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**Communicating Multiple Change: Understanding the Impact of Change Messages  
on Stakeholder Perceptions**

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**Communicating Multiple Change: Understanding the Impact of Change Messages  
on Stakeholder Perceptions**

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# **Communicating Multiple Change: Understanding the Impact of Change Messages on Stakeholder Perceptions**

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## **Abstract**

This study explored change implementation communication from a multifaceted (more than one at any particular time) change perspective. It examined how employees make sense of and respond to the organizational coordination of multifaceted change efforts. The case of a merger provides the backdrop for which to understand the multiplicity and complexity of organizational change (both planned and unplanned) and how the communicative organizational response to these overlapping and subsequent changes both complement and compete with the initially introduced change. This project was organized into two studies. The first explored the messages stakeholders recall receiving from implementers about multifaceted change. The second tested the relationships between change messages and specific individual and organizational change outcomes. Thematic analysis revealed that implementers used four different change messages. Statistical analysis revealed that multifaceted change messages create higher levels of change satisfaction, message quality, change liking, and organizational trust.

Moreover, messages including information about the multiplicity (or magnitude) produced the least degree of perceived deception, the greatest degree of coping efficacy, and higher degrees of organizational competency appraisals.



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*I think that whoever planned a merger, an acquisition, a relocation, and in my group, a reorganization of personnel... whoever planned to do all that within a four-month period must have been smoking something.*

*--Amy, Food Company Employee, 7 years*

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Organizations are changing in an effort to meet the environmental pressures they face today (e.g., globalization, new technologies, competition). In fact, scholars are suggesting that “[s]uccessful organizations are those that initiate change, respond to change, plan change, and implement change as an ongoing way of life” (More, 1998, p. 30). As a result, organizations are not only preparing organizational landscapes for change efforts but are currently organizing for continual change (cf. Zorn, Page, & Cheney, 2000). Thus, the ability to predict and explain organizational change is of particular interest to scholars (e.g., Huber & Glick, 1993; Huber, Sutcliffe, Miller, & Glick, 1993; Lewis, 2000, 2007; Lewis & Seibold, 1993; Miller & Friesen, 1980; Tenkasi & Chesmore, 2003; Van de Ven & Poole, 1988; Zorn, Christensen, & Cheney, 1999).

Planned change, or the “[i]ntentional change, occurring when a change agent(s) deliberately and consciously works to establish conditions that are different from the present state of affairs” (Kuhn, 2000, p. 3), is a complicated and disruptive process. Even when change is necessary or embraced, it is often accompanied by specific and frequent reactions such as anxiety (e.g., McGrath, 1976; Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994; Miller & Monge, 1985) or uncertainty (e.g., Kramer, Dougherty, & Pierce, 2004; Lewis & Seibold, 1996). Change is also subject to varying degrees of resistance (e.g., Dent & Goldberg,

1999; Piderit, 2000). Further, the implementation of a planned change effort is neither a simple nor a linear process. Several researchers have detailed this complex cognitive, behavioral, communicative and planned event. While some approaches privilege communicative interactions and outline and illustrate key constructs (e.g., environment, user characteristics, user perceptions) and processes (e.g., socialization, social influence, structuration) related to change implementation and innovation (Lewis, 2007; Lewis & Seibold, 1993), others do not focus on stakeholder interaction (e.g., Burke & Litwin, 1992; Meyer, Brooks, & Goes, 1990; Vollman, 1996). Conner and Lake (1994) suggest that executing a planned change may involve a combination of change elements (e.g., individual behavior, organizational processes, strategic direction) and may be accomplished by various methods or means (e.g., technical, structural or managerial). Much of the literature modeling change discusses ways that organizations plan for and manage change rather than address organic or unintentional evolutions, sometimes referred to as “unplanned change” (e.g., Dwyer, 2000; Harvey, 1995; for exception see Ford & Ford, 1995). Yet both academic (e.g., Alverson & Willmott, 1996; More, 1998) and popular discourse (for review see Lewis, Schmisser, Stephens, & Weir, 2006) surrounding change suggest that the most effective strategy to prepare for changes is to organize for continuous change, and by doing so, organizations can be adept to proactively respond to environmental pressures. As a result, most organizations appear to experience multiple and overlapping changes operating in tandem.

Two vastly different theoretical perspectives that currently shape and inform researchers’ fundamental understandings of change are: the *punctuated equilibrium*

*model* and the *continuous change model*. The punctuated equilibrium model (Gersick, 1991; Miller & Friesen, 1980; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994; Weick & Quinn, 1999) asserts that organizations experience long periods of stability, or equilibrium, that are then punctuated, or interrupted, by relatively short bursts of revolutionary change. These types of changes are also referred to as episodic change. Less disruptive and more adaptive approaches, like those within the continuous change model, suggest that change is constant and ongoing, emergent and self-organizing (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Thus, one clear distinction we can draw between these two models is that while one approach views organizations as relatively stable systems, the other views them as dynamic. In addition, the distinctions between the two approaches are characterized by the pace or tempo of the change(s). In other words, the speed and the time intervals for each are also vastly different. Brown and Eisenhardt (1997) argue that even though the punctuated equilibrium model has received theoretical interest among researchers, continuous change perspectives are more aligned with the reality that organizations are constantly undergoing change. Moreover, the punctuated equilibrium model is commonly criticized because its tenets lack substantial empirical support (for exception see Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). Albeit, literature discussing punctuated change efforts is vast.

Current scholarship has examined change from a number of perspectives and provided a robust understanding of this organizational reality. In addition to permeating punctuated perspectives, the reality of change presented consists of single changes occurring over the course of some defined time interval (e.g., adopting a new software program). As a result of this basic approach, scholars have examined how change efforts

materialize and process from a managerial perspective (cf. Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Lewis, 1999; Robertson, Roberts, & Porras, 1993; Vollman, 1996), how individual changes affect employees (cf. Gallivan, 2001; Jaffe, Scott, & Tobe, 1994; Lewis, 2006), and ways resistance manifests to particular large scale change efforts (cf. Clarke, Ellett, Bateman, & Rugett, 1996; Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Piderit, 2000). Additionally, research has broadened our understanding of how change is introduced through communication strategies, how stakeholders' concerns, assessments and interactions play a role in producing particular organizational outcomes (Lewis, 2007), and how unique organizational groups process understand change initiatives differently (e.g., Gallivan, 2001).

