[people] may resist the unknown, being dictated to or management ideas that do not seem feasible from [their] standpoint (p. 26).

Thus, there are numerous reasons why an individual or a group resists change within an organization, and understanding why resistance happens may lead to breaking down barriers by recognizing issues from others' perspectives.

Regarding academic program planning, Rowley et al. (1997) stated that environmental change is the most difficult to explain, conduct, and legitimize across a higher education campus. For academic leaders, faculty members, and students,

resistance to a change occurs due to the unknown, or they resist ideas that do not seem feasible from their own standpoint (Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence 1999). If efforts for change within the organization are expected to be resisted, then it is likely that the change will be planned and implemented less than effectively (Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence 1999). In the end, the resultant or inevitable change may be a mixed blessing to those individuals going through it, even in those instances when the status quo or situation undergoing a change has been widely accepted by those most affected (Bennis, et al, 1976).

Sense of Community and Belonging

Communities are the bonds and formal or informal interactions that unite individuals to one another. They are shaped by values, norms, and beliefs of cultures (Lovitts, 2001). Researchers have identified various definitions of the term “community”: professional learning communities (Stoll & Louis, 2007), cohort participation (Schulte, 2002), and college learning communities (Tinto, 1998). There is limited information, however, about the graduate students’ sense of community and belonging. Lovitts (2001) described five ways, nonetheless, that doctoral students become integrated within a community: (a) financially through teaching and research assistantships and fellowships, (b) sharing graduate student office space (c) participation in departmental and informal activities, (d) engagement in professional organizations and activities, and (e) integration in their academic department. “Strong, bonded graduate communities are characterized by the existence of numerous opportunities for supportive academic and social interactions between and among their members—faculty and graduate students” (Lovitts, 2001, p. 107). Without a sense of community or the “graduate student experience,” a

student may most likely exit the department or program or not complete their intended academic goal (Lovitts, 2001).

Lovitts (2001) further identified that the doctoral student's ability to adapt and cope within a department had to do with, not only the students' social support network, but the student's social integration within the departmental community. Further, the complexity of a student's integration within the community leads to greater psychological investment in the degree (Lovitts, 2001). Thus, faculty members within the academic department need to support the doctoral student communities to help them toward degree attainment.

Concept of Socialization

Closely related to acquiring a sense of community and belonging within a graduate community is the concept of socialization (Baird, 1992, April). In recent years, this has been the reigning paradigm in looking at the doctoral student experience. Socialization is an apprenticeship model that assumes that a graduate student (or apprentice) will be socialized into the profession by a mentor or faculty member in graduate school (Baird, 1992, April; Bieber & Worley, 2006). Socialization in graduate school explicitly focuses on graduate students' views of their future careers in the academy or workplace (Bieber & Worley, 2006, Gardner, 2007; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Bragg (1976) identified four essential conditions for effective socialization:

- Graduate programs are goal-oriented; these goals are understood by students and faculty
- Goals are transmitted or integrated into the structure of the academic program

- Faculty are role models for one-on-one and small group interactions
- Homogeneity of students leads to the formation of collegial peer groups that are complimentary to the environment of the academic program.

Within a graduate or doctoral program, the process of socialization is important since it (a) contributes to student performance and satisfaction; and (b) prepares graduate students as faculty to address emerging issues about faculty recruitment, productivity, and retention (Nettles and Millett, 2006). A faculty member's understanding about what does (or does not) occur in doctoral education will help with a doctoral student's socialization into the profession and recognition about the academic environment, processes, and culture within the academic department and program (Nettles and Millett, 2006).

Conclusion

Previous literature offered important information regarding the organizational changes in higher education and changes affecting graduate and doctoral students. Inadequate attention was paid to how organizational changes in a collegiate or departmental unit contribute to or hinder the experiences of doctoral students. Research has indicated that an academic leader's recognition of the emerging shift in environment or culture will determine if new strategies, initiatives, and goals are necessary to support doctoral student education and progress toward degree completion.

The literature on resistance to change, a sense of community and belonging, and the concept of socialization all present similar findings. Although there have been many replications of findings, one clear caution concerning a doctoral student's experience in an academic program has consistently been repeated: Creating an environment for

doctoral student success must be carefully and cautiously planned and implemented by the academic departmental leaders in order to ensure clarity and value of experience in the program.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

This chapter describes the methods used to address the research question on the College of Education and Human Development's (CEHD) doctoral students as they transition from a fairly stable academic department to a different academic department via merger of two departments at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities. The sources of data for this study include documentary data and interview data from academic department doctoral students and other key stakeholders as needed at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities. This section includes specifics concerning: research design, methods, participants, and data collection. Additionally, analysis and interpretation, limitations, and the researcher's role are discussed.

Research Design

For an in-depth study of CEHD doctoral students' experiences at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, an interpretive philosophical orientation was chosen. I was interested in understanding doctoral students' perspectives on the experience of shifting into a different academic department while immersed in the discipline. Individual experiences differ, and understanding their perceptions and ideas led to a consensus about environmental changes as a result of the merger of an academic unit. Exploration into research design led to the selection of a research question, choosing the qualitative method, selecting the interpretive philosophical orientation, and using a case study research approach.

Selection of the Research Question

The research question of this study was: What experiences have doctoral students in the Department of Work and Human Resource Education (WHRE) encountered during their first semester after the merger of that department? Framing the research question is a quintessential part of the research activity, and the nature of the question provides the foundation for the research design. “‘Good’ research questions are those which will enable you to achieve your aim and which are capable of being answered in the research setting” (Gillham, 2000, p. 17). Identifying the research question is a balance between what you want to find out, what is possible in the given setting, a focus on the data collection, and helping one organize how to precede (Gall et al., 1996). “In a qualitative study, the research question often starts with a *how* or a *what* so that initial forays into the topic describe what is going on” (Creswell, 1998, p. 17). Yin (2003) provided further insight into the *structure* of the question (e.g., what is my study about?), the *form* (e.g., am I asking “how many?” “how much?” and “what?”), and the *how* and *why* something happens. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explained that “questions developed to guide a qualitative study need to be more open-ended and concerned with process and meaning rather than cause and effect” (p. 162). These were important indicators of what research method to pursue.

I chose the above research question even though it asks “what” since it was similar in nature to how and why. I could rephrase the question to “how do doctoral students experience their first semester after the merger of their academic department,” or “why are doctoral students affected by the changes in an academic department?” For this

study, I chose the “what” question because it seemed more useful to try to identify the importance of the experiences within the case.

Qualitative Method Used

Depth and detail are the intended outcomes of the qualitative research and are critical for carrying out an interpretive research study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2005; Gall et al., 1996; Patton, 2002). “Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to its depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). In contrast, quantitative methods include standardized measures so that varying experiences and perspectives of people fit into specific categories or variables. Unlike quantitative methods that are used for measuring a large number of people or things, qualitative methods produce a wealth of detailed information about a small number of people and increase the depth of understanding about situations, but reduce the generalizability (Patton, 2002). Further, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that “Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. They do not search out data or evidence to provide or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together” (p. 6). Hence, discovering detailed experiences of a small group within a selected population directed me to an inductive, qualitative research study.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined five key points of qualitative research. These researchers emphasized that the concern about qualitative research was not about if the research is or is not seamlessly qualitative but the degree or extent to which it exhibits key components. The five key points are as follows:

1. Qualitative research is naturalistic, which implies that the researcher has a specific setting as a source of data to observe or collect data about what is happening and under what circumstances.
2. Qualitative research is descriptive in that the data collected is in the form of words and pictures, videotapes, personal documents, memos and other records rather than solely about numbers and graphics. “[The researcher] tries to analyze the data with all of their richness as closely as possible to the form in which they were recorded or transcribed” (p. 5).
3. Qualitative researchers are focused more on process rather than with outcomes or end-products.
4. Qualitative researchers analyze data inductively. They build upon abstractions they have gathered and grouped together rather than search for data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold prior to entering into the study. “You are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts” (p. 6).
5. In qualitative research, meaning is the primary concern in order to make sense of peoples’ lives and how they interpret reality. More explicitly, qualitative researchers are interested in participant perspectives and capturing those perspectives accurately.

These general characteristics of qualitative research have been identified and discussed by other researchers as well (Creswell, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Merriam, 1998).

Although commonly accepted in some social science academic specializations and professions, qualitative research, however, is often criticized for its subjectivity, which means that research is dependent on the discussions, documents, memos, videotapes, and other records available to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Patton, 2002). Subjectivity is a way of interpreting meaning and of organizing the world. “Because the individual is subject to multiple and competing discourses in many realms, one’s subjectivity is shifting and contradictory—not stable, fixed, and rigid” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 477). Subjectivity requires the researcher to play an active role in the collection of the data and inquiry processes while at the same time having sensitivity, tolerance for ambiguity, and communication skills while acting as a human instrument for data gathering (Merriam, 1998). Hence, qualitative research is a different scientific process than what was envisioned by the classical, experimental approach for empirical science and the generation of knowledge (Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Gerring, 2007). As a result, it is critical for the researcher to approach the research for validity and reliability in order to develop an empirical world as it exists to those in the study. Subjectivity reemphasizes qualitative approaches to depth and detailed interviewing and description to carry out the research study (Creswell, 2005).

The five key points or characteristics of qualitative research described by Bogdan & Biklen (2007) were appropriate for addressing my research question in three ways. First, the purpose of this research was to understand how an academic department transformation at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities would affect doctoral students. Qualitative research was, therefore, appropriate for exploring the perspectives and capturing the perspectives accurately of various persons involved in the context of

this study. Second, this study focused on the current trend to transform academic departments as a result of societal and economic changes. This results in a complex environment that needed to be explored. Lastly, qualitative research was suitable for my research in developing a theoretical understanding based on a naturalistic and inductive inquiry.

Interpretative Philosophical Orientation

Using the interpretive philosophical orientation leads to an understanding of the meaning of process or experience, which “constitutes the knowledge to be gained from an inductive, hypothesis- or theory-generating (rather than a deductive or testing) mode of inquiry” (Merriam, 2001, p. 4). Gerring (2007) referred to the interpretivist method as a technique for seeking evidence “that are focused on the intentions and subjective meanings contained in social actions (p. 69). Crotty (1998) stated that the interpretivist approach “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world” (p. 67). From various data gathering sources (e.g., interviews and documents), different pieces of collected evidence will be gathered, organized, and analyzed throughout the research process to construct a picture of the findings.

Goal of interpretative orientation. An inherent goal of understanding a phenomenon and writing the details further supported my decision in adopting the interpretive research orientation. Van Manen (1990) claimed, “the method one chooses ought to maintain certain harmony with the deep interest that makes one an educator (a parent or teacher) in the first place” (p. 2). Describing new understanding of individual experiences in text allows for the transfer of knowledge to others, which Van Manen claims is a form of pedagogy (Van Manen, 1990). To compliment Van Manen’s

perspective, Creswell (2005) stated that qualitative research allows for the exploration of a topic in which variables are difficult to identify; current theories may not explain participant behavior or experience. There is a need to present a detailed view of the topic since a close-up perspective may not exist in a qualitative study, and a wide scan may not provide answers to the problems (Creswell, 2005; Van Manen, 1990). Further, studying a topic in its natural setting is necessary in order to gain an understanding about individual experiences; a qualitative study approach encourages researchers to get out into the field of study, gain access, and gather materials (Creswell, 2005). An important result of this study is to provide an opportunity to educate others about the research outcomes based on interpretative research standards.

Standards of the interpretative orientation. By choosing the interpretative philosophical orientation, I used eight features as standards for interpretive research as defined by Brown (1989). The first standard is the importance of choosing a topic relevant to the practice of life today. Increased understanding and agreement regarding a concept or pattern in the conduct of life contributes insightful and rational knowledge. Second, the question the research addresses concerns how the researcher interprets meanings in a particular context and expresses them in text. Third, the meaning expressed by the researcher is respected in the interpretation. Fourth, the research reflects that interpretation had been made by interrelating the parts and the whole of the text. Fifth, the research reflects searches for an interpretation of the context and social practices that are reasonable. Sixth, the research shows the researcher's familiarity with the subject matter of the text. Seventh, the researcher seeks to establish a formal logic of validation of the research. Last, the interpretation makes clear that the meaning of the text is

important for the conduct of life. Accordingly, the importance of applying interpretative research standards as outlined by Brown (1989) was included in this study. Additional consideration was made to the study as naturalistic, indicative, descriptive, reflective, transferable, and relevant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2005; Malterud, 2001; Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative Case Study Research Approach

This study was a single qualitative case study approach to address the research question. I focused on the complexities of the experiences held by doctoral students who were enrolled in the former WHRE Department. Understanding their experiences was vital to my research. The qualitative case study included stories by individuals, which are smaller cases layered and nestled within the primary case. These smaller cases were thematically analyzed and incorporated into my research.

A case study may include either quantitative or qualitative methods, or both, to gather evidence in order to answer the research question. Patton (2002) stated that case study “involves organizing data by specific cases for in-depth study and comparison (p. 447). This study focused on the use of qualitative methods rather than on both.

The single most distinctive characteristic of qualitative case study lies in delimiting the object or unit of study (the case) (Merriam, 2001). In particular, is the case in a bounded system? Miles and Huberman (1984) referred to a case as a phenomenon within a bounded system or context “in which one is studying events, processes, and outcomes (p. 28). A qualitative case study approach is the observation or experience that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p.

13). Case study should not be confused with case method, casework, or case record since the study is selected for its uniqueness in what it can discover about a phenomenon, and the new knowledge which would be revealed (Merriam, 2001).

Gerring (2007) gave four factors inclining researchers toward a qualitative case study method.

1. To develop in-depth knowledge about individuals, group, organization, or event that is linked by social behavior or actions. Gaining deep, detailed information about a single case is more helpful to understanding the process or product of analysis than superficial understanding about a larger number of examples.
2. To preserve the detail of individual cases that are often lost in large population studies, by incorporating an alternative way or standardized formats to analyze narratives so that smaller cases can be meaningfully compared.
3. To test the theoretical predictions of a general models (such as an economic model) to help explain the features of the case, referred to as an analytic narrative.
4. To gain greater knowledge into what quantitative researchers coin “outliers” or a researcher’s observation that a number is numerically distant from the rest of the data.

From the four factors identified by above, factors one and two are most particularly relevant to this qualitative case study. Thus, this study was meant to develop knowledge about a single case through an inductive analysis of a contemporary event or

phenomenon that does not control for variables or “deliberately divorces a phenomenon from its context” (Yin, 2003, p. 13).

Qualitative case study method. In the construction of the case about doctoral students’ experiences, I used the sequential steps to move from raw case data to an actual case study by using the process created by Patton (2002) in which he identified the following process for the development of a qualitative case study:

1. Assemble the raw case data, which includes data information collected about the person, setting, or organization;
2. Construct a case record, which is to convert the raw data into a case record;
3. Write a final case study narrative; which gives a descriptive picture or story. The case story is told chronologically and/or presented thematically.

Additional description about the data collection, analysis, and interpretation process is found in the remaining sections of this chapter.

Research Population

In the initial investigation of the research question and the review of literature about doctoral student trends, it became clear that these doctoral students would be impacted by the organizational changes in the academic departmental structure, making their experiences much different than those of students in a historically stable, non-volatile environment. As a result, the population I selected was from the former WHRE Department at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities campus—see Table 1. The department is situated within the CEHD at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities. As of October 2009, 114 doctoral students were enrolled in one of the following

specializations: adult education (22.8%), agricultural, food, and environmental education (1.8%), business and industry education (11.4%), comprehensive WHRE (10.5%), family education (0.9%), leadership (1.8%), and human resource development (50.9%). Of the 114 doctoral students, 63.2% or 72 students were female and 17.5% were international students. This was the research population from which participants were sought for the study.

Table 1.

Number of Doctoral Students Enrolled in the Former Work and Human Resource Education Department in Fall 2008 by Specialization

Academic Specialization	Number of Doctoral Students
Adult Education	26
Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Education	2
Business and Industry Education	13
Comprehensive WHRE	12
Family Education	1
Leadership	2
Human Resource Development	58
Total Enrollment	114

Note: Data collected from the Office of Institutional Research at the University of Minnesota, October 27, 2009, University of Minnesota Data Warehouse Tables

In July 2006, the collegiate unit was immersed in a strategic transformation that was to result in greater operational efficiencies, greater opportunities for collaborative research, and increased curriculum quality and course selection (Coventry, 2006, July 3). Unlike the structural shifts of academic departments and the creation of centers in 2006, the WHRE Department merger with the (Educational Policy and Administration) EdPA Department did not occur until three years following the initial strategic transformation efforts. Conducting a study about the academic department provided a way to capture the experiences of doctoral students and offered a documentary analysis of the unit as it adjusted to the structural changes.

Participants

Through an in-depth exploration of the doctoral student phenomena, a maximal variation qualitative sample (Patton, 2002) was used. The maximal variation sampling strategy is for “a researcher to sample cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait” (Creswell, 2005, p. 204). For this study, the sample is based on the following criteria:

- nearly equal gender and racial representation;
- equivalent full-time and part-time attendance representation; international and domestic representation;
- primary academic department is the former WHRE Department at the University of Minnesota; and
- Human Resource Development, Adult Education, Business and Industry Education, and WHRE academic programs representation.