Because of its intentionality and the organizational support for an initiative, planned change is often equated with or referred to as change implementation.

*Implementation* is the “[t]ranslation of any tool or technique, process, or method of doing from knowledge to practice” intended to become part of ongoing organizational practices (Tornatzky & Johnson, 1982, p. 193). *Implementers*, then, as further defined by Lewis, Hamel, and Richardson (2001), are those individuals whose role executes the details of the change plan and ensures these new ideas are integrated into routine work practices. Thus, implementers are primarily responsible for the communication messages about the change, and communication during change has been empirically demonstrated as significant (Colvin & Kilman, 1990). Moreover, Ford and Ford (1995) suggest “[c]hange is created, sustained, and managed in and by communication (p. 560). Therefore, the way

impending changes are communicated to employees by implementers becomes a vital component to employees' perceptions of implementation success (Lewis, 1999, 2006).

To date, most organizational change research theorizes or measures change as singular events and most commonly examines the punctuated change efforts. In these studies, changes are examined in isolation from other connected (and unconnected) changes of similar or smaller magnitude. The supcomponent changes (i.e., parts of larger changes) and subsequent or unrelated but overlapping changes are rarely considered in terms of mutual influence or collective effects on stakeholders. In taking this singular perspective on change, current research approaches have either failed to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of concurrent changes or account for collective effects of multiple changes on single organizations in a given time period. Considering that (a) organizations are constantly changing and striving to do so (Tsouskas & Chia, 2002; Zorn et al., 1999, Zorn et al., 2000) and (b) that subsequent related and unrelated changes (both planned and unplanned) are likely beginning before any given change is fully implemented, it is quite possible that changes are overlapping and conflating the outcomes measured by current change literature. Therefore, a *multifaceted change* perspective is warranted. In such a perspective, strong consideration is given to investigating how more than one change occurs within the same temporal frame and to exploring how the overlaps are interpreted and perceived by stakeholders.

Since multifaceted, by definition, suggests the essence of having many qualities or features, multifaceted change conceptualizes change as more than one change occurring within the same temporal frame (i.e., several changes possessing subsequent

parts); for example, employees may receive a new supervisor which requires them to adapt to new communication strategies, or the organization may acquire a new piece of business that impacts daily workload. These kinds of changes are one of two types: *multiple change*, or more than one independent change (e.g., moving into a new location and accepting a promotion) or *multi-dimensional change*, or one change having subsequent parts (e.g., the loss of a major client altered the production schedules and forced layoffs). While both involve the existence of several qualities or features, the first involves the perception of change as many singles, and the second involves the perception of change as one with smaller or subsequent parts. Therefore, the following definitions of each are offered, in turn: (1) the perception of more than one singular but overlapping/simultaneous changes (multiple change), or (2) the perception of one (sizable) change with smaller subsets or components of that same change (multi-dimensional change). Further, it is important to note that it is also possible for multiple, multidimensional change to exist. Aside from the inaccurate descriptions and explanations of change as single occurrence, the complexity of multifaceted change can also create a heavy temporal load for members experiencing them. *Multifaceted change communication*, then, describes implementation messages that discuss more than one change that will occur in the same time frame, and it assumes that changes are, in many ways, a set or series of changes rather than just one change occurring in isolation and unrelated to other changes.

Scholarship has pointed to the prevalence of change in organizations (Zorn et al., 1999), advanced numerous implementation models (see Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999 and



Lewis & Seibold, 1998 for reviews), offered widespread perspectives on change (e.g., Gersick, 1991; Golembiewski, Billingsley, & Yeager, 1976; Weick & Quinn, 1999), and suggested that temporal conditions are critical to and absent in change research (e.g., Bluedorn & Denhardt, 1988). Yet despite this proliferation of research, a composite treatment of change implementation has not yet emerged. The deficiencies with change implementation coverage may be a direct result of the way that change has been conceptualized or tested. While current views do account for change as a complex event, or one containing multi-dimensional elements, current literature treats planned change in organizations as a single, often isolated event. Simply put, this *uni-change* perspective is deficient.

First of all, uni-change is uncommon and rare. Lewis and Seibold (1998) discuss that planned organizational change often results in additional subsequent changes. Most particularly, this applied to in changes to the role structures in the organization after a planned change. Specifically, they discuss how a particular program innovation created new roles and responsibilities for line technicians; in addition to understanding and absorbing the changes of the new program, this technician and others like him/her had to accept new role responsibilities and organizational structures. Stylianou, Jeffries, & Robbins (1996) also discuss that some planned change efforts are naturally accompanied by other necessary changes. Specifically, they examined organizations that both merged and integrated new information systems (IS) programs. While the focus of study was how well IS programs are integrated into new cultural systems, they also highlight the presence of co-existing change efforts and, perhaps more directly, the need for some

kinds of change to accompany other changes. Considering this, it is particularly essential that this under acknowledged treatment of change as a multifaceted phenomenon is addressed. Similarly, Schweiger, Csiszar, and Napier (1993) contend that restructuring efforts almost always accompany other large-scale change efforts, and they suggest that these efforts are truly two (or more) discrete activities and changes.

Secondly, by taking a uni-change perspective, we are missing important explanations for outcomes and processes of change. Studying only one initiative in organizations experiencing competing initiatives may create unknown consequences for both the studied and unstudied programs. Although multiple change research is unfamiliar territory, it may be likened to co-present tensions in organizations. For example, having things overlap (e.g., having two or more jobs or job roles, dating two or more people at the same time) can create tense moments, or environments. In particular, “[t]ensions exist when individuals are faced with opposing goals” (Medved et al., 2001, p. 140). According to Tracy (2004), these tensions manifest into one of three frames in organizations: *simple contradictions*, *complimentary dialects* or *pragmatic paradoxes*. She posits that when members frame tensions as simple contradictions, they are forced to vacillate or split between competing notions; that is, members often must alternate or choose between opposing tensions. And although reacting to tensions as contradictions did not appear to have personal negative emotional effects, Tracy (2004) notes that this frame did have a negative impact on specific behavioral outcomes (e.g., inconsistent and haphazard behavior). Complementary dialects, in contrast, occur when members are able to cognitively reframe tensions as harmonious. That is, members actually believe that the

tensions are collectively associated. As a result, they reframe the tensions as collaborative. Therefore, these re-constructed tensions are not only correlated with satisfaction (Baxter, 1988, 1990; Tracy 2004), but they also allow for the achievement of simultaneous expectations (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). Thus, reacting to tensions as complementary dialectics can create positive individual and organizational outcomes. Finally, Tracy (2004) argues that a pragmatic paradox is especially problematic because “[i]t paralyzes action, especially when other organizational structures, such as a lack of meta-communication and an intense organizational relationship, serve to transform paradoxes into double binds” (p. 141). Therefore, reacting to tensions as paradoxes creates stress and strain that ultimately stifles progress and increases confusion *and* contentment. Tracy’s framework provides a useful way of understanding how packaging or delivering communication about multiple change efforts may be perceived as either complementary or opposing.