Further, to better understand how organizational culture develops and transforms throughout a doctoral degree program, 8 participants were interviewed, which resulted in the concept of saturation (Creswell, 2005)—see Table 2. The characteristics of the participants included 5 students enrolled in the human resource development, 2 were in adult education, and 1 in business and industry education doctorate specializations. There were 5 doctoral students enrolled in fall 2009 with a half-time academic load. Out of the 8 participants, 6 were female. Five participants were white/Caucasian, two black/African American, and one international. The 8 participants were enrolled in WHRE Department starting between summer 2006 and fall 2007. All students were enrolled in fall 2008 and 2009.

Table 2.

Characteristics of the 8 Participants in the Study

	Academic Specialization	Fall 2009 Academic Load	Gender	Race
1	Human Resource Development	Half-Time	Female	White
2	Adult Education	Half-Time	Female	Black
3	Human Resource Development	Full-Time	Male	White
4	Adult Education	Full-Time	Female	White
5	Human Resource Development	Half-Time	Female	White
6	Human Resource Development	Full-Time	Male	White
7	Human Resource Development	Half-Time	Female	International
8	Business and Industry Education	Half-Time	Female	Black

Note: Data collected from the Office of Institutional Research at the University of Minnesota, October 27, 2009, University of Minnesota Data Warehouse Tables.

These participants were active in one of the following stages of their academic program:

- enrolled as a 2nd year doctoral student;
- in the preliminary examination phase; and
- passed an oral preliminary examination and is taking thesis credits or completed thesis credits (advanced graduate student) in the academic unit.

Since the study strived to discover how doctoral students identify with the newly integrated academic department, it was important to invite doctoral students who display different dimensions of the characteristics identified above. It is important to note that there were no agricultural, food, and environmental education; family education; and leadership students selected in order to protect the anonymity of individuals. It was my intention to develop a detailed understanding of the phenomena from doctoral students' perspectives in order to provide useful information and help others learn about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2005).

Data Collection

This study included interview sources as crucial information and document data as back up or reference material. "Documents represent a good source for text (word) data for a qualitative study. They provide the advantage of being in the language and words of the participants, who have usually given thoughtful attention to them" (Creswell, 2005, p. 219). Participants were invited to participate via email invitation and given the consent form in order to gain further understanding of purpose, benefits, risks for participation and their rights as a participant—see Appendix A and B. Following their initial acceptance to participate in the study, participants were provided a consent form at the time of the interview. The interviews were for approximately one hour in a semi-structured interview format on campus at convenient times for participants. Each interview was digitally recorded and then transcribed verbatim and brief notes were used as a supplemental source. The interviews included stories, anecdotes, and recollections of experiences (Van Manen, 1990). This format allowed participants to voice their experiences while not constrained by my viewpoint or previous findings (Creswell, 2005;

Gall et al., 1996; Patton, 2002). Questions were also included in the interviews when it seemed that the person being interviewed began to generalize about their experience, such as “can you give me an example?” or “could you explain your response more?”

The interview questions address the following main areas:

- Personal awareness of the impact of an academic departmental merger and program change
- Identification of the challenges and risks within organizational changes and adaption to major changes

Interview Questions

The following are sample interview questions used—see Appendix C. Additional questions were used for further detail at the time of the interview:

1. Tell me about a little bit about yourself and how you came to be a graduate student in this program. (Year in program, educational background, and previous professional experience.) (Prompt for year in program, educational background, and previous professional experience.)
2. What did you expect graduate school to be like? How was the reality different from what you expected?
3. Tell me about your first semester in the newly integrated department. What do you remember most about that semester and your experiences as a doctoral student? (Positive experiences, most negative experiences, and most challenging experiences.) (Prompt for positive experiences, most negative experiences, and most challenging experiences.)

4. What stories did you hear about the newly formed academic department prior to the fall semester? Now that you have experienced a semester in the new academic department, what did these stories mean to you?
5. Describe your experiences with shifting to a different campus and department. What were the benefits for you and what was most challenging for you?
 - a. What do you feel has most changed for you in the newly integrated department?
 - b. Do you feel like you are part of the graduate student community in the newly integrated department? Anything in particular that caused you to feel that way?
 - c. Tell me about the interactions you have had with your adviser and fellow students prior to and during the academic program shift.
 - d. As a result of the academic program shift, have you developed new faculty mentorships or connections? If so, what does this experience mean for your academic development?
6. How could the transition have been done better?

Analysis and Interpretation

The fluidity of naturalist research inquiry makes the distinction between data gathering and subsequent analysis far less absolute (Patton, 2002). Patterns emerge and possible themes surface over the course of the field work; recording and tracking of insights are a crucial part of data collection—during data collection and at the onset of data analysis. Patton (2002) described the beginning of data collection and analysis as

follows: “While earlier stages of fieldwork tend to be generative and emergent, following wherever the data lead, later stages bring closure by moving toward confirmatory data collection—deepening insights into the confirming (or disconfirming) patterns that seem to have appeared” (p. 436). Throughout the data collection phase of the study, I focused on the analysis by conducting fieldwork but recognizing that too much focus can interfere with the openness of naturalistic research inquiry.

Upon completion of the data collection, the final analysis took place and the preliminary framework for organizing and managing the data collected was created. Patton (2002) identified two primary sources to draw from in categorizing or organizing the analysis: (a) “the questions that were generated during the conceptual and design phase of the study, prior to fieldwork, and (b) analytic insights and interpretation that emerged during data collection” (p. 437). These means are critical in the organization of the data that will allow me to identify gaps or ambiguities found during the analysis. These gaps and ambiguities may require additional fieldwork and data collection. Through cross-interview analysis, I grouped together answers of common questions from different people and I grouped by topics utilizing an interview guide. The interview guide helped me to capture a descriptive analytics framework for the analysis. Further, it was possible that I may reengage interviewees to clarify or deepen their responses and it was possible that new observations would be sought in order to deepen descriptions. Gaps and unresolved ambiguities were noted at the conclusion of the written report, as the primary goal of analysis is to find patterns. During the period of organizing the data, it was critical for me to get a sense of the overall picture, the whole of the data collected and analyzed.

Transcription

As another part of the analysis of the data collected and of data management, I transcribed digitally tape-recorded interviews in order to fully recapture the material therein. As the person transcribing the interviews, I had an opportunity to be immersed in the data, “an experience that usually generates emergent insights” (Patton, 2002, p. 441). This was the major technique for data collection in the study. Computer-assisted qualitative data management software technology was used to allow for transfer of the audio files from the recorder into text data (Creswell, 2005). The computer-assisted software (NVivo 8.0 by Qualitative Solutions and Research) “assisted” me in the management of the analysis through data storage, coding, and retrieval of transcripts and documents. By using NVivo as a code-and-retrieve tool (Lee & Fielding, 1996), it accelerated my ability to locate themes, to group data into categories, and to compare information as I decide how much and what I would include in the study.

Thematic Analysis

Once data had been collected, transcribed, and member checked for validity, and once initial analysis had occurred, a comprehensive thematic analysis took place. Though there were a number of abilities and skills necessary to carry out qualitative case study research, Patton (2002) identified a primary competency that was needed: the ability to see patterns in random information. There are a variety of processes to perform thematic analysis, such as content analysis (Patton, 2002), pattern matching (Gall et al., 1996; Yin, 2003), or data analysis (Creswell, 1994). In this study, I applied content analysis, which refers to searching the text (e.g., interview transcripts and documents) for frequent words or themes (Patton, 2002). “Content analysis is used to refer to any qualitative data

reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Because of the challenging complexities of content analysis, I utilized a classification or coding scheme to reduce confusion (or even chaos) and identified core themes (Patton, 2002; Van Manen, 1990). Through the use of computer-assisted software during the thematic analysis process, I referred back to the original interview transcripts and documents to make notes in the margins of the full transcriptions.

Some patterns and themes emerged naturally in instances when the same response, feeling, and/or reaction were expressed a number of times by several participants. There were other less obvious themes as participants had the same experience but describe them differently. Interpreting the quality of the theme was essential. “In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 107). I identified themes from the data in order to answer the research question and form an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon through description and the thematic development process.

Limitations

There are two primary limitations to this study that are addressed in this section: (a) personal risks of bias or misrepresentation and (b) challenges with qualitative case study methods.

Personal Risks of Bias or Misrepresentations

Being aware of my experiences with the former WHRE Department and as a doctoral student and knowing my aim to reduce risks were important for carrying out an ethical qualitative study. My current academic program is the Comprehensive Work and Human Resource program in the former WHRE Department. This program was one of the several that were re-assigned to the newly formed Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development (OLPD) and the basis for study. This newly formed department included those academic programs from the WHRE Department and EdPA. In my academic career as a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, my history was as follows:

- In 1999, I was initially accepted into the Department of EdPA, higher education program, in the CEHD.
- In 2000, I transferred academic programs to Comprehensive Work and Human Resource Education, moving to the WHRE Department in the CEHD.
- After completing coursework for my doctoral program in 2004, I chose to obtain a masters degree.
- In spring 2008, I returned to work toward completion of my doctoral degree. My doctoral activities included completing preliminary examinations and doctoral candidate research activities.

As a doctoral student in both departments at one time in my doctoral career, I have an understanding of each department prior to the academic program reorganization into the Department of OLPD in summer 2008. For this study, I acknowledged that I am

part of the doctoral student population and potentially carry biases about the merger of the WHRE Department with the EdPA Department and the reorganization of its academic programs.

With the experiences and knowledge I brought to the foundation of the study, I have a participant observer perspective (Creswell, 2005; Patton, 2002) since I am a doctoral candidate and chose to be a researcher. Though I may engage in social activities or interact with faculty members at the study site, my involvement or interactions are minimal. For instance, I have not interacted with graduate students who are in one of the academic programs affected since 2004.

In an interpretive role during this study, I reduced bias risks by acknowledging the suspension of my beliefs for the purposes of this study, by triangulating findings, and by promoting the subjective nature of qualitative research. I described, in written language, the experiences of the participants as described in the in-depth interviews and my findings, as directly as possible in order to relate a description of the phenomenon. These experiences of participants were “bracketed” by suspending my beliefs in order to analyze and compare themes for identifying the core meaning of the experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002; Sokolowski, 2000). For instance, in an effort to suspend my beliefs about the core meaning of this study, I recognized there were various terms used to describe the merger of the department. In the WHRE and EdPA departments and the CEHD, many phrases were used to describe the reorganization, such as dissolution, closure, or shut down. For this study, I bracketed my beliefs and chose to use the technical term of “merger” as the way I address it. Further, I did not have interactions and activities with the department faculty or students that are outside of my research

activities. Rigorously applying bracketing techniques elucidated the participants' commonalities and emergent patterns of the interviewee experience.

Another intention to reduce the risk of bias or misrepresentations was to seek both accuracy and alternative explanations to answer the question, "Am I generating a comprehensive and accurate description of the phenomena?" This occurred through the triangulation by seeking the following: (a) a rich description from the interviews, (b) member checking, and (c) multiple methodological approaches, such as interviews and document review "to search for additional interpretation more than the confirmation of a single meaning" (Stake, 1995, p. 115). By intentionally addressing possible risks in this study, the representation of the findings led to an in-depth study with greater accuracy about organizational change in academic programs.

Challenges with Qualitative Case Study Methods

Confusion exists among proponents and opponents of the qualitative case study method as a result of a profusion of terms and meanings raised several decades ago. In particular, the trustworthiness of validity and reliability takes different forms than positivist, quantitative research (Merriam, 2001). Patton (2002) emphasized:

Science has traditionally emphasized objectivity, so qualitative inquiry within this tradition emphasizes procedures for minimizing investigator biases. Those working within this tradition will emphasize rigorous and systematic data collection procedures, for example, cross-checking and cross-validating sources during field work" (Patton, 2002, p. 545).

Critically important prior to generalizability is the internal validity of the study in which there is meaningful information that is applicable to the situation (Merriam, 2001). Internal validity is only a concern when the researcher is trying to determine if *a* led to *b* event and the relationship between *a* and *b*. Further, making inferences every time an

event cannot be observed hinders the internal validity of the case study research (Yin, 2003). Applying analytic tactics to support and convey internal validity (e.g., triangulation, peer examination, etc.) reduces the threats to validity in qualitative case study research (Creswell, 2005; 2001). This study integrated analytic tactics to determine the accuracy and credibility of the findings, such as the triangulation among different data sources, asking one or more participants to check the accuracy of their accounts, and seeking a person outside of the study to thoroughly review the investigation.

Generalizability of the qualitative case study beyond the immediate population is the primary concern for external validity. How generalizable is this study? As noted above, the study must be internally valid before generalizability can be considered. Qualitative case study research is used to study a single case or possibly multiple cases precisely because the researcher wishes to study the phenomenon in depth and detail rather than find out what is generally true to many (Merriam, 2001). The issue of generalizability can be approached in two ways: (a) the research assumes that the findings cannot be generalized and will regard it as a limitation to the study, or (b) attempts are made to strengthen external validity by using standardized sampling practices (Merriam, 2001). In this study, I addressed the external validity as a limitation.

Reliability has been a concern for social scientists engaging in case study research simply because human behavior is never static (Merriam, 2001). From a constructionist or reality-oriented perspective, individuals construct their own reality through the unique experiences based on their knowledge (Crotty, 1998). As a researcher striving for objectivity and a value-free inquiry, making biases explicit, taking steps to mitigate their influence through vigorous data collection procedures, and discussing possible influences

of the findings are all necessary (Patton, 2002). In a qualitative case study or other qualitative methods, there are no straightforward reliability tests (Patton, 2002). I will concentrate on fairly representing the data and accurately communicating the findings of the study.

Researcher's Role

At the time of this study, I was enrolled in one of the doctoral academic programs in the former WHRE Department. Throughout my doctoral career, I sporadically have been a full-time and part-time student while being involved as a graduate assistant and with campus-wide student organization groups, campus committees, and university governance activities. My involvement as a student occurred prior to December 2004 at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, when I became a full-time professional member at the University. In this study, the population researched involved the department I had been affiliated with. At that time the department was entitled the Department of Work, Community, and Family Education. Taking into account the diversity of my doctoral committee and my strong desire to reduce biases, secure valid data, and to achieve a solid thematic analysis, my knowledge provided a solid foundation for a quality study.

CHAPTER 4

Results

This chapter summarizes the results of the analysis of the narratives of each of the participants. Descriptions of their experiences with supportive quotations illustrating the experiences are included within each theme and their subthemes.

The research question of this study was: What experiences have doctoral students in the Department of Work and Human Resource Education (WHRE) encountered during their first semester after the merger of that department? The following are three major themes and corresponding subthemes that emerged from the experiences of these doctoral students that begin to address the research question—see Table 3.

Table 3.

Themes and Subthemes of the Study

Theme	Subtheme
Connections with other faculty will change the experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Choosing the academic program or department2. WHRE faculty members' impact during the transition3. Seeking new connections with faculty members in the newly created department
I had multi-faceted interactions with my community of peers but now it is minimal	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Need for a community2. Emotional connection
Why did the merger happen?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Speculating why the merger occurred2. Communication as a key strategy for addressing a merger

The following section elaborates on the themes and subthemes shown in Table 3.

Theme 1: Connections with Other Faculty Will Change the Experience

Participants in the study seemed to have awareness between their current faculty connections in the WHRE Department and those in the Educational Policy and Administration (EdPA) Department prior to the merger. The participants enrolled in an academic program rather than a department, but their connection to their academic program was via the department (i.e., departmental newsletter and physical location). Doctoral students' trust of expertise and knowledge, apprenticeship rapport, and expectations of faculty members in the WHRE Department were critical factors for substantiating their original academic program and supporting their degree completion. The WHRE faculty member's impact on the participants began at the point of choosing to enroll in the doctoral program, grew as the adviser–advisee relationship expanded, and was solidified with experience of departmental merger.

Choosing the Department

In this subtheme, participants chose to enroll in the former WHRE Department based on the participants' perceptions of its status or academic ranking, their interactions with faculty members, and academic program flexibility. For some participants, its status and academic ranking was critically important in their decision. A participant stated, “I have applied for the program twice and got rejected and reapplied and was accepted, after two years, into the adult education program. I really heard good things about the program and that is why I wouldn't settle for anything else.” Another participant described,

[I enrolled in the academic program because of] pride about being a top-ranked program. It's highly ranked and [has that] went away too? People came and still come. I don't know. Very diverse classes and the

international aspect brought depth to the program. Rankings brought people in and chose the program because of rankings. I had choices but chose [the academic department].

Prior to applying for the degree program, some participants engaged with the department to determine their fit academically. For instance, classroom learning delivered by faculty from the department influenced students' decisions to enroll.