To understand how tensions with multifaceted organizational change are managed, it can be helpful to examine other organizational tensions and how these tensions create conflict for organizational members. For example, co-present roles, multiple targets of identification and competing values can also create strain. Role conflict is present when organizational members are faced with overlapping and competing elements to the execution of their job (Shenkar & Zeira, 1992). Similarly, role dialectics, or the ongoing interplay of roles that affect organizational role development, create role contradictions. These contradictions are constructed and reconstructed via interaction (Apker, Propp, & Zabava Ford, 2005). Like role tensions, role conflict results

from the interplay of competing initiatives and overload concerns that often force members to make choices (House & Rizzo, 1972). The result of this situation is generally correlated with increased stress and lower satisfaction (House & Rizzo, 1972; Rizzo, House, Lirtzman, 1970; Upson, Ketchen, & Ireland, 2007). However, in a study of role tensions facing nurses, evidence suggests that role tensions can be negotiated communicatively (Apker et al., 2005).

Although competing identities are generally considered objectionable because they create obstacles to organizational effectiveness by forcing members to prioritize (or choose) their loyalties and dilute, divert or compromise responsibilities or resources (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987; DiSanza & Bullis, 1999; Simon, 1976; Van Maanen, 1976), evidence also suggests that multiple identification targets can create a positive although moderate correlation (e.g., Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Scott, 1997). Moreover, Vandenberg and Scarpello (1994) and Wallace (1993) suggest that various forms of commitment are also positively correlated. As suggested earlier, tensions exist with the presence of opposing goals (Medved et al., 2001); values, an organization's principles, are often reflected in its goals. The tension of reconciling opposing organizational values creates dissonance and dilemmas (Aram, 1976; Upson et al., 2007). Thus, considering what is known about tensions with conflicting organizational elements provides a functional foundation to make assumptions about multiple change efforts.

Countless planned efforts are cited as failures (e.g., Bashein, Markus, & Riley, 1994; Hammer & Champy, 1993; Majchrzak, 1988). In fact, research on implementation suggests that 80% of efforts fail to deliver their promised value, 28% are canceled before

completion and 43% are overextended or deliver late<sup>i</sup>. Knodel (2004) suggests this is due largely to the fact that change is not managed with a complex approach; rather, efforts are “disconnected”, “managed in silos” and “not aligned” well with the organization (p. 49). Additionally, many planned change efforts are often naturally multifaceted (e.g., Lewis, 2000; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1999; Safar, Defields, Fulop, Dowd, & Zavod, 2006). Tornatzaky and Johnson (1982) suggest that the implementation process is “[a]lmost always difficult and never proceeds as planned” (p. 193). Moreover, implementers not only underestimate the change efforts and problems, but they are often also saddled with unexpected consequences of organizational change initiatives. For example, Lewis (2000) notes that a “[v]ast majority of the respondents (94%) indicated that the planned change involved some combination of technological, policy and program changes” (p. 56). Respondents also noted other changes subsequent to a large-scale planned effort such as changes in job responsibilities, status and remuneration, to name a few. In addition, Rousseau & Tijoriwala (1999) suggest that downsizing efforts are a motivated reason to restructure. Moreover, in order for businesses to adapt successfully to environmental pressures, employees are often required to digest a multitude of organizational changes (Conner & Hoopes, 1997). In 1987, Beer and Walton argued that traditional science methodology continues to overlook the systematic nature of change in organizations, and they chastised scholarship for reducing change to a single intervention examination. In sum, it is rare that organizational change efforts occur in an isolation of other changes, and, consequently, a multifaceted approach to understanding the complexities of change is overdue.

Arguably, merger and acquisition (M/A) processes offer a rich context in which to examine multifaceted change. M/As are suggested to be one of the most disruptive and significant workplace events. As many as 25% of U.S. workers were affected by M/As in the 1990s (Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson, 2000), while worldwide M/A activity grew to \$3.5 trillion in 2000 (Driscoll, Stuth, Rieger, & Kobayashi, 2001). Nonetheless, most mergers fail. In fact, researchers agree that approximately 75% of M/As fall short of their financial and strategic objectives (see Marks & Mirvis, 2001), and some sources suggest that as many as 95% of mergers fail (e.g., Boeh & Beamish, 2006). Therefore, when organizations combine values, cultures, practices, processes, people and geography, it is challenging at best. Moreover, when organizations attempt to micromanage change, they may, in fact, fail to vigilantly attend to the successive changes created by an initiative like a M/A.

M/As are often coupled with overlapping, subsequent, and often necessary immediate organizational changes (e.g., restructuring, new processes, new management). For example, Schweiger et al. (1993) discuss how mergers are frequently aligned with simultaneous downsizing and restructuring efforts. In addition, Griffin's (2004) study of an M/A illustrated how the new partnership structure created increased, simultaneous philanthropic donation activity. Because these changes do not occur in isolation, one change may be interacting in ways not clearly or presently understood, and outcomes associated with a particular change may actually be conflated by the complexity of other concurrent, related changes. . Moreover, when changes occur simultaneously, tensions are present and a crisis of competing interests is potentially created both by management

and employees. Unless members see these tensions as complementary, members will become conflicted and likely direct their efforts toward one change while simultaneously and subsequently ignoring another change, becoming paralyzed or operating arbitrarily. As a result, change overlap may impact change effectiveness in ways previously unaccounted for by planned implementation and other similar literatures. Thus, it may be important to examine and understand how overlapping changes are introduced to organizational members, how these changes bear on other changes, how organizations attend to changes communicatively, and how this shapes potential outcomes.