Before the University, I had my masters in health and human services from [another institution] and I joined their doctoral program but it was not challenging. There were good professors but not a challenging learning environment; it was really, really boring. I wasn't stimulated at all. I heard good thing about the University of Minnesota, [WHRE academic program]. Before accepted, I took a class. This is a good program and relevant to what I want—teaching and working with adults. What made me really interested, before I was even accepted, I took a class to see if the program is for me or not. It can look really rosy from the outside. I took my first class with a professor and it was the way [the professor] taught the class. Though I didn't have very much experience in [the field], [the professor] still valued my perspective and it was challenging because there was a lot of lecture and reading.

Another participant echoed a similar experience.

I expected [the graduate school experience] to get to the point where I would be a little bit over my head, but I found that it was challenging. The professors were very supportive, so with that support I felt very comfortable in moving forward [to apply to the program]. So I felt like I could do it and I felt like they had my back.

Flexibility in the degree program of the former WHRE Department, the ability to focus research interests, and classroom learning offered doctoral students a programmatic option that fit into their daily lives. One participant stated,

The higher education program here, I looked at the courses and I thought, wow, this is exactly what I did in grad school—do I really want to do this over again? Or do I want to learn something new, but is it still flexible enough to fit into my career path? So I went over to the [WHRE] program, and really my first meeting was with [a faculty member] and my questions for him weren't so much about the program, because I could see what the classes were, but was focused on what type of research I could do for my dissertation ... I asked him if [my topic of interest] would be an option,

like if I could focus more on that for my dissertation, and write about it along the way. [The faculty member] said, “by all means, it relates to our [academic program].” Unlike the other programs, it wasn’t a repeat of what I had already done in my Masters degree; it was all new. I could do it part time. So that’s why I chose the [academic] program.

Former Department’s Faculty Members’ Effect During the Transition

This subtheme describes faculty members’ or advisers’ relationships with the participants during the initial phase of the transformation of the department. The faculty member’s or adviser’s role was a fundamental factor in the doctoral students’ experience.

I liked to hear [about the merger of the department] firsthand and not through somebody else, and I was really glad I went [to the open forum]. After that I was totally comfortable with it. I didn’t want to leave St. Paul, but then they said they were happy about the move. Then I was totally at peace because they’re the ones that are really going through the transition. They made sure that that was well established, that ‘we are here to support you and nothing will change as long as you continue to make progress forward’. They respect each other and you feel that in the room that the professors respect each other, and they respect their expertise.

[The departmental transition] was seamless. The reason why it was so seamless was that [a faculty member], in 2008, allowed the doctoral students to come in [to an open forum about the merger]. They had all the professors from WHRE in the room, and they presented the idea that they were going to be merging with EdPA, and they let us know that it was very important that you continued your progress.

For some participants, their adviser was a critical part of the transition to the new department. A participant stated, “[My interactions with the adviser] really hasn’t changed much [since the departmental transition]. My adviser is there, now he’s here. Always accessible, both before and after.” For one participant, holding a high trust with the adviser that the merger and transition would cause minimal effects was important to her experience. “The advisers prepared us that we are not going to be on the same campus but no specifics. I never had the chance to explore more. When I met with my adviser about my research, I never questioned.” In addition, a different participant’s

interaction with an adviser provided no specifics and didn't include the departmental transition discussion.

I certainly did not hear about the relocation to the Minneapolis campus, that was really held close, not a peep. I didn't hear a peep about that. [My adviser] is rather tight-lipped, but [the professor said], "No, let's not have you do that just yet." So [my adviser] might, just for administrative things say, "No, let's maybe do this next", or "Let's have you go here, we want to make sure this is all lined up." [My adviser] say to me, "Things are changing, you may have heard," and I am like, "Nah I don't hear anything," which you know, we're playing cat and mouse with each other.

For some participants, even if their advisers did not directly impact their experience, their perceptions about the transition's effect on the faculty and what was to come for the department were shaped by the aura of the departmental environment.

I did have a sense that the faculty didn't like the move, and although none of them specifically said it—in the classes I had just before prelims, I was already preparing for my prelims and putting together my committee—nobody specifically said, "Oh we're not looking forward to this move." But you can feel it, you can see their apprehension.

I remember the summer because I took three classes this summer. Several of the professors were in the process of moving from one campus to another so they would say things such as, "I have this book that I wanted to show you guys, but I'm not sure where it is at the moment." "I have this syllabus, but I can't tell you my office hours because I don't know where my office space is going to be." You could just tell they were kind of frazzled. It's always like that when you're moving, right? I was sort of feeling their pain.

Seeking Connections with Faculty Members in the Newly Treated Department

This subtheme depicts the participants' need to make contacts or work to create mentorships with faculty from other academic programs in the newly formed department, Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development (OLPD). There were visceral responses to some of the situations described. In these cases, the participants felt the need to remain in connection with their current adviser and doctoral committee structure and

seek new relationships if necessary, but it was not a forthright intent for many doctoral students.

I am dealing with the same faculty, so I really haven't had a chance. This particular person, the one in the spring, I have had him before, even though [the professor] is in the new department. I haven't had a chance to develop new ones, no. I don't want to say it's not important, but right now with the network and the support that I have, I don't feel that I have to reach out to other faculty. If something comes up, I am comfortable approaching another professor, but I would be comfortable approaching [someone] over in [another department] or whatever. It's just where my needs are right now, I don't have to reach out. I don't have a need for it, but I know that they are very competent and I think that they really have the best interest at heart.

In instances when a student had to seek a mentorship or new faculty relationship, it was based on the need to add to their doctoral committee as a result of a faculty retirement or sabbatical.

I haven't yet [created new faculty mentorships], but I anticipate that I will be going to. One of the people on my committee is on sabbatical when I may be taking my exams, I will probably need to get someone new. There are a couple of people who have tangential interests in the topic that I'm interested in. I think it will be good. When it comes to my dissertation, I'll pull in the original guy and maybe keep the new guy.

For a few participants, the need for support to make those connections with faculty members in the newly formed department was important for their experience. Even though doctoral students are required to have one member outside the department on their doctoral committee, the merger of the department heightened some participants' concerns about connecting with other faculty. Further, frequent faculty retirements may have played a factor to heightened concerns about a doctoral committee. A participant stated, "It is important to meet to build connections because of survival. It is really

important and I don't want to lose connections [with the faculty in my academic program]. I need support and I can't do it on my own.” Another participant conveyed,

I have my committee chair; [the professor] is my adviser. I've got [three other faculty members who], who have signed on; I asked them quite some time ago. I asked somebody else, early retirement, phased-out retirement, and then [another faculty member from the former department], also retired. So I've had two people retire, and the promise was, “We'll make this work when the time comes, so don't worry about it.” That's the promise. But then on the flip side, “Well, what are you going to do about an outside person on your committee?” I'm like, “You're telling me, you're going to make this work! You guys got to help me out.”

Theme 2: I Had a Diverse Interaction with the Community but Now It Is Minimal

I Had A Diverse Interaction with the Community But Now It Is Minimal refers to the doctoral students once knowing a community of peers and faculty within their department who were brought together or purposely convened to share common experiences, insights, and research interests. Many of the participants felt their community has been minimized as a result of their academic program shift or merger with the other department. Initially forming or developing a community in the former WHRE Department was not easy for many of them, and now they are faced with the challenge of learning a new campus, its people, and its environment. The participants' connections with the former department were held together by the community of learners and researchers, but the emotional connection to the environment has been transformed.

Need for a Community

Many of the participants expressed the need to create or rekindle a community of learners described as one in which the learners would go through similar doctoral experiences in the academic programs and be connected to the former WHRE

Department. All of the participants realized the department's community was different than their perceived stereotype of a graduate school community experience. They all mentioned ways of thinking about issues, solutions, or topics with a group of peers, ideas for creating a community, and an emotional connection with the WHRE Department as a critical aspect of their learning. The focus on their community was because of the merger of the WHRE and EdPA departments and how it impacted their experiences as doctoral students; these participants were retrained and enrolled regardless of the transformation of the department into the newly formed OLPD Department in fall 2009. For instance, a participant stated, "Previously, I had diverse interaction but now it is minimal. During prelims, orals, and conference papers, I have more interactions with my adviser. With students, other than working on conference papers or homework, there is less interaction." Another participant conveyed,

I'll get there five minutes before it starts, and hopefully as soon as it's done my group will want to meet afterwards because I don't want to meet with them on the weekend. My frame of mind has changed, but that was frustrating at the beginning, there wasn't that community. Especially academically, it hurt, because I used to have peers that I could call on and say, 'Hey what did you think the faculty wanted by this', or 'What did you think about this article', or 'I am thinking about taking my paper or my argument this way'. And I didn't have other students ask those questions to because I didn't know them. I have a feeling [it would have been different if it was full-time]. I know it's not a cohort program, but I think if I were full-time, I would have seen consistently more faces, probably the other full-timers who were there at the same time I was.

It seems to me that when were in the VoTech [Education Building], there was a stronger sense of community. The odds were much higher, that if I ran over there [to the building] to drop off a paper, that I will run into people I knew. If I was taking a class and maybe someone else would be taking a different class, but you would meet on break. I'm not seeing that same thing now on the new campus. I think this may be a loss.

The attempt to maintain or, alternatively, to not engage in the community after WHRE department transition was due, in part, to the outside daily living demands on the participants. With family and work commitment and responsibilities vying for their time, participants were unsure how to immerse themselves in a community that was now difficult to find or not easily accessible. A participant spoke about her intentional actions to become part of the former department's community:

I've been intentional about being part of the community even though I'm part-time. When they have those day-time lunch seminars, I try to get to them; and the bag lunch seminars put on by international students about [the academic program]. I try to go to a lot of those so that I would meet people. My adviser does a great thing. He has group meetings with everyone who is his advisee, and I try to go to meet others. I like that. A lot of my classes had group projects and then you'd end up with that group for the semester.

Each of the participants' experiences reflected their busy lives. They all expressed difficulty finding the time to be a part of a community from the beginning of the doctoral program. A participant conveyed, "I don't, and I haven't [felt like part of the graduate school community], really because I am a commuter student, but so is most everybody in our program. Unless you were an international student living in graduate student housing, or for some reason you were a bright [student] who went from your undergrad to your masters and are living on campus, it is difficult to find."

As a component to this subtheme, participants shared their thoughts regarding ways to initially create a stronger sense of community for an academic program or what it means to have a community group or a cohort of doctoral students. The former WHRE Department and the academic program's structure in the newly created department (OLPD) do not have this cohort element established. In a cohort structure, students would

systematically move through their coursework, seminars, and candidacy phases with others in similar academic endeavors.

The participants who emphasized this approach for generating and sustaining a community environment were building upon an experience from previous post baccalaureate education programs. A participant stated disappointment in not having a cohort of peers that helped to create a community of doctoral students. The participant's perceptions of graduate school were shaped by a notion of an environment with a cohort experience. One participant described,

I really got to know my peers, and we had a community, a really strong community, that we would do stuff on the weekends, we would study together, we would do those kinds of things. I thought this program was going to be like that, you know, just part-time, which was not the case. I really found that as a part-time student, instead of knowing most of the class or even half the class, I'd be lucky if I knew one or two other students. So you'd come in and see them that first semester and then they'd be gone, because they'd be at a faster pace than I was because they were a full-time student, or spending more time on it than I was, or just by chance or course selection, I didn't have a lot of the same people from class to class. So I didn't feel like there was much of a community, you know, compared to what I had previously. It was frustrating, but I would describe it more as disappointing. I was hoping, especially as a young professional, I was hoping to have it be an opportunity to meet a lot of people and get to know them.

Another participant stated a similar expectation as a result of a former post baccalaureate experience but recognized the reality of the program based on expectations of the department.

The first thing I expected was for it to be like the masters program, which is a more cohort-based program. Just the structure of it—I think the Ph.D program is much more open-ended, and frankly a lot more work in terms of thinking about things that I never thought I'd have to, where it takes up a lot of time. So normally classes and doing those kinds of things, I've been used to over the years, then you get into the program and then you're all, 'Oh I gotta think differently!' So that was kind of a revelation, in

going through it. I tell people sometimes, it's a lot more work than I ever would have expected. You expect to do a lot of work, but it's just the time that it occupies in your life, and all the steps that are necessary seem very different than just going through, if you're doing courses and things you can get through. It's all the outside things—the conferences, the papers and interaction with people. You try to immerse yourself in it as much as you can, even though working full-time and going to school full-time isn't the optimal.

An additional participant stated:

I think it is just, as a graduate student, you need a group to hang with. Again, I'm thinking about my first [post baccalaureate] degree—to get through the classes. The other thing about it is, too, if you have another group you know from your program, your discussions can be so rich.

Because of the issue or challenges faced by the participants who expected or sought out a community of peers, several participants identified ways needed to make some adjustments to their graduate school experience in order to accommodate the difficulties and realities of the new department's community.

I also think community building with the new college, like brown bag lunches or something, would be important. Other colleges do what we don't do, like invite people to listen to dissertation presentations. I think that would be a good thing, to start doing some of that. I think most of us would go. I've been walking through campus in other buildings and there would be signs about 'so-and-so's dissertation presentation' at a certain time. I think that would be an interesting way to build community. Meet people and faculty. I kind of wondered why we didn't do that. They are open to the public but not advertised. I can't really think of any meeting with the department chair or lunch or whatever [in the new department]. I'm not sure if the person who used to do was an old department chair, but because of the transition it might have been helpful.

Maybe there was a time to meet with doctoral students to let them know, but I may have missed the email and I get a lot of email. I'm not sure if there were any announcements about questions that may need to be answered and how we can get connected, what it means to us, any changes that will happen. I'm not sure if the department had a meeting to see how the transition may affect the students, to see others perspectives. But, if something like that happened, I'd definitely be interested in that. I could get answers from my adviser, but it would be good to have all the doctoral students together to see how we can transition and connect to each other.

Though most students related a community to a building design or location of a building, one participant described a connection with the community that entailed a remote or electronic community of learners. As a means for enrolling in courses in a non-traditional manner, the participant identified a way to build a sense of community during the transition of the academic programs and merger of the WHRE Department with EdPA Department.

One thing I am enjoying—the professor for [a course], offered it online and in the classroom. I am a person that has not really experienced online learning. So I was excited about it. I really did feel like part of the community because when you do it online, you actually do have to communicate, because you're proposing questions and having discussions, and I really do like the online feel of it. And so I felt more part of a community because at that point, it was required for you to share, so we had a little bit of conversation and interesting discussion, I couldn't believe it, it was great. I got a new experience that I hadn't had...But because [the professor] had it online, you have to communicate—you really started knowing people more than you could have in the classroom. I felt like we knew each other, it was great. He wanted everybody to feel safe in expressing themselves. With the structure of the class being partially online, you had to share and converse and engage in discussion. You do get to know people more differently when you have to communicate in that format, because you're probably going to say a bit more, or you feel more comfortable saying.

Emotional Connection with Department

This subtheme speaks to comments made by all participants regarding their experience with the merger of the WHRE Department with the EdPA Department. Their connection to the former department created lingering concerns about how to intrinsically handle the transition of the academic program and also how the shift of physical space impacted their experience. For instance, one student conveyed, “I feel lost again, I feel like I am a brand new student again. I feel disconnected. Mentally and emotionally, I am connected to [the WHRE Department's previous location], because there's familiarity

there and now I am over at the main University campus, of which I have great fear, because I don't know it." Another participant stated, "Now what is going to happen to [the academic program]? It's a strong program at the U and it felt like it might just fade away." A third participant described,

I don't know if this was perceived or somebody had told me, but I had this feeling that I needed to get my committee together and have it locked in before everything changed. I remember having that feeling, and I don't know if that was because somebody told me it's the way that should happen, or if it was because I thought it was best. But I remember having that intrinsic feeling that I need to do that, that I needed to make sure that that was done before this big shift occurred. And if not, that it would be even more difficult to have it happen, whether that would be true or not that was my feeling.

For some participants, the physical move for the academic programs to a different campus location heightened their awareness of the potential impact on their experience. As one participant stated, "I am connected to [the former WHRE Department's location], because there's familiarity there, and I built that familiarity—sights, sounds, locations, pathways, buildings, people." When asked about the move to the larger campus, all the participants mentioned the physical location. Participants stated,

- "For me it's that frame of mind [to go to the main campus]";
- "There are strange names to buildings, and so I feel extremely disconnected. I don't even know where my adviser is, I have an address and I can't picture it."
- "We are not familiar with the [the other campus location], not much. It is a closer campus for me, and I think I'll get used to it. Are they going to move again?" and
- "The phone numbers stay the same; they're just in a different spot."

The reputation of the program and its loss as a result the WHRE Department's transformation was a factor in the students' experiences. Though the academic programs exist within a newly created department, participants view it as not given the same status it once held. A student explained,

It feels absorbed instead of in a leadership position. When we were [the academic program in WHRE], it was a place that people wanted to go to. My perception now is that it is an afterthought. It's not front and center. It's not the main reason the current department exists. We are a subgroup instead of the lead dog. So that is fundamentally different.

Theme 3: Why Did the Merger Happen?