### Study Rationale

Uni-change is an inadequate way to study change processes based on the following reasons. First, by focusing on one change at a time, we assume that changes come to organizations one at a time, and we may falsely attribute all attitudes to that single change arbitrarily focused on for study. Instead, we should investigate simultaneous and closely sequential changes and examine how these situations create distinct or conflated attitudes. Second, by ignoring the “perceived” start-end points of change, as well as the overlap of changes, we tend to privilege implementers’ ideas about when something is “new” and something else is “no longer new.” Rather, we ought to recognize that stakeholders may perceive start and finish (fully implemented) differently. For example, employees may perceive multiple change efforts where managers do not. They may also perceive time intervals as sufficient or inadequate. Third, by disregarding the coordination or interplay of change initiatives and their relative components that simultaneously operate in organizations, we ignore an important area of explanation for

change outcomes. While some literature has acknowledged that *competing change* efforts are problematic (Stylianou et al., 1996), we have little understanding of how simultaneous or multifaceted change affects implementation efforts, communication about change, perceptions of change, resistance to change and other practical organizational outcomes. Therefore, directing our attention to recognizing, examining, describing and testing a multifaceted change phenomena will serve as a productive contribution.

### Dissertation Purpose and Organization

This dissertation project is an attempt to depict multifaceted change and how members in organizations facing these intersections of change are impacted. This study will focus on issues surrounding (a) stakeholders' perceptions of the initial implementation messages during multifaceted change, (b) stakeholders' reactions to initial implementation messages, as well as (c) particular change perceptions (quantity, favorability, deception, coping) and, (d) issues of multiple change load (overlapping changes, rate of changes) as it relates to particular organizational outcomes (satisfaction, and trust). Although change implementation research has provided a vigorous beginning, organizational studies often examine change processes from a uni-change perspective. Consequently, it is still unclear how organizations plan and manage for and employees respond to multiple changes and multifaceted change efforts. While it is helpful to understand a change in isolation, it is often not realistic. Changes are, indeed, punctuated and continual, drastic and evolutionary; they are also complicated, multifaceted and often



co-present with other changes. Thus, the impact of multiple, multifaceted change on organizational members is at this time unknown.

This study on multiple changes is specifically interested in understanding how implementers' coordinate their communication efforts about multifaceted change. More directly, it is interested in understanding the use and impact of the multifaceted change message during situations of multiple, independent and interdependent changes in a short time period. As a result of this goal, my investigation is guided by the following research question: How does implementers' coordination of initial messages about change impact organizational members during multifaceted change? This query directs the much more specific questions and assumptions discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4. Moreover, given that the trend toward major and moderate change has drastically increased in the past decade and a half (Cushman & King, 1995) and that "rapid change will likely continue to be the cornerstone of organizational life in the next century" (Lewis, 1999, p. 43), organizations faced with multifaceted change situations are a significant and definite reality. Likewise, the degree that organizational members can endure "change burnout", the "[e]xhaustion of an individual's capacity or willingness to continue to participate in change programs" (Lewis, 2006, p. 27), is of additional interest.

Toward that end, this dissertation project is organized into a two-study project. A two-study approach is necessary to be able to provide a full understanding of multifaceted change communication and its impact on organizational stakeholders. Study 1 sought to reveal the communication strategies implementers share with stakeholders regarding multifaceted change. Once perceptions of these communication strategies were

revealed, Study 2 tested a series of hypotheses regarding message type and particular outcomes of these communication choices. Study 1 involved the collection of data via individual, in-depth, semi structured interviews, and this data collection occurred just nine weeks after the organizations merged. Interview data is an important tool to provide a conduit into the ways members of the organization under study are acting, interacting and ultimately making sense of their behaviors in accordance with their surroundings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Interviews are especially appropriate to “[u]nderstand the social actor’s experience and perspective” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). In particular, interviews provide a useful method for understanding how employees are affected by the formal and informal communication practices in organizations, and they are also helpful in examining how employees process multifaceted change. This method can provide information about sense-making activities that organizational members experience during a potentially dissonant, disruptive or uncertain time. More specifically, this approach will allow a rich, detailed understanding of the communication messages and sense-making experiences encountered by members of the firm during their organizational changes. Study 2 included the distribution and collection of self-report questionnaires to the entire combined firm. Questionnaires are particularly useful for testing relationships among variables. They are additionally helpful because they allow participants to share information about themselves or other matters under the veil of privacy or confidentiality. This is especially important when studies involve sensitive or dissonant disclosure.

The intention of a two-study approach was, first, to discover what information was being shared with organizational stakeholders about multifaceted change, and, next,

to determine what impact particular message types concerning multifaceted change have on employees experiencing multiple changes. With this in mind, the next chapter of this dissertation will discuss the relevant research surrounding organizational change as well as research on change communication and initial implementation messages. Following this review, an important research question is presented to (a) develop an empirical understanding of multifaceted change communication in the context of a series of large scales changes, (b) address and extend current knowledge bases, and (c) carve out a new area of study on multifaceted change messages. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methods used to address the research question in Study 1; this overview includes background on the research site, procedures for collecting data, commentary on the qualitative protocol and descriptions of the data analysis tools used for investigating this key area. In addition, this chapter will discuss the results of Study 1. Building on the results of the first study, Chapter 4 will discuss literature surrounding Study 2. In particular, this chapter addresses the key variables related to initial change messages, and it culminates with predictions related to message type and specific stakeholder outcomes. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the methods used in testing the predictions for Study 2. Data collection methods, instrumentation, and data analysis techniques will be discussed in detail. This chapter will conclude with a report of the results of the hypotheses. The final chapter of this project will involve an in-depth discussion of the findings, which includes individual interpretations of each study as well as a collective view and interpretation of the cumulative findings. The last chapter will also include a

discussion of the study limitations and opportunities for future research arising from the conclusions of this project.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### STUDY 1

#### What are Stakeholders Being Told about Multifaceted Change?

The previous chapter provided an introduction, rationale and overview for the study of multifaceted change. This chapter provides an overview of current literature that addresses (a) features and types of organizational change and (b) initial implementation messages. The literature covered in this chapter serves as the foundation for launching and responding to initial questions related to the larger project. Study 1 explores how an organization undergoing multiple change shares information with its members.

Ultimately, it will answer the question of how change and change communication is treated in situations where more than one change is concurrently, occurring within the same organization. In order to inform the research question of interest this chapter is organized into three main parts: (1) an assessment of literature conceptualizing organizational change, (2) a review of key constructs related to implementation communication, and (3) a presentation of the central research question for Study 1.

#### Understanding Organizational Change

##### *Dimensions of Organizational Change*

Research in organizational change has evolved over the past twenty years and has tendered broad and diverse literature spanning across several disciplines. Huber et al. (1993) define change as “[c]hange in how an organization functions, who its members and leaders are, what form it takes, or how it allocates its resources—pervades and

continuously reshapes both our personal world of work and the larger world of organizations that surround us” (p. 16). Lewis (2000) further distinguishes between change that is planned, or controlled, and change that is uncontrolled. She refers to planned organizational change as that which is “[b]rought about through the purposeful efforts of organizational members as opposed to change that is due to environmental or uncontrollable forces” (p. 45). Similarly, then, unplanned change is unintentionally produced, is often times the result of exigencies or external pressures and is often the result of a secondary effects, accidents, or unanticipated consequences of action (Ford & Ford, 1995). Although change is an enduring feature of organizational life, the degree of change, the engines of change and the impact of that change can vary substantially.

*Magnitude of change.* Bartunek and Moch (1984, 1987) study various types of change and outline three different types of change referred to as *orders of change magnitude*. *First-order changes* are small, incremental changes that essentially extend prior beliefs or ways of operation. First-order change means performing the same basic work functions faster, more efficiently, with fewer errors, etc. *Second-order changes* are major transformational, often discontinuous or radical changes that undermine and alter fundamental assumptions. Second-order change transforms old processes and norms so that the purpose of a business process and its associated tasks fundamentally change. It is often difficult to make direct comparisons between old and new processes because the very nature of work has changed. *Third-order changes* are referred to the preparation for ongoing, constant change. Third order change means that individuals and organizations are change-ready and understand the “the only constant is change” (cf. Gallivan, 2001, p.

246). Communication is often woven into these degrees of change for individuals and organizations alike.

Individual self-reports on change have provided a useful way to understand the magnitude of change. Specifically, Golembiewski et al. (1976) propose three conceptually different types of changes. They suggest organizational individual self-reports calibrate the impact of organizational intervention as one of three types of change: *alpha*, *beta* and *gamma*. Golembiewski et al. (1976) define alpha, beta, and gamma change as:

Alpha change involves the variation in the level of some existential state, given a constantly calibrated measuring instrument related to a constant conceptual domain. Beta change involves a variation in the level of some existential state, complicated by the fact that some intervals of the measurement continuum associated with a constant conceptual domain have been recalibrated. Gamma change involves a redefinition or reconceptualization of some domain, a major change in the perspective or frame of reference within which phenomena are perceived or classified in what is taken to be relevant in some slice of reality. (p. 134-135)

Unlike Barnutek and Moch's order changes that can be best understood in terms of scale size, *equilibrium* changes can be understood in terms of pace; Golembiewski et al.'s (1976) typology indicates how members perceive the changes that are occurring (not just size or disruption pace). Nonetheless, alpha change, the least radical of the three, is often equated to first order changes in which change occurs within an existing framework

(Bartunek and Moch, 1984, 1987; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974), and gamma change is often equated to punctuated equilibrium or second order changes (Bartunek and Moch, 1984, 1987; Watzlawick et al., 1974) because it is transformational, revolutionary and often organizationally “frame-breaking” (Phillips & Duran, 1992). However, management-engineered gamma change is perceived by individuals as a revolutionary event as well as an incredibly novel and highly unpredictable. Gamma change alters the organizational environment in such a way that previous measurement rules are irrelevant. Martin (1992) suggests this type of intervention is the least common in organizations.

*The nature of change.* At a more fundamental level, Huber and Glick (1993) suggest that changes are the result of the two energizing forces in organizations: the environment and top management. They suggest that in order to survive and remain competitive, organizations are influenced by environmental stimuli and may be forced to change to complex and turbulent environmental needs. In addition, top management influences change by becoming a “source of change, inhibitor of change, interpreter of the organization’s environment or manipulator of the organization’s environment” (p. 9). In understanding these forces, it becomes clear how particular paradigms have been referenced to understand how shifts (e.g., radical and incremental) in organizations occur. As the change literature became more robust, Van de Ven and Poole (1995) attempted to capture the overarching frameworks by which the literature could be categorized. From their analysis, four perspectives of change processes emerge which include the (a) life cycle theories, (b) teleological theories, (c) dialectical theory, and (d) evolutionary theory. Each perspective was characterized by a different event sequence and generative



mechanism. For example, life cycle theories have an event sequence of a start-up, grow, harvest, terminate, and start-up. They have a generative mechanism of an immanent program or regulation. In another instance, evolutionary theory has an event sequence of variation, selection, retention, and variation. It has a generative mechanism of competitive selection and resource scarcity. In these examples, both have similar sequences, but the former perspective assumes an internal locus whereas the latter assumes an external focus.

As noted earlier, there are two fundamental approaches to understanding change in organizations; one suggests an ongoing, continuous approach, and the other suggests an episodic, often radical approach. These approaches are not only compatible to the evolutionary model and the life cycle model, but they also similarly align with and resemble first order and second order changes. The continual change paradigm suggests that change is an evolution occurring gradually and inherently in the process of organizing. It assumes that organizations are often in a state of slow, continual, incremental and cumulative movement. It has also been referred to as non revolutionary (Miller & Friessen, 1982, 1984) and, in some cases, suggests independence among organizational units in an adaptation to specific local and environmental needs (Cyert & March, 1963). Although continual change approaches suggest that changes are planned, they also suggest that changes are often unplanned responses to other changes rather than strategic efforts (Burke, 2002; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Huber & Van de Ven, 1995). As a result, Miller and Friessen (1982) argue that organizations should be “constructed so as to ensure a complementary alignment among structural variables” (p. 870). Continuous

change has been characterized as rapid mini episodes of change in which inertia leads to normality (Vaughan, 1996), competency traps (Levinthal & March, 1993) or even temporal milestones (Gersick, 1989, 1994). Albeit, the main distinction in this change as it is related to punctuated change is its relation to continuity and scale.

Continuity issues are associated with the organizational culture (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Specifically, changes that are small and ongoing with few large disruptions or breaks are legitimized because the environment values continual adaptation and adaptability (Kotter & Heskett, 1992) and embeds this system into the norms and values of the organization (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Scale is described as “[s]ituated micro-level changes that actors enact over time as they make sense of and act in the world” (Orlikowski, 1996, p. 91). They are not, however, trivial, and although they are mainly evolutionary, they can be decisive if they occur on the edge of chaos or cumulative revolutions (Staw & Sutton, 1993, Staw, 1991; Weick & Quinn, 1999). For example, in their study of mall experiments with cultural change at a British customs, Colville and colleagues (1993) discovered that micro level changes were able to provide a springboard for transformational change as well as the means to institutionalize. In a sense, it legitimized and softened what might have been seen as a radical or second order change as a much more adaptive change due to its micro-level approach.