This theme is based on the perceptions and experiences as participants pondered the merger of the WHRE Department with the EdPA Department. All participants were aware in varying degrees that the transition was to occur due to being told or hearing about it in some manner. Their speculation about why the merger happened, how the merger was handled, and about the department's evolution were key factors that made up their experiences. *Why Did the Merger Happen?* refers to the unknown, the unexplained, and speculated reasons for the merger of the WHRE Department and the transfer of academic programs to a larger, department (newly named Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development) that occurred within the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD).

Speculating Why the Merger Occurred

A subtheme conveyed by all the participants was their questioning about why the college acted to merge the WHRE Department with another department and various assumptions for why it occurred. Through scenarios of speculation, doctoral student generated ideas for why the merger happened but none were confirmed, explored, or

resolved through communication tactics with the departmental leadership, faculty advisers, or mentors in the newly created OLPD. A participant described,

I am the type of learner who wants to know why things are happening, too. I was told of the change, and made aware of the change, and that's kind of where it ended. Maybe it's only on a need-to-know basis. As a student in the program, it would have helped me to understand why the move and the change was taking place, not just that it was happening. The messages to me should have been more than just, oh, "We're moving; we're combining with another department." Well, "Why are you doing that?" And I still have that question today.

Another participant stated,

So the only way I can really truly look at this is to say that this is an economic decision. This isn't about higher learning to me; this isn't about creating a finer department. It's about money, because right now we don't have enough staff to teach, to coach, to counsel, to mentor, to advise.

Similarly, a student described,

To me this is strictly economic, where the first move, WCFE (Work, Community, and Family Education) to WHRE, I think that was also an economic move, but it felt more like a move for the interest and best use of the resources for the students. That felt very student-centered, this feels economic-centered based on maybe current economic status with the legislature. Now that's just my opinion, I don't know if it's true, just my big fat opinion.

For students in this study, faculty was viewed as an important factor in why a merger may have occurred. As faculty retired over the past 10 years, few were replaced.

As a result, personalities and the faculty environment may have shifted within the WHRE Department. A participant described:

The department needed to stay viable after the heavy hitters left and that requires leadership and it requires somebody to stand up and fight. I don't think we have those personalities in the department. I'm not angry. To protect everyone in the program, that would have been best for the students.

Likewise, recognizing faculty behaviors about the transition to the newly formed department (OLPD) had an impact on how the participants viewed the merger.

I think [the merger] was more globally related to [the college], than the department. Most of what I heard about the new department, the professors were excited about it and it was a good opportunity. I really didn't hear anything negative about the new department. I knew some of the professors and saw some names and they looked good.

Another student described the experience in the classroom that had an impact on how she viewed the transition to the newly formed department,

One professor, retired now, would come into class and rant about how badly the University has handled things and that got a little old. Because I'm sure he was frustrated, but we were all frustrated. I don't think you should air your dirty laundry out on the students. We are all in [the academic program] and we are all frustrated with the University for not using good change management, and it's very amusing. But, it had its moments, it did. I think I would have picked a different organization as an example [in class] to talk about rather than having people who are paying tuition and in some instances coming from other countries to the University. I don't think they need to be told that the organization is managing this so badly. I would not have done it that way.

Some participants felt helpless or powerless in the face of the departmental change, expressing the helplessness through speculation about why the merger occurred or their expressed need to separate themselves from the departmental transition. For one participant, student input about the WHRE transformation was a component in the experience and raised some skepticism about the department's merger with the EdPA Department. An international student stated,

One thing [international students] have in common, we just take our classes; we only have to deal with what is in front of us. We don't question. We take classes. If it means something in my transcript later on or diploma, then I'll be concerned. Nobody asked us for our input. We didn't have any input about the change in the department. It is something we don't have any influence on, so why would we bother?

Communication as a Key Strategy for Addressing a Merger

In this subtheme, communication delivered by departmental leaders or faculty was key to student experience in the transition. Though some participants felt their questions or concerns were answered through communication venues, others said they had additional questions about the merger of the department or about their academic program. In some cases speculation about the reasons for the transition emerged since the faculty may not have been able to address their questions, or perhaps because students didn't express their concerns. This situation occurred even though departmental faculty's intentions seemed to be to answer the doctoral students' questions.

Participants had been informed about the pending merger of the WHRE Department with the EdPA Department through email notices or other written communication modes, such as a forum for doctoral students and faculty members and a panel discussion. During a the WHRE Department open forum held in early fall 2008, doctoral students were given an opportunity to ask questions about the situation and address how it may impact their program and progress toward degree completion. An EdPA/WHRE Integration Panel, sponsored by the EdPA Student Association, was an option for doctoral students to attend, which was held four to five months prior to the official merger and opening of the OLPD Department in July 2009. The purpose of the panel was to highlight and discuss "similarities as well as distinct qualities of our programs from various perspectives" (email, 2009, February). For some participants, however, discussing the academic program transition with their faculty adviser was a mode for communication while other participants stated that they dodged or ignored the emerging and inevitable change. Overall, varying levels of communications occurred by

either WHRE faculty or students in EdPA and various levels of understanding about the merger ensued during this period of focused communication efforts.

Some participants failed to internalize the shift while others wanted “to know about the program and how it will affect me,” as one participant stated. For many participants, the strategy was effective, as one student conveyed, “I think [the WHRE faculty] did some things well. Focus groups, town hall meetings, what felt like a communication plan worked, open to answer questions, I think that was a healthy approach and calmed most people's fears.”

One participant, however, missed all modes of communication for unknown reasons. The participant stated,

Maybe there was a time to meet with doctoral students to let them know, but I may have missed the email and I get a lot of email. I'm not sure if there were any announcements about questions that may need to be answered and how we can get connected, what it means to us, any changes that will happen. I'm not sure if the department had a meeting to see how the transition may affect the students, to see others' perspectives. But, if something like that happened, I'd definitely be interested in that. I could get answers from my adviser, but it would be good to have all the doctoral students together to see how we can transition and connect to each others.

The evolution of the WHRE Department meaningfully impacted students when the name of the department changed throughout its history. For most participants, their identity was viewed by the departmental name—it brought meaning to their studies and connected them with their peers and departmental faculty. From 1993 to 2006, significant departmental changes impact academic program offerings (as a result of the economic environment, work place trends, and legislative mandates) and what ultimately altered the title of the department, which in turn impacted the final merger of the WHRE Department in 2009—see Table 4.

Table 4.

Transitional Milestones in the Department of Work and Human Resource Education

Year	Milestone
1910	CEHD founded Agricultural Education Program
1911	Home Economics Education Program founded
1912	Industrial Education Program founded
1947	Distributive Education Program founded
1948	Business Education Program founded
1962	Vocational and Technical Education Division founded
1965	Minnesota Research Coordinating Unit established to stimulate and disseminate R&D for improving vocational education practices (renamed Minnesota Research & Development Center in 1975)
1973	Business Education Program founded
1974	Vocational and Technical Education Department formed to assimilate Industrial Arts, Distributive Education, Home Economics, and Agricultural Education Programs
1974	Adult Education Program founded
1977	Special Needs Learners Initiative founded
1980	Training and Development Program founded (renamed Human resource Development in 1993)
1981	Vocational and Technical Building completed on the St. Paul Campus
1995	Adult Education program moved from Curriculum and Instruction Department to Vocational and Technical Education (later merged from HRD program)
1995	Vocational and Technical Education Department renamed Work, Community, and Family Education
2006	Work, Community, and Family Education Department renamed Work and Human Resource Education <i>(cont.)</i>

Year	Milestone
<i>(Table 4. cont.)</i>	
2009	Work and Human Resource Education merges with Education Policy and Administration to form new Department of Organization Leadership, Policy, and Development

Note: Brown, J. & Leske, G. (2010, April). Milestones in the History of Work and Human Resource Education. Unpublished, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Prior to the WHRE Department transition in July 2009, concerns mounted as to what the new name was going to mean. The doctoral students were asked by departmental and collegiate leaders to identify what name they wanted on their diploma, either (a) WHRE or (b) OLPD, so the naming of the new department became a focus for them. A participant described, “I remember email information about how we created a new name of the department. I think EdPA and WHRE had common characteristics. The new department name is good at capturing [my academic program].” For some students, the name change further enforced the historical changes within the WHRE Department.

A participant conveyed,

I feel like the program’s evolving and I do like the new name. I think there’s leadership and development in the program title, and they gave me the option, what do you want to appear on your degree, WCFE, WHRE, now you can have ... Well, I like it because it sounds more current, and more up to date, so I think it’s great. I am comfortable with the change in the name, I really was.

In contrast, uncertainty about the new name and its affect on their status in the profession was a concern for some participants. A participant stated “It felt like it diminished the importance of [my academic program] in the [new department]. Even though the name has [my program focus] in it and things like that it’s just . . . without the

same structure, I'm not sure how that's gonna play out." Another participant stated interest in knowing how professionals outside of the University viewed the changes of the department. The participant described,

I'm not sure how that's gonna play out. It'll be interesting to hear when I go to the conference this time to hear what people think outside about the changes there. So many people before would kinda seek you out because you were in the program at the U. WCFE to WHRE, at the time I felt like was maybe a positive change, it was moving away from more of the technical aspects of the program and I was moving in that same direction. So it felt like, "Oh this is good, we're going right into where I want to be." And I was in there, I guess long enough that this change gets you another area, and a much bigger change but in some ways it has less impact, I am hoping, [on him and on the academic program].

In addition, some participants discussed the evolution of the former department and how those experiences impact the meaning of the department and what the name may mean for future job perspectives. A participant stated,

In 2006, there was a name change to from WCFE (when I applied), then after that it was WHRE, and now it is ODLP? What does it mean? What does it mean in the job market? Where will I graduate from? What one is better? I'm not opposed to the idea but I want to see what it means in the job market, which name will be attractive, which one is better?

Another student stated confusion when talking about the newly formed department. The participant stated,

Which integration are we talking about, that's my question, because we started off at, when I joined it was WCFE, Work Community Family Education—and I go, "Well, that department doesn't make a whole lot of sense, but it's floating around under the College of Education, great." So then we became WHRE, Work and Human Resource Education—I thought that seemed to fit better for the specialties of human resource development and adult learning, I thought that fit better. And now we're OLPD. From WCFE to WHRE, there was some attrition of faculty, a couple people, but it was mostly, I think, they were very excited to get a better name. I didn't care. My first semester in 2003, I was under WCFE, and I hardly knew what a classroom was!

Another participant stated similar concerns about the meaning of the new title of the department. The participant conveyed,

I've gotten questionnaires that say, would you like the old department name or the new department name? On your diploma, do you want the old or new department name? And I am like, it won't matter—I'll pick the new department name because that's really what the new department name is. I am not even really sure what's in there. I think there's an HRD specialty, I think there's adult learning as a specialty, but isn't educational psychology rolled in there?

For most participants, the departmental name changed several times during their academic career at the University. Some participants relied on feedback about their academic program from peers outside of the University, while others believed the department was trying to transform academic programs internally to capture the essence of evolving professional fields. One participant described this experience as the following,

This department to have changed three times in seven years, I don't know if that's usual or not ... of other universities where it's like Play Dough. We're just a bunch of Play Dough characters and "oh, let's pull them apart, let's roll them out, let's cookie cut them, oh good we've got a happy little group here in pink. Oh no, we're gonna squish them all together, and we're gonna get some new Play Dough, and it doesn't look good together".

The WHRE Department's name changes throughout its history impacted participants as did the communications to convey the most recent name change to OLPD. Then, during the first semester following the point of transition (September, 2009), participants stated that their communication and notices via email from the newly formed department (OLPD) began. A participant stated, "I appreciate the communication from the department. I think that has been refreshing; I feel like there are many opportunities handed to us. But if I was at a different stage in my life, I'd be looking at it seriously. Job

options.” Another participant stated, “I’m getting more diverse email from the department but not related to my interest.” A participant described the abruptness of the email messages that began with minimal introduction during the transition, “I get emails from a guy named X, I don’t know who in the hell he is...I get more emails from that guy than I do my adviser. I don’t know what [the professor] does, I don’t know where [the professor] fits in the flow chart.”

The communication with the doctoral students from the WHRE Department seemed haphazard according to the participants. With electronic capabilities and communication outlets available to departmental faculty and student communities, there seemed to be an under abundance of communication tactics that would target differing students demographics, such as full-time or part-time academic load to commuter or residential students. One participant described,

I don’t feel part of the integrated department, because I am a commuter student, I am not on campus. It’s also my choice. I work full-time, that’s a choice. I choose not to come over to campus on free time. So of course there’s not a connection. I go to the formerly named WCFE/WHRE website, and they haven’t changed the name. So I don’t feel connected to our department because they haven’t even kept up the pace of the website.

The different modes of communication seemed to impact the participants differently based on the ways in which they seek communication announcements and information. In some instances, the students felt positive about the new opportunities for information given to them as a result of the newly formed department. In contrast, other students relied on past communication avenues or needed a stronger, pointed introduction to the people and strategies behind the communication practices within OLPD.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to relate the findings of the interview data by incorporating quotations and documentation on each theme that emerged from the interviews. These descriptive findings will lead to a discussion in the next chapter. The data findings suggest that the transformation of the WHRE Department was methodically planned and has been supported by faculty members. The doctoral students followed suit and focused on their academic plans and research work. The former department faculty had put emphasis on the doctoral students' progress toward degree completion as strategy for the students' to move forward and seemed to want students to remain focused on their educational efforts rather than be concerned or agonize about what the future holds for the department. This next chapter is devoted to a discussion of these findings as it relates to the literature to address the research questions and future research.

CHAPTER 5

Research Summary

This chapter provides an analysis of the data that were collected by means of the methodology described in Chapter 3. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 provides evidence that organizational changes in higher education institutions should involve academic leaders and departmental faculty members to recognize, understand, and interpret organizational cultures and environmental changes that are critical to their department's performance and ability to shift strategic directions (Draft & Weick, 1994; Milliken, 1990; Rowley & Sherman, 2001). Also, the literature review provides evidence that graduate programs have remained relatively unscathed in terms of course content, recommended work experiences, and requirements for decades despite precautionary cuts, state government retrenchments, and permanent reductions (Lee & Eisen, 2009; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). The stability creates expectations for its students. Though important accounts in the literature exist, the impact of organizational changes on the lives of doctoral students during a period of departmental transformation was unknown, and available literature remains scarce (Gardner, 2009). Throughout this chapter, I provide a brief review of the study and examine the themes as they relate to the available literature.

Study Overview

The study took place at an institution of higher education in the midst of changes in its organizational environment. The assumption of this study was that the University of Minnesota was making dramatic organizational and structural adjustments, and academic

leaders in the Department of Work and Human Resource Education (WHRE) needed to make transformative changes to their organizational strategies in order to remain viable as a critical research entity in their particular fields of study. The participants in the study were doctoral students who had experienced the organizational shift. As Weick (1990) described, if leaders misread or misconstrue an emerging or evident change within the organizational environment, they may fail to make an important decision for the organization's strategy or action. Therefore understanding the organizational impact on the population of doctoral students is necessary when preparing and carrying out planning activities of a significant strategy or action during the transformation of an academic department. It is generally accepted that doctoral students contribute to the overall university mission, but how they progress toward graduation and preparation of professional careers within a department under significant transformation has not been thoroughly examined.

Despite a variety of professional activities, teaching and research responsibilities, and family and personal obligations, the commonly shared feature of doctoral students' experiences is that they have a common procedural path toward a certificate of doctoral program completion. These ties among them and among faculty seem to exist regardless of a department's existence. What further hardens a shared experience amongst students and faculty is through an academic program and disciplinary field, or through the academic program's primary purpose of research, teaching, and public service. Exploring the impact of structural changes in an academic department during a period of significant, historical transformation on doctoral students seemed to be an appealing venture that will begin to fill a gap in literature.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Research

A review of literature found that there was a great deal of investigation into the impact of environmental changes in higher education and the role and experiences of doctoral students. Research literature is non-existent in regards to the doctoral student's experiences as applied to current trends of downsizing or reducing the number of departments in an institution to address economic development, workforce trends, or innovations in fields of study. In particular, very limited research has been conducted on the experience of doctoral students when such a noteworthy institutional event occurs. Though I am unsure why the transformation of the Department of WHRE took place, my assumption remains that it happened to maintain its critical research contributions and pursuits through interdisciplinary collaborations. This led to the examination of one of the populations of students at a university—doctoral students. Their role is to develop social relationships with faculty and peers as well as to participate in scholarly activities as a way to create social interaction and collegiality that supports a climate for doctoral study (Weidman & Stein, 2006). Amid the organizational change, the student's role remains intact and the process toward degree completion continues to be stable, but the expected and anticipated doctoral education experience shifts.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of doctoral students at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, as they transitioned from a fairly stable academic department to one experiencing significant changes. Since the study was not conducted pre- and post-transformation, there is no point “A” and point “Z” to compare. Furthermore, there existed no preliminary data. Likewise, comments or survey results about doctoral students' levels of satisfaction with faculty members, professors,

and advisers had not been documented because an institutional survey of the doctoral student's experience (i.e., Exit Survey of Doctoral Graduates) is distributed following degree completion (R. Huesman, personal communication, December 2, 2010).