In contrast to the continuous change perspective, the punctuated equilibrium paradigm, sometimes referred to as episodic change, is used to refer to those groups of changes that can be described as infrequent, discontinuous, and intentional (Weick & Quinn, 1999). This approach can be best understood by examining changes in isolation

or, at the very least, by examining changes as occasional interruptions from equilibrium that are punctuated by episodes of divergence from the organizational status quo. Examples of punctuated changes include the implementation of a new technology or a change in a key personnel member. As result, it is important to examine how the equilibrium periods interact with revolutionary periods and in what ways the characteristics of those states depend on or reflect the deep structures that organize the change. This kind of change is particularly necessary because it enables fundamental organizational transformation processes that continuous change approaches are not potent enough to permit. Gersick (1991) argues that change does not or cannot occur incrementally or slowly yet her paradigm proposes that fundamental change cannot be accomplished “[p]iecemeal, slowly, gradually, and comfortably” (p. 34; for exception see Colville et al., 1993). Moreover, research by Bougon (1992) and Langfield-Smith (1992) suggests that continuous change efforts may create enough inertia to bend or alter an organization’s belief system or frame of reference, but a punctuated change creates enough cognitive strength to break or replace an organization’s belief system or frame. Therefore, *a* punctuated change has a much more significant impact than *a* continuous change.

Punctuated or episodic changes are characterized by occasional interruption or divergence from equilibrium. Three important processes depicting this type of change include inertia, triggering of change, and replacement. Inertia is defined as an “[i]nability for organizations to change as rapidly as the environment” (Pfeffer, 1997, p. 163) and can take a variety of forms (e.g., deep structure, technology advancements). Triggers for

change come from a variety of sources including the environment, organizational performance, characteristics of top managers, organizational structure, and competitive strategy (Huber et al., 1993). Thirdly, punctuated and episodic change assumes that change occurs through replacement (Ford & Backoff, 1988; Ford & Ford, 1994). The idea of replacement is that “[o]ne entity sequentially takes the place of or substitutes for a second. The first identity does not become the second but is substituted for it” (Ford & Ford, 1994, p. 773).

Perhaps a less subtle approach to understand continual organizational change is one offered by Tsoukas and Chia (2002) suggesting that organizations are sites of ongoing, incremental and emergent change; —that is, changes are what organizations are always engaging in both by purpose and by nature. Change, in their view, is one that takes place by “[a]daptation, variations, restless expansion, and opportunistic conquests” (p. 580). In addition to the similarity that this view harkens to a third order perspective of change, their view is consistent with Giddens’ (1976, 1979) notion of structure and agency; this notion suggests that microscopic examination of organizational change would reveal that organizations are quasi-structures of both institutions and humans reacting to change.

In sum, change efforts can be characterized on a continuum whereas punctuated or episodic change is driven by inertia, a desire in making change to the fundamental organizational frame and the inability of organizations to keep up, while continuous change is driven by alertness, minor alterations and the inability of organizations to remain stable. However, the difficulty in truly understanding organizational change and

its density may be the result of categorizing change as (a) isolated and (b) either/or when, in fact, it may be more complicated. Therefore, the real challenge may be in understanding how these two models both interact in temporal conjunction and compete for organizational member attention.

*Change and continuity.* When organizations are not in a state of change, they are suggested to exhibit inertia, a state of inactivity. However, organizations can also exhibit momentum, another form of inertia. This results when organizations adapt to continuous change (Kelly & Amburgey, 1991; Amburgey & Miner, 1992). A momentum pace of change is suggested to have positive outcomes because change becomes routine and adaptive cycles become much quicker. This is attributed both to organizational learning with respect to change and to members seeing these changes as routine (Amburgey, Kelly, & Barnett, 1993). Amburgey et al. also suggest that the probability of an organizational change increases with the number of prior (similar) changes of the same type (e.g., organizations that have downsized once will be far more likely to downsize again). The momentum model then suggests that a stable organizational tempo for change creates a healthier climate for change and increased likelihood of repeat changes.

Breaking a radical or large-scale change into smaller sequential changes is suggested to decrease resistance and increase the likelihood of successful adaptation (Gallivan, Hofman, & Orlikowski, 1994). A big advantage of this approach is that it permits phased adaptation to uncertainty surrounding punctuated change, reduces radical change to a momentum inertia state and allows for employees to make sense of the unfolding sequencing of changes (Brynjolfsson, Renshaw, & Alstynne, 1997; Gallivan et

al., 1994; Kotter, 1995). Moreover, sequencing change supports a divisibility of organizational processes, and segmenting change this way increases the coordination of change efforts (Brynjolfsson et al., 1997).

In contrast, employees' responses to continuous major and minor organizational changes are a primary contributor to employee resistance to change. Sikora, Beaty, and Forward (2004) argue continuous and, more importantly, overlapping change creates serious organizational consequences. Specifically, they suggest the "cumulative impact of multiple and sometimes conflicting change initiatives eventually overwhelms cognitive appraisal and coping mechanisms" (p. 3). Additionally, Kotter (1995) suggests that the main reason why major transformations fail is a result of skipping steps in the necessary series of change implementation efforts.

Brown and Eisenhardt (1997) argue that successful innovation is linked to having an organizational disposition toward time-paced evolution. This involves taking the perspective that "change is keyed to the passage of time, not the occurrence of particular events" (p. 25). In their study of eight product development teams, they concluded that successful teams were able to engage in continuous change rather than "the episodic phenomenon described by the punctuated equilibrium model" (p. 1). By considering change as a continuous and time-paced or clock-based, rather than project based, successful teams were able to reduce their uncertainty about additional organizational action or responses. This finding suggests that organizational members are cognizant of actual time frames and may be reacting to change based on temporal elements related to the rate or speech of changes associated with multifaceted change.

As was the case in the aforementioned study, organizational researchers usually talk about speed in terms of the duration of time it takes organizational groups to complete projects regardless of the pace of specific activities. In contrast, pace has been defined as “tempo or rate of activity” (Ballard & Seibold, 2004, p. 141) and does not include the frequency or the timing of the activity. Thus, what scholars (e.g., Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Eisenhardt, 1989) have conceived of as change speed is related more with delays in the process of organizational actions rather than with the pacing of the actions themselves (Huber, 2004). Given the inordinate amount of change present in today’s workplace (e.g., Zorn et al., 1999) and the likelihood that planned change activities often result in subsequent and overlapping changes, frequency and rate must be considerations for accurately theorizing about implementation efforts.

According to Brynjolfsson and colleagues (1997), three factors help determine an appropriate pace: task interdependence, organizational receptiveness to change, and external pressure. Task interdependence refers to how modular or serial the essential steps of the changes are (i.e., whether the change can be broken down). Organizational receptiveness is concerned with climate for change (i.e., the extent to which the organization is tolerant to change). Organizational receptiveness is suggested to increase as an organization engages in change regularly and as a particular change is more greatly welcomed (Gallivan et. al., 1994). External pressures also guide rate. This factor suggests that low external pressure will allow for slower rates of changes. With extreme external pressure (e.g., the need to merge for financial survival), the concern for survival and limited extraneous resources force change to be more rapid. Moreover, Gallivan et al.

(1994) suggest that cultures resistant to change should implement change more rapidly because slack or transition time permits greater chances of resistance.

The ability to engage in rapid, relentless and continuous change is becoming a crucial capacity for survival (D'Aveni, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989). It is, therefore, highly likely that planned change activities will often result in subsequent and overlapping changes. Thus, frequency and rate must be theoretical considerations for theorizing accurately about implementation efforts. Also, while research on the relationship between temporality and communication in organizations (e.g., Ballard & Seibold, 2003, 2004, 2006) has focused on temporality within groups, there is an important association as both interact with organizational, particularly, multifaceted change.

There is much to gain by understanding the impact of timing and change efforts. Notably, Bluedorn and Denhart (1988) mark time as a critical component to change; however, extant literature on time has not yet produced findings to suggest exactly how time, outside of continual and rapid change, is related to elements of multifaceted change. Current research is not examining the rollout of several changes in limited temporal frames (e.g., a second or third change prior to the completion of the first change). In light of this deficiency, this study will seek to understand how timing changes are related to the concept of multifaceted change rather than maintaining a view of change as continual.

#### Implementation Communication

Researchers have long recognized that effective and appropriate organizational communication makes vital contribution to the success of change initiatives (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Kotter, 1995; Lewin, 1999; Voelpel, Leibold, & Mahmoud, 2004).



Communication can increase organizational readiness by helping organizational members understand the need for and impact of change (Armenakis & Harris, 2002). Many have acknowledged the pivotal role that communication plays in engineering and managing change (e.g., Albrecht & Ropp, 1984; Barrett, Thomas, & Hocevar, 1995; Fairhurst, 1993; Fairhurst, Cooren, & Cahill, 2002; Fidler & Johnson, 1984; Ford & Ford, 1995; Johnson, 1990, 1993; Johnson, Meyer, Berkowitz, Ethington, & Miller, 1997; Lewis, 2007; Lewis & Seibold, 1993, 1996; Van de Ven, 1986). Although Lewis and Seibold (1998) reconceptualize implementation as a communication phenomenon, there has been a “noticeable lack of research that deals with the methods by which planned changes are announced and disseminated to organizational stakeholders” (Timmerman, 2003, p. 302). Emphasizing communication in the process of planned change efforts is critical because change is not only constituted in communication, but is the central means by which changes occur. Therefore, if organizational communication is identified in the literature as an important factor in determining the success of change, the change message itself may be seen as the heart of the primary mechanism for creating readiness for change among organizational members (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993).

#### *Initial Implementation Messages*

Although some prescriptive recommendations exist (Fidler & Johnson, 1984; Larkin & Larkin, 1994; Smeltzer & Zener, 1993) and a limited amount of descriptive data has begun to emerge (Brimm & Murdock, 1998; Lewis, 2007; Lewis, 1999; Lewis et al., 2001; Smeltzer, 1991) regarding communication and change, there has been no comprehensive effort to describe, explain, or predict multiple change situations for

organizations facing an overabundance of overlapping and continual changes. However, a number of studies provide a universal understanding of the conditions necessary for implementation communication to be successful.

*Antecedents to implementer communication choices.* Research suggests that specific conditions or elements within and surrounding organizational change will affect change implementation approaches. Lewis (2007) suggests two general categories of antecedents to implementation communication strategy selection: *perceptions of the change situation* and *institutional factors*. She contends that communication strategy is influenced by the perceptions of the change situation and the implementers acuity of “[t]he change situation, the goals of the change initiative as they see it, and the perceived barriers or potential challenges faced in effort to install the change” (p. 182). Moreover, the constraining forces that influence organizations to comply with specific institutional norms also impact the communication strategy. Likewise, Klein and Sorra (1996) suggest the implementation effectiveness is a function of the organizational climate. Specifically, they suggest that an effective plan is constituted by (a) organizational receptiveness to change and the specific change efforts along with (b) the fit of that innovation for the targeted user’s values and needs. Consistent with Lewis’ compliance to external pressures, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggest that in order for organizations to survive in today’s turbulence, they are subject to the environmental pressure of organizational homogenization known as *isomorphism*. According to Hawley (1968), isomorphism is a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units facing the same environmental conditions. Therefore, organizational change practices and programs

often arise out of a need to achieve competitive edge by looking/acting similarly to other organizations. As a result, there is evidence to suggest that particular organizational and environmental conditions direct implementer communication choices.

*Perspectives and strategies for change communication.* Lewis (1999) suggests that implementers and employees perceive successful change implementation differently. More specifically, implementers related higher levels of communication frequency with success; alternatively, employees perceive change implementation as successful when implementers clearly communicate the vision of change as well as solicit feedback or provide opportunities for employees to tender feedback about the change (Lewis, 2006). From there, these unique perspectives on change communication illustrate (a) the tactics implementers use to disseminate and manage the change, (b) how implementers perceive success, and (c) how employees perceive success. Each of these perspectives contributes to a more robust understanding of change communication as “[a] dialogic process wherein various stakeholders engage one another in clarification, negotiation of meaning, and perspective taking” (Lewis, 2006, p. 40) rather than merely transmitting information. Traditionally, the role of change implementation has thought to be occupied by those in a managerial position (Leonard-Barton & Deschamps, 1988). However, research on more informal implementation efforts suggests the upward influence employees have on change processes (Lewis, 2006). Implementers utilize a number of communication choices for introducing and managing change efforts. Building on the model by Lewin (1952), Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, and Ganesh (2004) emphasize six communicative tenets of implementation efforts which include: communication constitutes change,

changes are influenced by shared discursive behaviors imbedded in a social-historical context, change discourse flows bi-directionally, communication is central to the initiative, change metamorphosis and adaptation is framed and reframed communicatively, and feedback accounts for the non-linear progression (pp. 319-321). This approach to change communication suggests that it is an organizationally infused process; however, much of the research on communication in the change process has considered specific strategies that implementers can use in communicating change to their employees.