Because of the absence of this beginning data, I have relied heavily on the doctoral students' perceptions and anecdotal evidence of the change. The study focuses on their understanding of and their perceptions about events and decisions prior to the onset of the transformation and after the first semester of the newly created department. As stated in earlier chapters, prior to this study, the culture of the department and college was an imbedded part of the organization and unnoticed by the faculty and students. With the transformation of the WHRE Department, the cultural elements may have become more obvious as new customs, traditions, and ways of knowing are being challenged or considered by those impacted. Specifically, the merger of the department occurred methodically, but without an understanding of what the fundamental implications might be prior to the merger with the Educational Policy and Administration (EdPA) Department. For instance, the faculty focused on having the students maintain their tracks or progress toward graduation. The faculty seemed to lack awareness of the possibility of a culture shift as a result of the organization change. This study then seeks to find evidence, understand the essence of the doctoral students' experiences, and describe being a student during the transition of the department, thus seeing the implications of transfer of academic programs to a newly renamed department—Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development (OLPD) —during this transformation.

I sought to determine if the doctoral students had personal awareness of the impact of an academic departmental merger and academic program change. I also sought

to discover if these doctoral students identified challenges and risks within organizational changes and adaption to major changes. During earlier stages of data collection, at the onset of data analysis, and looking at confirming patterns or themes, I was able to gain a deeper understanding and greater insights into the research inquiry. As a step to further understand and explain new insights into the experiences of doctoral students, the overall results are addressed in larger themes that demonstrate the findings of the study. This chapter focuses on further discussion of my research question: What experiences have doctoral students in the WHRE Department encountered during their first semester after the merger of that department? Themes were analyzed as they related to the literature.

Data Findings and Analysis

The following section elaborates on the themes for a further literature review.

Theme 1: Connections with new faculty members will change the experience.

This theme highlights three primary experiences that define how doctoral students view their connections to the faculty in their doctoral education experience: (a) choice of academic program or department, (b) faculty member's impact during a significant transition, and (c) engagement with faculty outside of their primary field of study or academic department. The importance of the faculty and student connections was critical to their experience toward progress in the doctoral program, but developing new relationships with faculty outside of their known academic program and department tended to not be a critical factor for their continued progress and advancement toward degree completion. Importantly, all doctoral students are required to have a faculty member on their dissertation committee member who is outside of their department. However, the changes within the department raised their awareness about identifying

with new faculty members within the OLPD Department and others outside of this department as appropriate to their research activities and or to the doctoral committee.

First, choosing an academic program or department was based on the doctoral student's perceptions of the program's status or academic ranking, program flexibility, and interactions with faculty members who have similar areas of interest. The experience of being a doctoral student does not begin on the first day of a course; rather, it begins before the student applies to the program. As Lovitts (2001) described, anticipatory socialization occurs when an individual has an understanding of the doctoral experience through a range of sources, such as from his or her own undergraduate experience, higher education websites, conversations with peers and colleagues, and the media. The knowledge gained through these experiences results in awareness and attitudes that are brought to the first day of class. Gardner (2007) stated that these first days and months in a doctoral education are referred to as the Entry Phase in a three-phase educational process that describes a doctoral student's experience. This phase summarizes the time leading up to and continuing through the first year of the doctoral program. The Entry Phase includes challenges and the sources of support for "admission, orientation, coursework, initial relationships with peers and faculty, changes in how a student thinks and understands knowledge, the transition from undergraduate to graduate school expectations, and departure of students that results from a lack of support during these challenges" (Gardner, 2007, p. 42). For these students, this phase prior to their entrance into the doctoral program, and the new experiences gained during the first year, was critical then and became so again at the time of the transition of the academic department.

At the time of the study, these students were past the Entry Phase, since they had at least one year of experience in the former WHRE Department, and one semester in the newly created department. As Gardner (2007) described, the next phases in doctoral education are the Integration or Candidacy Phases. The students in this study would have been engaged in one of these stages. After the Entry Phase, students tend to begin to see themselves in a different way; they are no longer students being taught by instructors. In the Integration Phase, the doctoral students view themselves in a larger role, as a producer of new knowledge (Delamont, Parry, & Atkinson, 1997; Lovitts, 2001). The Candidacy Phase “is the time during which the doctoral candidate begins to produce original research in the form of a dissertation, [which includes the following set of challenges]: transition to candidacy, the dissertation, the job search, transition to a professional role, and student departure” (Gardner, 2007, p. 77). Though the doctoral students in the study were past the Entry Phase, it was rethought during the process of departmental merger.

The students in this study seemed to be rethinking why they chose the department, though their academic programs were not questioned. The connection to their programs, however, seemed to be closely interconnected with the department. Therefore, they questioned the decision process and factors influencing choice of an academic program which was shaped by their experiences in the department. As the department transformed and the student’s academic programs merged into a cluster of other academic programs outside of their known department, the students continued their pursuit toward a degree. They questioned, however, their understanding of the factors influencing their decision to pursue the particular academic program and those experiences that occurred during their

Entry Phase. Thus, the experiences of the doctoral students may have tempted them to revisit or revert back to the Entry Phase.

Second, during the time of the announcement of a forthcoming departmental merger with the EdPA Department and the shift to a newly formed OLPD Department, faculty and student interactions had a considerable impact on doctoral students' experiences. Prior to enrollment in the degree program, faculty influence or persuasion for individuals to enroll was extensive for the institution (Garden, 2008) and the faculty members had a positive influence on a student's interest in a particular academic program (Kallio, 1995). Further, faculty influence is marked by the quality of the relationship that directly influences the quality of the doctoral education experience. Zhao et al. (2007) identified from the literature beneficial outcomes for students in a constructive relationship to include: (a) positive departmental environment, (b) successful socialization into the department and discipline, and (c) timely completion of the degree. Without a satisfactory relationship, many students choose to leave doctoral study (Lovitts, 2001; Garden, 2008; Golde, 2005). Thus, the impact of the faculty on the doctoral students in this study was likely profound, prior to and during the departmental and academic program transformation. Noticeably in this study, the faculty and student relationships remained a stronghold through the WHRE Departmental transformation that resulted in the attrition of these students into fall 2009.

The relationships established and interactions shared between a student and faculty member form advising relationships that encompasses trust, interaction, and intellectual support. The advising relationships deeply impact a doctoral student's progress toward degree completion (Golde, 2005; Zhao et al., 2007). Golde (2005) stated

that a critical and central component of doctoral education is the match between the adviser and student and a relationship that “either never flourished or withered” (p. 687) can severely impair a student’s education. For doctoral students who have obtained working advising relationships with their advisers, it often includes high levels of interaction, purposefully helping students progress in a timely manner and, based on their degree plan, treating students as junior colleagues (Zhao et al., 2007). Thus, the potentially important factors in a student and faculty member relationship are the selection of the right adviser at the onset of the doctoral program, and the input of that adviser once the relationship has commenced. Yet little is known about how adviser behaviors are related to the student’s advising experience. It is known, however, that the adviser selection strategies (i.e., adviser reputation) and adviser behaviors (i.e., academic advising, personal touch, and career development) affect doctoral students’ satisfaction with the advising relationship (Zhao et al., 2007).

If and how the student and faculty relationship changed during the department transformation, and later upon the final implementation of changes to the academic program, was unknown. This was not the focus of the study; however, what is evident from the study is that many faculty members and the doctoral students’ advisers had great impacts on the students during the transition of their academic programs. The doctoral students in this study remembered comments made during advising sessions, behaviors displayed to redirect conversations, and pointed attempts to maintain a strict course of action for the student’s academic progress and degree plan. The relationships between the doctoral students and faculty did not seem change for participants in this study, but the experience during advising sessions or in the classroom created an environment of trust

and respect, professionalism, hierarchy in the academy, and greater expectations for them to progress in the face of change (Zhao et al., 2007).

Third, engagement and interaction with faculty was viewed as vital to progress toward degree completion, but was an essential component particularly for those faculty with whom the doctoral students worked directly. Who taught and advised them was also important, and this moved them toward scholarly interests (Gregg, 1972; Nyquist et al., 1999; Weidman & Stein, 2003). The doctoral students were not in a phase in their graduate programs that enabled them to thoughtfully rethink or rework their understanding of their graduate education experience because of a shift in the academic structure of their program of study. Though it is required for the doctoral students in the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) to have at least one faculty member from outside of the doctoral student's department, some doctoral students felt that seeking additional faculty for research activities or mentorship roles may not be their immediate action to pursue in the newly created department. For doctoral students, if they chose to engage and seek new connections with faculty members in the newly integrated department, the reasons for which they chose their original department during the initial phase of doctoral education would need to shift or be broadly rethought (Cabrera, Castafieda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Gardner, 2008). With significant thought already devoted to their initial decision to become a graduate student in a particular department, a change would have required mean a dramatic shift in how they thought about their doctoral education going forward.

Faculty member's impact on doctoral students' experiences in a graduate program is of utter importance and significance to the student's preparation for a post-graduation

career. Throughout the history of American higher education, the unvarying assumption has been that the educational impact of faculty and student interactions is critical beyond the classroom (Garden, 2008, 2010; Golde & Dore, 2001; Pascarella, 1980). In most instances, it was the desired learning experience of students to be mentored by a faculty member and to acquire apprenticeship experiences while living in a separate location from the campus environment. Even in the 1800s, doctoral students worked in specific areas of study under the supervision of a faculty member (Geiger, 1997; Thelin, 2004). Much of the unrest experienced by academic institutions in the 1960s and 1970s was explained by a cultural element of the time that created an environment which encompassed lack of classroom communication and non-classroom communication between students and faculty (Long, 1977; 1980). Sweeping initiatives produced debate and new changes pertinent to graduate education (Commission on the Future of Graduate Education, 2010; Council of Graduate Schools, 1996/2003/2009; Taylor, 1971). Golde and Dore (2001) revealed two additional common assumptions as to the purpose that underlies most doctoral programs: (a) to teach junior scholars to conduct sound, rigorous research, and (b) to provide apprenticeships under the tutelage of their advisers. Thus, the impact of faculty on the learning and growth of graduate students seems critical, from the initial point of interaction to a fully developed working adviser–advisee relationship. However, the circumstances and priorities within the graduate department may lead to transformative changes that affect the doctoral experience and may affect the ability of the academic programs to remain viable and to advance knowledge within their fields of study (Golde & Dore, 2001). The connection with faculty, therefore, is necessary but it could be assumed that relationships with faculty members outside of the department or

outside their domain of research or academic program could create unanticipated complications or obstacles that could change the desired learning experience of students.

Theme 2: I had multi-faceted interactions with my community of peers but now it is minimal.

This theme draws attention to the primary experiences of doctoral students: (a) the need for a community of learners, and (b) the emotional connection with the community of peers and the environment therein. These experiences define how students tend to view complex interactions with their peers and how these multi-faceted interactions have been lost or minimized due to organizational change within their academic programs. The importance of student relationships and the department's community of learners was critical, vis-à-vis their success. The connections with the departmental community and interactions with peers and faculty brought about new ideas and exchange of thoughts, connections for research collaborations, and classroom project support and collegial integrity to strengthen their doctoral experiences. As organizational change was implemented in 2009, the student-to-student relationships and the known environment established for collaborations and engagement transformed to become less obvious, accessible, and cohesive. This theme describes how the doctoral students' community or cohort experience brought a stronger emotional connection which was lost or diminished in the process of the department's transformation.

Some literature outside of the higher education paradigm draws upon a general background into a community or cohort experience. Within the literature, a geographical notion of a community (neighborhood, town, and city) and relational character of human relationships within in a community (without reference to locality) exists (Gusfield,

1975). These two categories of community are not exclusive communities and are created, expanded, and solidified by the interests and skills of people (Gusfield, 1975). In relation to this study, I looked at the community, or population of doctoral students, within a specific department or specialization, to examine their experiences with human relationships within the context of the WHRE Department. This perspective allows for the use of the literature that exists about communities and people in a learning environment in order to discover these relationships (spiritually, intrinsically).

Specifically, for the doctoral students in this study, their geographical notion of a community was altered. With the merger of their department, their known structure was lost. When their academic programs were shifted to a new location in a different part of the campus, the geographical location had an altering affect on their community. The academic programs were moved from a location on campus included cattle and horse barns, large and small animal veterinary sciences, agricultural extension and research laboratories to a location that included the education of liberal arts programs, chemistry, engineering, and medical sciences, which were within a metropolitan environment. Even though the building location moved only a few minutes away, students seemed to be impacted by the physical difference of the location, which may have caused a psychological challenge for some of the participants in the new location. Their known community and its geographical location had dramatically changed and their experiences following the merger of the WHRE and EdPA departments and the opening of the OLPD Department impacted their experience with possible unintended results, such as lengthened progress toward degree completion.

There is minimal research available about the doctoral student's community experience (Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005; Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006). The human resource development field of study defined a community of learners, however, through a workplace learning community frame, which reflects the process of social participation in a community or culture (Torraco, 1999; Brockman & Dirkx, 2006). Social participation refers to the formal and informal association or connections with a group (Axelrod, 1956; Olsen, 1972; Wilensky, 1961). "The vitality of social participation, primary and secondary, and the strength of attachment to a community and to the major institutional spheres of society are in part a function of a cumulative experience" (Wilensky, 1961, p. 522). In addition, Brockman and Dirkx (2006) posited that social participation in a community is group of people who reflect upon and learn as they participate and become involved with a particular culture. "Individuals interact with the community and learn to understand and participate in its history, assumptions, and culture values and rules. Furthermore, they enter into and interact with triadic, dialogical relationships with other [people], their identities are strengthened, and they increase their participation within the community of practice of which they are becoming a member" (Brockman & Dirkx, 2006, p. 212).

Glynn (1981) described the psychological elements of a sense of community. That study highlighted the predictors of a sense of a community as a geographical notion of community. Glynn administered the study to focus on a residential population and identified 202 behaviors and 120 characteristics related to a community. The outcome of the study showed that the strongest predictors of an actual sense of community are (a) expected length of residency, (b) satisfaction within the community, and (c) the number

of people who could be identified by name (Glynn, 1981). This study also found a positive relationship between the sense of community and the member's ability to perform and work competently in the community. Glynn's initial work in the *area* sense of community involved a geographical community of people that was able to bring insights into a person's ability to function therein.

The Glynn (1981) study provided a deeper understanding into the doctoral students' sense of community in the department for this study. If doctoral students became members of a community of learners as they interacted with other students, then their identities as learners were strengthened within the culture of doctoral education in the department. Further, the strength in their status or degree program was marked by the distinctions of knowledge and skills with varying levels of experience as they engage in conversations and collaborations with other students to bring into being new ideas, research topics, and classroom interactions. In addition, the learning within a community occurs within the context of solving problems shaped by belonging to a community, and is encouraged or strengthened by students' ability to participate in that community (Brockman & Dirks, 2006). Therefore, for the doctoral students, the significance of their experience and their identities and relationships with others was shaped by belonging to a community.

There are many possible reasons why doctoral students become integrated and bond within a community and why those bonds may be compromised. As previously noted in Chapter 2, Lovitts (2001) identified five ways that doctoral students become integrated into a department: (a) financially through assistantships and scholarships, (b) sharing of office space, (c) participating in departmental formal and informal social

activities, (d) involvement in professional organizations, and (e) bonding with a community of learners and educators in their academic department. Lovitts (2001) reported that doctoral students would most likely exit the graduate education program or not complete intended academic goals without a sense of community within the doctoral program. In many cases, social relationships or community bonds are severed as a result of declines in participation, changes in the makeup of the community or role of its participants, or the level of gratification and satisfaction with participation within the community (Wilensky, 1961). Thus, social relationships in a community of learners will be formed and threatened as a result of the challenges faced by doctoral students if their department merges with another.

In addition to Lovitt's research, Katz and Hartnett (1976) and Tinto (1987) provided an early perspective about doctoral students' experiences as they relate to reasons for staying in the academic program. Katz and Hartnett (1976) found graduate students' interactions with other students in their academic program related positively to their academic achievement. "Social membership within one's program becomes part and parcel of academic membership, and social interaction with one's peers and faculty becomes closely likened not only to one's intellectual development, but also to the development of important skills required for doctoral completion. In a very real sense, the local community becomes the primary educational community for one's graduate career" (Tinto, 1987, p. 232). If an environment hinders peer interactions or student-to-student connections through a competitive academic climate, or a change in learning and research space by faculty members, this will negatively impact the sense of community and the community experience among doctoral students (Katz and Hartnett, 1976).

According to this study, the doctoral student community experience was altered when the academic program was shifted to a newly formed department. This change resulted in a new dynamic or a new composition of peers and faculty members. And, significantly, the community experience was altered as a result of the move of classrooms and faculty offices to a geographically different location on campus. The student's connection with other students was damaged when their geographical community changed and identities and relationships within their community were altered. Thus, for the doctoral students in this study, it was important for these components to be maintained in order for them to connect to their community of learners and maintain a sense of community.

Theme 3: Why did the merger happen?

Why did the merger happen was a third theme highlighted in this study. The theme draws attention to key experiences of doctoral students after the merger was completed and after their academic programs was shifted. The following two subthemes were identified: (a) speculation about why the merger occurred, and (b) communication as a key strategy for addressing the transition of the WHRE Department. These experiences describe how the doctoral students view their interpretation of and rationale for the transition and how communication from faculty leaders and their advisers in the former WHRE Department shaped their perception of the organizational change. The significance of knowing about the circumstances for the decision to transform the department and how it was communicated to them in the months leading up to July 2009 and thereafter was an important component to their experience. This theme describes the doctoral students' understanding and perspective for why the change occurred and how

the unknown realities and rationales for the merger played out in their experience during the department's transformation.

Speculation about why the merger occurred

First, addressing doctoral students' speculation about why the merger occurred led to (a) a brief review the University's history of planning, and (b) a distinctive reexamination of organizational change literature. This review of literature provides a window into understanding why the changed occurred.

Brief review of the institutions history of planning. The University of Minnesota is known as a large public land-grant university located in the Midwestern region of the United States. The institution is situated within a large metropolitan area in close proximity to the Mississippi River. It primarily has been a public institution available to Minnesota high school graduates, but the institution historically has also been a viable option for local, national, and international students. The University of Minnesota's three-fold mission of research and discovery, teaching and learning, and outreach and service grew out of the vision of the University's founding president, William Watts Folwell (1884–1911) who believed that a university should be “an institution in which any person can find instruction in any subject” (Lehmberg & Pflaum, 2001, p. xvi). It was fortunate that it was designated a land-grant institution, in which public lands were set aside for the benefit of higher education institutions that were dedicated to agriculture, mechanical arts, applied studies, outreach, and service to meet the state's needs (Lehmberg & Pflaum, 2001). With 17 colleges and several joint programs and certificates, professional and online options offered at the Minneapolis–St. Paul campus, the University of Minnesota's instructional breadth and depth support

nearly 51,500 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students who seek degree completion. Further, this organizationally complex university also includes extension services, research centers, a medical center, and other health programs throughout the state. It offers services to more than five million Minnesotans.

Over the course of the University of Minnesota's history, academic and administrative leaders shaped and transformed the institution to support student learning, to provide developmental and career needs, faculty entrepreneurship and innovation, and promote research discoveries and advancements (Lehmberg & Pflaum, 2001). During the University's budget challenges in 1993 and the national recession in the later 2000s, administrative leaders sought aggressive strategies to address economic pressures and shifts, while at the same time contemplating the balance of access, quality, and excellence (Lehmberg & Pflaum, 2001). In 2005, leaders systematically led a strategic planning effort that resulted in the closure or reorganization of numerous departments and three colleges. Strategies included efforts to create and streamline enterprise or system-wide services and technologies and focus on key innovative research areas (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2005, March). Even with pointed efforts, new economic challenges emerged across the country in 2009, and it was the first time in the University's history that state appropriations to the University fell below tuition revenues (Bruininks & Pfitzenreuter, 2009, 2010). Institutional cutbacks and budgetary retrenchments across academic and administrative units became a reality (University of Minnesota, Office of Budget and Finance, 2009; University of Minnesota, Office of the President, 2009). With the institution's Board of Regent's and President's commitment to

embrace its traditions, ways of functioning may have changed, but the mission and vision remained steadfast.

Reexamination of the organizational change literature. Individuals and organizations face the phenomenon of change on a daily basis and, as a result, the nature of change and responses to change appear continuously (Rowley et al., 1997; Rowley & Sherman, 2001; Weick, 2001/2009). The complexity associated with understanding the phenomenon of change has often contributed to many failed organizational change efforts that lead to projects to reengineer, re-strategize, merge, downsize, and design culture renewal (Foster, 2010; Kotter, 1996). In failed change initiatives, the resulting costs to organizations can be great, in terms of time, money, and other areas affecting future change efforts (Foster, 2010). In this study, a planned organizational change occurred, i.e., the merger of a department and the opening of academic programs in a newly formed department. This type of change is very similar to an episodic change with a very short-run adaption (Weick & Quinn, 1999). It was a complex transformation, and this study provides a point in time of understanding the doctoral students' experiences during the transformation of the academic programs within the former WHRE Department.

From the doctoral student's perspective, the transformation of the WHRE Department was swift; the faculty's plans to carry out the organizational change were methodical. A particular circumstance in the department, college, and University moved the faculty to make an adjustment in the organization's structure (Bruininks & Pfitzenreuter, 2009; University of Minnesota Board of Regents, 2005, March). It could be assumed that institutional cutbacks and budgetary retrenchments in 2009 expedited the decision to make strategic efforts to merge the WHRE Department with another

department. Higher education institutions have faced downsizing initiatives in order to adjust to the economic and social environment of their state and nation (Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Keller, 2009, March 27; Kotter, 1996; Lively, 1993, February 3; Oehlert & Uggen, 2010; Rowley et al., 1997). “The current challenge, therefore, is not to determine whether to change but how to change to increase overall organizational effectiveness” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 9). Thus, the WHRE Department was prepared for a transformation of the academic programs which would occur at a point in time (July 2009), and the faculty expected that the doctoral students would adjust and continue their responsibilities toward degree completion within a newly formed department (Kantz & Hartnett, 1976).

Change is inevitable in higher education (Astin & Astin, 2000; Rowley et al., 1997; Rowley & Sherman, 2001). The WHRE departmental leaders and faculty members arranged for the academic programs to shift to the newly formed department. Much of this was procedural, but the cultural and environmental components were substantial to the experience of students. Some of the doctoral students questioned why there was a change in the department while others wanted to gain a greater understanding for why the department could not keep doing things the way they had always done them. Other students alluded to a mystery for the reason why they would want to rid the community of its familiar traditions and ways of operating. Some of the students assumed the change would affect them negatively and the progress they would make toward degree completion and educational development. However, their desires to seek answers were not pursued; it was merely skepticism. The hierarchy of higher education does not lend itself easily to doctoral students’ attempts to question and seek answers about faculty

decisions (Gardner, 2007; Golde & Dore, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Nyquist, et al, 1999).

Although higher education structures differ across institutional contexts, two universal factors may impact a doctoral student's decision to seek answers about a transformation in the structure of the department. First, there exists an underlying model of apprenticeship, in which a doctoral student is reliant on or has a measure of dependence on a faculty member for degree completion and the values and expectations of the academic culture therein (Gardner, 2008; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Nyquist, et. al, 1999; Zhao et al., 2007). Second, "many learners who come to [higher education] institutions seem to have a better handle on the realities of the new economy and subsequent changes in the new millennium than many permanent members of a college or university campus who have difficulty understanding that change is needed in higher education" (Rowley & Sherman, 2001, p. 11). Although some doctoral students in this study had questions about the transition to the OLPD Department, they did not seek answers. In fact, at times when they addressed their concerns with faculty or advisers, the transformation was not discussed. Further, some doctoral students viewed the departmental merger with the EdPA Department as a part of how systems change and evolve. These factors together contribute to the complexity of student experiences in doctoral education.

Communication as a key strategy for addressing a merger. This subtheme brings awareness to the critical component of communication that doctoral students need during a transition. The importance of effective communications is critical to students' experiences in the doctoral program, so that they can become acclimated in the newly

formed department, inside a different campus building, and within a new doctoral community. Within this newly formed department, a different system of communication has been established, and their interpretation and management of information from the department has had to be altered to fit the new environment.

Researchers have made attempts to define communication, but identifying and establishing a single definition has proved difficult (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Debates continue over the concept of communication and the dimensions that characterize it. For purposes of this study, a widely accepted definition that distinguishes the elements of communication is from the work by Frank Dance (1976). Dance's theory of communication provided structure to this concept within the context of this study. Dance (1976) stated the three dimensions of communication are:

1. Levels of observation are referred to as the abstractness of the communication. When a person speaks, it is only a small fraction of what he or she really thinks about a subject and a response is triggered by another person to store the information. "While in the process of communicating, people take inputs from a very wide variety of sources—much wider than typically is the intent of the one trying to communicate" (Kennedy, 1985, p. 326). Body language, selective listening, and impressions of the speaker as an individual or authority figure have an impact of the act of communicating and the phenomenon of communication.
2. Intentionality is referred to as the purposeful action of sending and receiving a message. The more complex the message, the more

complicated communication tends to become, which increases the likelihood of communication errors and distortion (Kennedy, 1985).

3. Judgment is referred to as the success, effectiveness, and accuracy of communicating information to another person.

Understanding the concept of communication provided a backdrop in further comprehending the experiences of doctoral students. Communication was a key element in their development as doctoral students, and its impact was exacerbated during and following the transfer of their academic programs and the departmental merger. Kennedy (1985) described four components of communication during a period of organizational change:

1. The importance of simplicity in communications. This referred to keeping the message simple.
2. Role of trust in communications and change. This explains that organizations that hold high trust amongst their members are most likely to receive the message and “not feel it necessary to figure out precisely what the other is trying to say” (p. 327).
3. The role of authority in communications and change. This referred to authority having a greater and compounding influence on communication.
4. The role of repetition/reinforcement in communications. This referred to creating a common theme within the communication and the building of various outlets (i.e., email, newsletters, and open forums) to distribute the messages around a common theme. “Two-way communication devices, such as open forums, focus groups, town meetings, and reports to major

constituent groups, are much more effective in making sure that people understand what the process is leading to and accomplishing, and they provide the opportunities for those who are not directly involved in the process to make comments and voice concerns” (Rowley et al., 1997, p. 263).

As a strategy for implementing change within an organization, communication is a critical factor. As the transformation of the WHRE Department was in progress, it was critical that the doctoral students knew the processes and procedural changes which would directly impact their degree progress. The change brought new faculty leaders and a new community of people to connect with. The faculty needed to prepare for the transformation in order to create readiness for the cultural and environmental change. They should have considered resistance to the change among the department’s doctoral students (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). Mechanisms identified by faculty members for helping the community feel committed to the new culture also would need to have been part of the planning effort. For the doctoral students, communication was the critical component and action step necessary for their ease of transfer into the newly created department and community.

As of July 2009, the merger was complete and the academic programs had been shifted. The means of communication in the department changed as well. A new building, new faculty members, and a new community meant new communications from members of the newly formed department. The component missing in the communication was the doctoral students’ connections to their already known and trusted faculty members and their student community.

The doctoral students' reality had shifted. This reality "is defined through a process of social interchange in which perceptions are affirmed, modified, or replaced according to their apparent congruence with the perceptions of others" (Tierney, 2008, p. 12). Some doctoral students talked with others about the merger, but, importantly, changes were mostly addressed through communication via the WHRE Department prior to the July 2009 academic program changes. Communication structures which were previously in place allowed them to make sense or have a shared understanding of the circumstances in which the people collectively understood how the transformation would be carried out. A shared understanding identifies ambiguous language from the complex, random, and past to make it explicit, simpler, ordered, and applicable to the situation at hand (Weick, 2009). The shared understanding was, unfortunately, lost after the communication structures and a community with a shared understanding was altered.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to relate the findings of the interview data with documentation from the literature. Several important themes emerged after each case was contrasted and the literature was reviewed. These descriptive findings lead to the discussions in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion

This chapter begins with a summary of the main findings of the study. Subsequently, the findings for research and practice and practical implications are discussed. Finally, limitations of the study and future research actions are addressed. This study investigated the experiences that doctoral students in the Department of WHRE encountered during their first semester after the merger of that department.

Summary of the Major Findings of the Study

Regarding the experiences of doctoral students as their department transformed and academic programs shifted to a newly formed department, the three major findings were: (a) connections with new faculty members would change the experience, (b) multi-faceted interactions with a community of peers is now minimal, and (c) speculation as to why did the merger happened. Doctoral students in the former WHRE Department consistently described their efforts to conform to the expectations of faculty members by continuing to advance in their academic program, professional advancement, and research work. In most situations, it appeared that these doctoral students were dependent upon their community within the department. These students developed a community of peers for moral support, collaboration of classroom and research activities, and social opportunities. Their community of peers helped them to expand their knowledge about the fields of study within the WHRE Department and develop a connection to others going through similar experiences as students in doctoral education, and these were critical factors in their academic and professional development. Further, their dependence

on the departmental community was strengthened by a core connection to the faculty of the department. Their dependence on faculty members for learning the requirements for a professional in the field included what activities are necessary to become a scholar in the field, how to become a scholar, and ways of conducting as a scholar in academia. Many of these students could not even begin to explore the development of a new community of peers based on their stage in the doctoral program and the time required to engage with a new group of peers and faculty within the newly formed Department of OLPD.

The students' connections with faculty members were related to a theme highlighted in this study. Their doctoral education experiences were developed based on the foundation they created upon choosing the academic program within the WHRE Department. Specifically, the students' perceptions of the ranking of their academic program, course and program sequence flexibility, and accessibility and interactions with faculty members played an important component to their foundational experience. The quality of faculty and student interactions particularly influenced their educational experience; trust, intellectual support, timely support toward degree completion, and recognition as junior colleagues seemed to be a stronghold in the advisee–adviser and student and faculty relationships. Further, these relationships were profoundly impactful in the doctoral students' experiences prior to and during the departmental and academic program transformation. In this study, thus, strong, supportive, and undeniable connections with the faculty members had a knowable impact on the experiences of doctoral students. As described by the doctoral students in this study, the creation of new faculty relationships outside of their domain of research or academic program, however, would be an unanticipated experience that would alter their learning and program

experiences. Based on the doctoral students' stage in degree completion and educational development, this was not an avenue readily available for them to consider.

The second major finding of the study draws attention to the doctoral students' need for a community of learners and the connections with their community of peers and its environment. These students emphasized the importance of having created multi-faceted interactions with a community of peers within their former department; those interactions, however, had vanished or were minimized due to the organizational change. Most students could not find a common place to visit with other doctoral students, could not identify who was or was not in their academic program, and could not find a methodical way to reconnect with their peers from the former WHRE Department. For these students, the geographical location of the community was critical to their experience for convening with others or simply initiating conversations with other students within a common space. When their academic programs and faculty members moved to a new location, their geographical notion of a community changed and their known community structure was lost. Moreover, the human relationships within a community of learners who are on a similar path were an important component to their experience. The doctoral students' identities as learners were previously strengthened within their community of peers, but now the community had changed. As a result, the development of a new identity as a doctoral student, junior scholar, and researcher needed to be reinvented, rediscovered, or retransformed.

A final theme identified in the study was the doctoral students' question of why the merger of the WHRE Department with the EdPA Department occurred. This theme draws attention to the doctoral students' speculations about the transformation based on

their knowledge of the current environment and previous changes (i.e., name change, academic program shifted to a different department) within the department and doctoral students' need for communications with faculty members about the transition and anticipated new environment. The University of Minnesota–Twin Cities had taken aggressive measures to address fiscal pressures from the state and economic challenges across the nation, and additional initiatives and tactics would need to take place to continue the balance of access, research and service quality, and academic excellence. The institution's environment was positioned for change, and the transformation of the WHRE Department was swift, methodical, and seemingly unquestioned by its students.

Yet, the doctoral students did not know what circumstances led to the merger of the departments and the shifting of the academic programs. Students made assumptions, but verification or refutations of those assumptions did not happen. Doctoral students presumed that the change would happen, and faculty expressed expectations for them to adjust and continue their progress and responsibilities leading to degree completion. However, some doctoral students did not question the transformation while others questioned why faculty and other leaders would want to rid a community of its familiar connections, traditions, and ways of operating just to try a new tactic. In the end, the doctoral students did not directly ask why the merger occurred. For the most part, the hierarchical culture structure of doctoral education does not lend itself easily to allow students to question their superiors or faculty members about decisions made. The complexity of student and faculty relationships and the concept about how systems change and evolve were driving factors for these students.

Within this final theme, communication was considered a critical component for the doctoral students' experiences during the transformation of their academic program. The doctoral students heard a consistent message from faculty members prior to the merger in July 2009, which was for them to continue to advance in their coursework and make progress in their degree. Some students heard a message about the necessity to identify or reconfirm their doctoral committee membership, which seemed to create feelings of uncertainty in the future program. The consistent messages from the faculty they trusted were important to them; it reassured them that the transition of their academic programs and degree plans would stay intact.

After July 2009, communications between the doctoral students and the department changed. A person from the newly formed department sent emails, messages, and newsletters, and the doctoral students from the former WHRE Department were unfamiliar with the contact person. Thus, their communication structures broke or were severed in the midst of a methodical transformation of their academic programs. The doctoral students' shared understanding of the former WHRE Department, the community of peers and faculty members, and physical environment had been altered.

The students in this study were committed to continuing their academic progress. Some students noted frustration throughout the interviews about why the merger happened, not knowing how to reconnect with their community, and concerns about the ways the transition might impact their professional career prospects following degree completion. At that phase of their degree program, most doctoral students did not view their future experience with the newly formed department to include efforts to form new connections with peers and faculty, create a re-invigorated social environment, or seek

answers to their unanswered questions about the former department. Few students viewed new opportunities for engaging in structured forums or communications about job opening as their method and strategy for being involved. Overall, the doctoral students anticipated hearing about their colleagues' and other professionals' negative and positive perspectives about the status and reputation of their academic program through professional organizations, conversations at job interviews or upon attaining career success, and other outlets.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to uncover perceptions of doctoral students about their experiences at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities as they transition from a fairly stable academic department to one experiencing significant changes. This study was prompted by the need to provide a conceptual foundation of organization change at a university and within academic departments. In addition, this study was designed to investigate how academic departmental changes affect doctoral students even when their academic programs remain intact. Finally, the study was prompted as a means to propose strategies for future efforts to plan for an academic department transformation and to better understand how doctoral students' needs and concerns can be supported in their doctoral education during such a transformation.

Conceptual Foundation of Organization Change

Developing a conceptual foundation depicting organizational change at a university and within academic departments was a crucial step to aid in the context of the experiences of doctoral students. There were task force, committee, and administrative reports to support recommendations and action strategies for initiatives intended to

produce sweeping changes within the academic and administrative sectors of the organization. Changes were supported by the University's Board of Regents members, administrative and academic leaders, and faculty members at various levels of the institution in 2006 (Marshak, 2005; University of Minnesota Board of Regents, 2005; University of Minnesota, Administrative Service and Productivity Task Forces & Steering Committee, 2006; University of Minnesota, President's Emerging Leaders Program, 2006). Though the former WHRE Department within the CEHD was not mentioned at the institutional level as a unit to modify, the historical underpinnings of the department may have been a precursor to its transformation (G. Leske, personal communications, December 16, 2010). Further, the institutional priorities set by the University's president and provost created a precedent for collegiate and departmental units to consider organizational change efforts. The component absent from task force and committee documents and discussions, however, was information about the impact of proposed changes on students. How change affected doctoral students during the institution's efforts to change, renew, and even rebalance administrative operations, support services, and academic programs were amiss at the university level and, therefore, were not seemingly addressed in the planning activities at the departmental level. Thus, this study was intended to help understand how change affected students within the bounds of the reorganization of the academic programs from the former WHRE Department.

As a means for building a conceptual foundation for organizational change within a higher education institution, this study provided the basis for doing so. Importantly, this study was bound within the frame of doctoral students within the former WHRE

Department; therefore, the conceptual foundation is based on the findings within this study. The figure below is an illustration of the conceptual foundation—see Figure 1. The figure illustrates the core elements of doctoral students’ needs during transition for continued advancement toward degree completion.

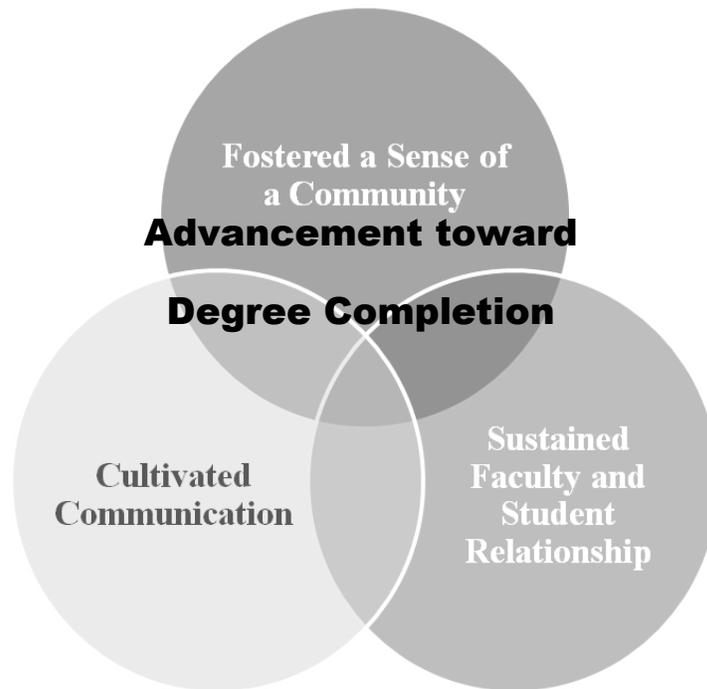


Figure 1. A conceptual foundation of organizational change for merger of a department or shifting of an academic program.

As described in Figure 1, the primary outcome of doctoral education is for degree completion; thus, this was considered a cornerstone to the doctoral students’ support and structures necessary during a departmental transformation. Three areas of influence for a doctoral student’s advancement toward degree completion were identified as critical components during merger of a department and the shifting of academic programs to a newly formed department: (a) cultivated communication with and between students and

faculty, (b) sustained faculty and student relationships, and (c) fostered a sense of community. A missing link within and among these components would alter or impair a doctoral student's experiences and progress toward degree completion.

During the transformation of the academic programs and merger of the WHRE Department with the EdPA Department, the doctoral students maintained their need for consistency and seamless process. WHRE faculty members provided the cohesiveness of their community, communication, and faculty–student relationships. At the point of the organizational change in July 2009, what the doctoral students once knew about their community had been transformed. What continued to be an important stronghold for them before the transformation and then following the transformation of the WHRE and EdPA departments remained critical. As illustrated in Figure 1, these doctoral students needed communications, considered the faculty relationships necessary, and looked for a sense of community. What was presented to and arranged for them caught them by surprise.

Cultivate communications. Based on the comments during the interviews with doctoral students, it seems evident that the former WHRE faculty members considered a segment of their doctoral students' transition needs during the changeover. From the doctoral students' accounts, the faculty seemed to have a plan for communicating with students, with consistency in their messages, about the impending transformation of their department. A doctoral student in this study stated, "...what felt like a communication plan worked, opened to answer questions, I think that was a healthy approach and calmed most people's fears". However, some students identified a new communication strategy

that was not predicted from their perspective after the departmental merger and the opening of the new department in July 2009.

Communication between WHRE faculty members and doctoral students about the process of the transformation ended in July 2009, except in the form of advisee–adviser communications and instructional coursework. New email messages from unfamiliar faculty and staff members within the newly formed department appeared. The once consistent messages were gone as faculty moved to a new location, a new departmental name was present on letterheads, and instructional offerings and faculty offices were moved to a different campus. What remained the same was the former department’s website, which alluded to a departmental merger and new contact information; the WHRE web structure and presence as they knew it remained (University of Minnesota, WHRE, 2008). Consequently, these communications strategies hindered the doctoral students’ connectedness with the newly formed department following the merger of the departments. Thus, faculty members’ and administrative leaders’ ways of communicating with them were critical to their experiences.

Sustain faculty and student relationships. Faculty relationships were also a core component of doctoral students’ experiences. For these students, engagement and interaction with faculty members were viewed as critical for their progress toward degree completion (Baird, 1992; Bieber & Worley, 2006; Gardner, 2007, 2010; Golde, 2005; Katz & Hartnett, 1976; Zhao et al., 2007). The quality of these interactions was important for their development as future scholars, researchers, and service providers within the profession (Gardner, 2010). However, ways of expanding doctoral students’ connections with faculty may not have been at the forefront of the faculty members’ planning efforts

and may not have been viewed as an important element in the schooling of students. Further, doctoral students in this study indicated that it was not the students' priority to seek out relationships with new faculty. Accordingly, educating doctoral students about initiating and forming connections and engagement opportunities with faculty outside their department beyond their known disciplinary boundaries may have helped to prepare them for the academic program shift. This experience also encouraged and strengthened their development as doctoral students. Importantly, expanding faculty and student relationships outside of the former WHRE Department may have provided new opportunities for research collaborations and community formation. Doctoral students and faculty members may have missed an opportunity for new connections, research engagement opportunities, and enrichment within their discipline.

Foster a sense of a community. Additional stories and descriptions about the doctoral students' experiences highlighted the critical importance for a sense of community within their peer network. These students felt a strong, bound connection with a core group of other graduate students while in the WHRE Department. Wilensky (1961) described the strength of attachment to a community and to its major area of interest of a group as a collective part of a person's experience. A doctoral student in the study stated, "I think it is just, as a graduate student, you need a group to hang with ... if you have a group you know from your program, your discussions can be so rich." The physical space for the former WHRE Department provided a location for convening and meeting other students. The space had few walls and a small number of divided spaces, which allowed for seeing and talking with faculty and students at various locations and

times during their visits to campus. It was an open environment and student networks were created that instilled a sense of a community.

A critical turning point in their doctoral experiences occurred when the geographic location of their academic program moved to another part of the campus. In the formation and cultivation of a community, the relationships within the community and the geographic notion of a community are both elements that are needed to create a sense of a community (Gusfield, 1975). A doctoral student in the study conveyed, “I feel lost again, I feel like I am a brand new student again. I feel disconnected. Mentally and emotionally, I am connected to [the former department location], because there’s familiarity there and now I am over at the main University campus, of which I have great fear, because I don’t know it.” Walls, doors, and barriers were the student’s perspectives about setting. Finding a faculty member or adviser from their former department was a challenge, along with identifying peers from their discipline. Their community was altered and this impacted their experiences while on campus, within the classrooms, and in connection to social outlets. In most instances, for these students, the first semester in the new department required them to find a new community only if they were academically ready to do so. Thus, the doctoral students’ experiences in the creation and maintenance with a community of peers had been altered and in most cases abruptly distinguished.

In summary, the doctoral students’ desire for effective communication throughout the transformation process, sustaining faculty and student relationships, and fostering a sense of a community were three foundational components necessary in their experiences as they advance toward degree completion. Shifts, alterations, or missing elements among

these components cause a student to flounder, rethink, and reevaluate his or her place in doctoral education. As junior researchers and scholars, the doctoral students' strongholds were their faculty relationships and community of peers that were created and expanded during their initial phase and experience in the doctoral program. Without specific planning efforts to support, educate, and mentor the doctoral students, their progress toward degree completion and acquisition into the scholarly field of study would be hindered.

Investigate How Academic Departmental Changes Affect Doctoral Students

Various factors affect how doctoral students experience education when their academic programs remain intact but their department merges with another department. This was the breadth of the study. Interviews with doctoral students imply that they relied heavily on their faculty and adviser relationships during the initial phase of the transformation; they did not realize the full scale of their need for a community of peers and the importance of a sense of community, and; they were distraught by the missing communication links that would directly address the merger.

Student and faculty relationships. As evident in this study, doctoral students' engagement and interactions with faculty members were central to their experiences. When a doctoral student is considering enrollment into a degree program, his or her interactions with faculty during the initial stages is a decisive component to that student's long-term outlook on doctoral education (Gardner, 2007, 2010). The faculty members with whom the students work, who teach and advise them, and who influence their scholarly interests all had an imperative impact on doctoral students' progress toward graduation (Gregg, 1972; Nyquist et al., 1999; Weidman & Stein, 2003). Further,

students desire mentorship and apprenticeship experiences with their advisers as a component beyond the classroom (Garden, 2007; Golde & Dore, 2001; Pascarella, 1980). As the department transformation plan was implemented, the strength and fortitude of the faculty and student relationships were important to maintain. There were, however, differing levels of communication between faculty and doctoral students, which created some confusion for some students and relief for others.

The outward impact of the transformation on relationships between faculty and students was their interactions during advising sessions and open faculty and student discussions. For some doctoral students, discussing their particular academic program transition with their faculty advisers was a key method of communication, while several doctoral students stated that they dodged or ignored the emerging and inevitable change during advising sessions. However, these students were attentive and gained a sense of security about the transition during open faculty and student discussions. A doctoral student stated how interactions with the adviser really had not changed much following the departmental transition. The same student stated, “My adviser is there, now he's here. Always accessible, both before and after.” For another doctoral student, a high level of trust had been established with the faculty adviser prior to the transformation of the department and it was felt that with this trust level there would be minimal effects upon the student's experience. “The advisers prepared us that we are not going to be on the same campus but no specifics. I never had the chance to explore more. When I met with my adviser about my research, I never questioned.” Further, a doctoral student stated, “I liked to hear [about the merger of the department] firsthand and not through somebody else, and I was really glad I went [to the open forum at the merger]. After that I was

totally comfortable with it. I didn't want to leave St. Paul, but then they said they were happy about the move. Then I was totally at peace ...” Overall, the doctoral students were impacted by their interactions with faculty members and their actions leading up and following the merger.

Importantly, the doctoral students maintained strong faculty relationships, but the totality of the experience of the transformation of their department created an environment that tempted them to revert back to their initial stage of doctoral education. In particular, many of these students re-thought about why they chose the department and the different factors in their decisions to pursue the field of study at the institution. What they knew at their initial phase or Entry Phase was a result of a wide range of experiences, such as their transition from undergraduate to graduate school expectations; interactions with peers, colleagues, and faculty members; changes in how a student thinks and understands knowledge; and media outlets (Gardner, 2007, 2010; Lovitts, 2001). As the department merger moved forward, the students seemed to rethink why they chose the department, though their academic programs were not questioned. Yet, their academic programs and faculty advisers seemed to be closely interrelated to the department structure itself. Consequently, the students questioned their decision process and factors influencing choice of an academic program as a result of new experiences and the unknown experiences within a new department. Thus, doctoral students were impacted by the compounding experiences that led many of them to rethink, revisit, or, for some, possibly to revert to their Entry Phase or initial phase of their doctoral program—exploring the department, its faculty, its mission and values, and their new community of peers.

Sense of community. The doctoral students' sense of a community was deeply impacted during the initial component of the organizational change and then following the merger of the WHRE and EdPA departments. For some of the doctoral students, their community of peers was found in the classroom since the former WHRE Department allowed for flexibility in scheduling and time frame for degree completion. For other students, their community was found in the totality of the geographic environment: its geographic location on campus, the buildings, classrooms, study spaces, and student offices. The doctoral students' connections were based on what they perceived to be their community and needs as learners. Katz and Hartnett (1976) found that if a change in their projected events impacted their peer connections within their known environment, then negative impacts to their sense of community and the community experience amongst the doctoral students in the program would occur. A doctoral student in this study stated,

My frame of mind has changed...there wasn't that community. Especially academically, it hurt, because I used to have peers that I could call on and say, 'Hey what did you think the faculty wanted by this' ... or 'I am thinking about taking my paper or my argument this way'. And I didn't have other students ask those questions to because I didn't know them.

As the transformation of the department was carried forward after July 2009, minimal emphasis to maintain the graduate students' known community was evident.

The doctoral students' emotional connection to their departmental community (geographically) and human connections with their peers (relationships) were multi-faceted, and these critical pieces to their milieu were then missing following the transformation in the 2009 summer and fall semesters. The doctoral students noted ways of thinking about academic issues and trends, how to generate solutions to new initiatives or public policy questions, or new ideas and familiar topics with a group of peers, ideas

for creating a community, and an emotional connection with the former department as critical aspects of their learning. Their identities as learners were strengthened within the community they knew (Brockman & Dirkx, 2006); therefore, an alteration in their community shaped their identity, relationships, and sense of belonging, creating uncertainties and unpredictable situations within their experiences as doctoral students.

Communication links. The doctoral students' communication linkages with their faculty members and peers provided the backdrop for the doctoral students' understanding of the experiences as their academic programs transitioned into a newly formed department. In preparation for the July 2009 program shift, doctoral students had an opportunity to convene with their faculty members and other graduate students to talk about the merger, impending shifts, and academic expectations. The faculty members' message remained constant throughout the department's transformation, which continued to support the students' understanding of the future of the doctoral education. After July 2009, new communication strategies took effect.

Following the academic program move to the newly formed department, the most impactful changes to the students occurred. First, the name of the department changed to OLPD, which produced tangible evidence of the departmental merger. It was the culmination of their experiences leading up to the transformation. Second, communication from the WHRE Department ceased and communications from OLPD Department commenced. A doctoral student stated the impact of the communications to be welcome and renewing for a new way of thinking about a department; this student stated, "I appreciate the communication from the department. I think that has been refreshing; I feel like there are many opportunities handed to us." A dichotomy existed in

the doctoral students' perceptions of the unexpected shift in communication. It is unknown if the faculty members had prepared for the transformation by establishing readiness for the cultural and environmental changes and prepared students for their resistance to the change (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). For the doctoral students, communication was the critical and impactful component for their experience to the newly created department and new community of faculty and learners.

Proposed Strategies to Support the Needs and Concerns of Doctoral Students

This study highlighted various challenges and opportunities for faculty and doctoral students as a department transforms. This section provides a set of proposed strategies to plan for an academic department transformation. As one doctoral student described the experiences, it was as if the students were “a bunch of Play Dough characters and ... we're gonna squish them all together, and we're gonna get some new Play Dough ...” The doctoral students in this study provided examples and stories of their experiences and below are strategies to support the needs and concerns of the students:

- Departmental planning. Document faculty leaders' efforts to analyze, evaluate, or contemplate how complex change within the University affects its doctoral students. Research, evaluate, and analyze how the change in organizational structures and strategies would impact doctoral student's experiences within their academic program and departmental unit.
- Faculty connections. Identity strategies and synergies to bring together cohesiveness and sustain relationships between departmental faculty and doctoral students. Encourage an expansion of the students' boundaries

beyond their known academic program and departmental unit faculty members in order for them to advance their thinking about mentorships and research collaborations with faculty in differing fields of study.

- Connections with the former department's community of peers. Discover, promote, and initiate ways for doctoral students to maintain their known community of peers with their former departmental unit. Purposefully reconvene the doctoral students following the departmental transformation to discuss their challenges, successes, and opportunities created as a result of their experiences. Thus, faculty members within the academic department should support the doctoral student communities and their efforts to become integrated within the new community to help them toward degree attainment and greater psychological investment in the degree (Lovitts, 2001).
- Connections with a new community. Encourage and facilitate the opportunities for doctoral student to convene within a new environment prior to and following integration with the new organizational structure. Provide a forum or venue for students to learn about and interact with the new faculty members to learn about their research expertise, student groups, and connection points, and ways of communicating and interacting in a new environment within a new location. Consideration should be taken for the creation of a geographic community, which would include learning spaces, classroom locations, and student offices, and

include human relationships through coursework, research collaborations, and social connections.

- State reasons for the merger. Provide a forum or communications network between faculty members and doctoral students to discuss reasons for the change. Encourage and reinforcement a trusting environment and the possibilities of the transformation to be a learning opportunity for their development as scholars.
- Establish and promote communications plan. Consider a methodical communications plan to help document and support the advancement of the transformation. Mechanisms identified by faculty members for helping the community feel committed to the new culture also would need to be part of the planning effort. Kennedy (1985) described four components of communication during a period of organizational change: (a) the importance of simplicity in communication; (b) role of trust in communications and change; (c) the role of authority in communications and change; and (d) the role of repetition/reinforcement in communications.

Preparing, communicating, and following through with doctoral students may help form the mold for creating a positive learning and professional experience for them. By providing an opportunity for faculty and students to reconnect and pursue dialogue about their challenges and development as scholars will not only strengthen a doctoral student's experiences, but it may provide insights for leaders in the planning for future organizational changes.

Restatement of the Limitations of the Study

This section provides a restatement of the limitations of the study. The design of this research study and environmental complexities within the University of Minnesota are restated and expanded upon. The significance of this section is to provide a further understanding of the limitations based on the analysis of this qualitative case study.

Research Design

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Patton (2002) described the ability of a case study research and qualitative method of inquiry to offer insights into complex social phenomena more readily than quantitative methods. In the study, the research design and method was to develop in-depth knowledge about of the doctoral students' experiences linked by actions taken within the former WHRE Department. Gaining deep, detailed information about this case was more helpful to understanding the process or product of analysis than superficial understanding about a larger number of examples as done in quantitative methods. Merriam (2001) stated that the single most distinctive characteristic of qualitative case study lies in delimiting the object or unit of study (the case). The results of the study were generated from doctoral students in a single academic department at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities. A limitation of this study, therefore, is that the results are not generalizable because of the numerous elements specific to the case, which is consistent with application of the interpretative philosophical approach (Gillham, 2000). The results apply to this population of doctoral students and are only assumptions or “hypotheses for future applicability and testing rather than as definitive” (Patton, 2002, p. 583).

An additional limitation of the research design was methods by which to triangulate the data and analytical perspective. Through the audit review by the doctoral committee to verify my work, triangulation of data sources and analytical perspectives were used to develop an accurate, solid description and an analysis that brings credibility to the findings (Patton, 2002).

There were additional elements within the research design that led to limitations of the study. These limitations include the following:

- The purposeful sample, using the maximal variation sampling strategy, included participants from the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities doctoral student population. The participants in the study reflected the demographic profile of the academic department as much as possible.
- This study would not include data or analysis about individuals who have not been a doctoral student prior to September 2007. This limitation improved the identification of students who have experienced the former WHRE Department prior to its merger and shifting of academic programs to a preexisting academic department. As a result, this further refined the sample of doctoral students to consider for interviews.
- This study did not include an analysis and evaluation of the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities cultural and environmental foundations.

Environmental Complexities

As identified as a limitation of the research design, this study did not include an analysis of the cultural and environmental base of the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities campus and its departments. Environmental complexities in higher education

should be carefully contemplated and analyzed prior to launching a process for major changes and possible alterations to the organizational environment (Rowley et al., 1997; Rowley & Sherman, 2001; Tierney, 1997). Based on the researcher's review of existing documents, there exists explicit rationale for embarking on strategic changes within the institution but a lack of documentation about University leaders' efforts to analyze, evaluate, or contemplate how complex change within the University affects its doctoral students. This led not only to the important need to analyze and apply strategies but also to discover what those strategies could be for doctoral students.

A further limitation, as a result of environmental complexities within higher education, is generating a study that would imply a cultural shift should occur and how. The culture within an organization is complex and the ability of an institution higher education to change is a limitation to the study. Efforts to change a culture are more complex and involve understanding the dynamics of learning processes—these entail the knowledge about learning and unlearning beliefs and assumptions that cause modifications to social behavior (O'Meara, Kaufman, & Kuntz, 2003; Trice, 1993; Schein, 1996). Since culture is commonly unrecognizable and a common set of interpretations, values, and experiences are difficult to modify, the complexity of changing a culture exists (Cameron, 2008). As with this study and from a qualitative philosophical perspective, understanding the phenomenon of the culture leads to a “dynamic view of how things work, how culture begins, evolves, changes, and sometimes disintegrates” (Schein, 1996, p. 440). Though the concept of culture within the realms of organizations could be a limitation, this study drew upon the human resource education

literature to strengthen the study and provide depth in understanding organizational change in this case study.

Implications

The University central administrative leaders have unsuccessfully conceptualized or maximized an important component for fully planning and applying the planning ingredients necessary in organizational changes—the students’ experiences. Faculty and administrative leaders have not been consciously aware of the impacts on doctoral students as they forge ahead to create reorganized structures although faculty members do consider how the organizational change impacts the students in so far as their development as scholars and their progress toward degree completion. As described in this study, applying tactics or initiatives for supporting a greater student understanding of the change, investing time to engage and then reengage students, and creating forums and lines of communication between them throughout and following the process of change will have a significant impact on their experiences. As the current trend is toward developing plans for reduction of departmental programs at this institution, forging ahead without knowing their student body will become a missing link in their planning efforts.

Doctoral students are great ambassadors for the University’s mission and values to the public it serves. A high level of awareness and positive impressions of the faculty members and their former WHRE Department were reflected in interviews with the doctoral students. The faculty’s contact, trust, and academic leadership in the department and their contributions to the field of study and previous steadfast efforts to support the students, however, created an environment in which students continued to expect their environment and community would not drastically change during the transition.

University academic and administrative leaders failed to conceptualize and maximize the full impact of a transformation on its students. Nevertheless, the students associated with the former WHRE Department have prevailed during the experience of the academic program shift by observing and making adjustments in their doctoral education as a result of the change and academically continue their academic plan.

Future Research

The consistent message from this study is that organizational change is complex within an institution of higher learning and that doctoral students' progress toward degree completion is impacted by the faculty members and their community. This qualitative case study was designed to investigate the experiences of doctoral students as the WHRE Department's transformation occurred and their academic programs shifted to a newly formed department. Further research to substantiate and refine what was discovered is needed as limitations are inherent due to restricted literature available about doctoral students in general and no additional studies completed about graduate students' experiences during a period of academic program change. Little is known about the role doctoral students have in effecting change within an institution. This study revealed that, in this one case, planning efforts and initiatives for doctoral students may have produced a different outcome of experiences than what may have been expected by faculty members. Administrative leaders and faculty members may have able to purposely anticipate for unintended outcomes if information was available about how a departmental merger could impact doctoral students, such as described in Figure 1. A conceptual model for handling organizational change in the realm of doctoral students' experiences was created and evidence was presented to support it. Given this promising

start, additional research could be conducted around the applicability of the conceptual model of organizational change to other university departments that are planning similar initiatives.

At the conclusion of dissertations, many suggest the use of alternative methodologies and theoretical frameworks for future research. However, the research studies on the subject of doctoral students in a changing environment are minimal on this subject. Similar studies about a different department or case would be appropriate. I acknowledge, nonetheless, that the conceptual model established in this study could be used to accomplish academic planning at other departments even though the scope of the research is limited to this particular case.

An alternative methodology of investigation would be to look not at organizational structures, but at communications. How do students and faculty communicate with one another and who communicates with whom during a change within a higher education department? In a period of time when text books, learning platforms, and departmental newsletters and notices are increasingly mediated by electronic technologies, how do these technologies influence organizational change? If communication is a critical component for the effectiveness of organizational change, then is the student experience enhanced by listservs, electronic blogs, and virtual forums? The field will benefit by expanding the research to show how different populations of students and faculty have communicated about specific issues.

Another methodology for consideration is the responsibilities and roles of doctoral students during an organizational change. Participants in this study describe support by faculty members, by their advisers, and by a community of peers as ensuring

and bestowing a solid foundation to their education experience. Doctoral students, though, have the responsibility for making and enriching their own experiences. Students should take the initiative to reach out to their faculty members, advisers, peers, and professional organizations in order to open themselves to the discipline and its social aspects. Yet, the stories told by the doctoral students in this study indicate that barriers put before them created challenges and roadblocks to their advancement as learners and scholars. Expectations from the department must be made clear and further study is needed. For instance, what are the norms for discussing change with students and the administrative operations of a department? What should the doctoral students generally expect from the department or institution? Further understanding about the impacts of a change will provide clarification to the role of doctoral students so that they can begin to take initiative to become involved in the organizational change effort.

Whether one decries or celebrates calls for organizational change, the assumption is that change is already occurring. The need to diagnose and manage organizational change is growing in importance because of the need to merge and meld different departments as structural changes, colliding faculty philosophical perspectives, and institutional priorities for fiscal efficiencies occur. “As competition, change, and pressure intensify for organizations, therefore, organizational culture is given more prominence and emphasis” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 144). What are the department’s strategic intents and its ability to adapt to change that ground the organization in its culture and within its environment? A cultural assessment of the department becomes increasingly important because of the need for both change and the ability to maintain stability in the face of a new environment.

Organizational change will not effectively occur unless there is involvement, commitment, and active support of its members and through the entire institutional network. It is a difficult and long-term effort. Creating readiness and overcoming resistance to change from those affected can be challenging but bring tremendous rewards. What system changes must be made to reinforce the new environment? What are the factors of resistance to change? Mechanisms for helping the organization members (faculty members and students) feel committed to the new environment and even new culture must be designed. In what ways can faculty members and students become involved in creating and carrying out the change strategies? How can continuous communication of new cultural values and creation of a new milieu be ensured? What information needs to be shared and with whom? How will progress be known or identified? What are the key indicators of success for the organizational change in its totality and in segments? How will the changed effort be measured or evaluated in order to address immediate needs of those affected or to document for future consideration? Involvement by administrative leaders, faculty, and students are essential for a cohesive, flexible, and dynamic organizational change effort.

Final Thoughts

The economic, political, and social environments across the country are continually evolving and their impact on higher education has been and may continue to be profound. As higher education administrators and faculty leaders plan and address critical components for institutional financial and educational strength and sustainability, making decisions about how to adjust to the environmental conditions will be challenge. Difficult decisions about the vitality of academic departments and programs will more

and more become a factor in planning discussions for organizational change. The academic department's vitality may be judged based on growth in fields of study or workplace demands, increased enrollment in specializations, higher graduation rates, and administrative efficiencies. Strong academic departments and programs may continue, while others may be at risk for dissolution or merger with other departments. As with the WHRE Department, historical and other dynamic issues may have been a factor in the administrative leaders' decisions for its transformation. If merger is the ultimate outcome, then preparing for, responding to, and following up with doctoral students will be a centerpiece in the outcome of the actions.

As evident in this study, administrators and faculty members seemed to lack awareness of the possibility of the cultural shift as a result of an organizational change. Culture was an imbedded part of the department and virtually unnoticed by faculty members and students. The transformation of the department occurred methodically, but without an understanding of what the fundamental implications might be for the culture and environment of its doctoral students. Thus, being cognizant of cultural and environmental nuances within an academic department and its programs will begin to broaden attention toward critical implications of the change for doctoral students.

The conceptual foundation of organization change was a critical product illustrated in this study. Figure 1 provides a visual synopsis of the key areas of influence that are critical components during academic department merger and the shifting of academic programs. As evident in this study, doctoral students maintained their need for an environment that cultivates communications, sustains faculty and student relations,

and fosters a sense of community. These areas were important for the doctoral students' experiences and central for their progress toward degree completion.

This study reached and identified the foundational needs of doctoral students during an organizational change within their academic department. Overall, preparing, communicating, and following through with doctoral students, before and after the organizational change, may help create a positive learning environment and professional experience as these students become and embrace their role as junior scholars. This study only begins to peel away the layers of complexities amongst and between doctoral students while they pursue degree completion.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Invitation

Dear [Participant's Name]:

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota currently working on my dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Jim Brown. For my dissertation, I am studying the experiences doctoral students have had after the merger of an academic department. The main method for my research is qualitative by doing one-on-one interviews. I am inviting you to be a participant in this project to share your experiences of an academic departmental merger and program change, and the challenges and risks due to major changes in your academic career as a doctoral student. You were selected as a possible participant because of your graduate student status, student in the former-Work and Human Resource Department (now the Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development), and length of time in the academic program at the University of Minnesota.

I hope that you will agree to participate in a one hour interview to share your knowledge and experience. Your input will be used to contribute valid insights into preparing doctoral students for a different learning environment due to a major transition at the University of Minnesota.

Your participation is critical to the project's success. I ask that you read the form attached and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate. Please respond to me by replying to this email if you agree to participate by Friday, November 13.

If you have any questions about the project, please contact me (612-624-0095 or 952-239-0131; cfrazier@umn.edu) or Dr. Jim Brown, doctoral adviser (612-624-7754; brown014@umn.edu).

I want to thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Christina Frazier
Ph.D Candidate

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Organizational Change in Academic Programs: A Case Study of Doctoral Students' Experiences

You are invited to participate in a research study addressing the experiences doctoral students have had in the Department of Work and Human Resource Education during their first semester after the merger of that department. You were selected as a possible participant because of your graduate student status, student in the former-Work and Human Resource Department (now the Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development), and length of time in the academic program at the University of Minnesota. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Christina Frazier, doctoral candidate, Department of Work and Human Resources, at the University of Minnesota.

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of doctoral students at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities as they transition from a fairly stable academic department because of significant changes. This study will incorporate data sources from a combination of interviews with the University's doctoral students as the primary source of information and document review as supplemental information. The following is a sample interview question: "Describe your experiences with shifting to a different campus and department. What were the benefits for you and the most challenging for you?" Documents reviewed will be those that are only publically available from the Internet or through the media.

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following:

- Schedule a date and time for a 1-hour interview
- Allow the interviewer to take handwritten notes
- Allow audio-taped recorded for reference during the analysis of the interview

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

This study has minimal risk since you will be among a relatively small group (and potentially an identifiable group) of participants. Both positive and negative comments may be made about the new department, graduate colleagues, or the institution. To minimize the risks to protect your welfare, the following steps will be taken: (a) ensure my field notes and transcripts do not contain personal identifiers; (b) keep raw and processed data locked in a secure cabinet and password protected; (c) not share data or identifies; and (d) make every effort to report results in a way that protects your confidentiality and disallows retribution.

The benefits to participate are to contribute valid insights into preparing doctoral students for a different learning environment due to a major transition at the University of Minnesota. In addition, academic leaders (faculty, student support services) will be able to better prepare student services and instructional programs to meet the academic and social needs of doctoral students at the University.

Compensation:

You will receive no payment for your participation in the study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. Participant names will be linked to the interview notes by the Principle Investigator. The notes and respective participant identification will be maintained and secured by the Principle Investigator. In any report, for use on campus or for publication, participant confidentiality will be maintained. Research records will be stored securely in the Principle Investigator’s office in locked file cabinet and only researchers will have access to the records. All audio-recorded tapes and notes will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Christina Frazier. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Christina at 612-624-0095, cfrazier@umn.edu, or Dr. Jim Brown, doctoral adviser, 612-624-7754; brown014@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects’ Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN ACADEMIC PROGRAMS: A CASE STUDY OF DOCTORAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

Christina Frazier, University of Minnesota, doctoral candidate
Winter 2009

1. Tell me about a little bit about yourself and how you came to be a graduate student in this program. (Year in program, educational background, and previous professional experience.)
2. What did you expect graduate school to be like? How was the reality different from what you expected?
3. Tell me about your first semester in the newly integrated department. What do you remember most about that semester and your experiences as a doctoral student? (Positive experiences, most negative experiences, and most challenging experiences.)
4. What stories did you hear about the newly formed academic department prior to the fall semester? Now that you experienced a semester in the new academic department, what did these stories mean to you?
5. Describe your experiences with shifting to a different campus and department. What were the benefits for you and the most challenging for you?
 - What do you feel has most changed for you since the newly integrated department?
 - Do you feel like you are part of the graduate student community in the newly integrated department? Anything in particular that started you to feel that way?
 - Tell me about the interactions you have had with your adviser and fellow students prior to and during the academic program shift.
 - As a result of the academic program shift, have you developed new faculty mentorship or connections? If so, what does this experience mean for your academic development?
6. How could the transition have been done better?