Smeltzer and Zener (1993, 1995) constructed a literature-based model for organizational leaders to use when announcing major changes that may potentially be negatively perceived by members of their organizations. Testing this model revealed a pattern of conditions that, when present, make communicating change messages particularly difficult. These conditions include: the presence of a wide variety of special interests and concerns within the organization, evidence that the proposed change challenges organizational norms, a lack of representation by affected organization members in decision making forums, and the availability of a wide variety of communication means possible. Smeltzer and Zener concluded that timing of the changes, in terms of organizational readiness to accept the change or allowances given for curbing destructive rumors, was among one of the factors having the greatest impact on the acceptance of an organizational change message. They also found that timing was one of the features organizations most commonly overlooked. Additionally, they suggest that the geographic dispersion of employees and the amount and type of information

included in the announcements were variables that should have been considered when crafting the change message.

Change message and momentum issues have also been shown to be of concern. Armenakis and Harris (2002) evaluated a previously developed framework for making organizational change communication more effective (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993). Their findings indicated that the effectiveness of the framework's three key change messages and five key change message components suffered over time and the process of multiple implementations. Specifically, their near-term operational concerns superseded adherence to the initial long-term strategy originally suggested by the framework. This might imply that initial change messages need to be cognizant of the longer-term effects of multiple implementations rather than the short-term concern of reducing uncertainty.

Clampitt, DeKoch, and Cashman (2000) outline five specific "top down" (formal) communication strategies that management employs to communicate change to a workforce. They argue that involving employees in appropriate areas and ways as well as providing employees with relevant information about the change prior to its occurrence is the most effective strategy for managing this process. Conversely, they argue that the least effective strategies involve management withholding information, appearing to be ambiguous about possible or pending changes or presenting employees with an abundance of unsorted information in an attempt to present a red herring to the dissonance.

*Change message construction.* Although not as deeply researched as the process of implementation, researchers have begun to recognize the importance of change messages. Some research has contended that context of the communication was much more important than the content (e.g., Smeltzer, 1991; Smeltzer & Zener, 1995), while others have acknowledged the pivotal role of the message content in creating effective implementation efforts (e.g., Armenakis et al., 1999; Ford & Ford, 1994; Lewis, 2000, 2007). Porras and Silvers (1991) contend that change communication and the messages about change is a multi-step process, and there is a need to understand the “means” of communication including a “closer scrutiny of what is said, how it is said, when it is said, and the effect of what was said on the progressive development of an intentional change” (p. 561). With this in mind, Armenakis, et al. (1999) argued that specific components are critical in change message construction. To be effective, the content of the messages should focus on five factors: (a) making the case that change is needed, (b) demonstrating that the organization has capability to successfully change, (c) convincing organization members that it is in their best interest to change, (d) showing that those most affected by the change are supportive, and (e) establishing that the desired change is right for the focal organization. Fairhurst (1993) also examined communicative strategies used by organizational leaders. Her results revealed five framing devices that managers and their reports used to make sense and ascribe meaning to the implementation process. Results suggest that implementer communication containing information employees perceived as relevant to enacting the new vision was reported as more successful choices; in contrast,

implementation was found to be least successful where leaders failed to communicate relevant information that would have aided members in implementing the new vision.

Smeltzer and Zener (1994) suggest that the detail and amount of information given to employees about a change is the most significant aspect of the change message. They contend that although employees want to know the whole story, it may result in inconsistent and contradictory messages. Specifically, this may occur when too many details are provided to the employees before the change strategy has been totally formulated. They cite the case of a company's announcement that further details would be provided about the number of employees affected by the layoff and their future job classifications; within a month, although, the numbers and classifications changed twice resulting in massive confusion and distrust. However, in a series of studies, Pincus (1986), Pincus, Knipp, and Rayfield (1990), and Klein and Sorra (1996) found that organizational members retain information that is specific and personally relevant to them better than they do abstract, general, or unfamiliar information. Conversely, they found that information concerning the organization in general or other organizational members was quickly forgotten or not even recorded in employees' minds from the outset.

According to Armenakis and Harris (2002), the change message "both conveys the nature of the change and shapes the sentiments that determine the reactions to the change" (p. 169). Moreover, as with any strategic communication, change messages should vary according to the concept being communicated (Conrad, 1995). Therefore, announcing a new attendance policy, for example, is going to be different than

announcing the consolidation of your company with another organization. Likewise, presenting an organization with a series of ongoing changes would also require the need for a specific and unique change message. In addition to tailoring the message to the type of change and the target audience, tailoring change messages to the organizational culture by framing them in familiar terms improves the understanding of perceived advantages of a directed change; it also portrays the perceived advantages to be greater than the stress of going through the change.

#### Study 1: Rationale for Research Question

In 1996, Klein and Sorra argued that a paucity of research existed on change implementation efforts, and the existing research mainly involved single-site, qualitative cases. They have suggested that contemporary implementation research fails to view and, therefore, explore and explain change as a multilevel phenomenon. They argued few studies at that time integrated and coordinated views of change. Moreover, Beer and Walton (1987) suggest that contemporary methodologies are only examining change as a single intervention. They suggest that by neglecting the interrelatedness of elements in a system, exogenous variables will prevent any powerful conclusions. So despite the colossal and growing body of knowledge explaining single change in organizations over the past ten years across multiple disciplines, there is little known about multifaceted change implementation efforts.

Lewis (1999, 2006, 2007) has continually contended that the manner in which changes are communicated by implementers is a vital component to stakeholders' perceptions of implementation success. Moreover, a review of current literature suggests



that implementers' initial messages about upcoming organizational change will be accepted by stakeholders to the degree that the message contains (a) a vision of the change with specific enough and relevant enough information, and (b) wherein the perceived advantages of the change are well understood, consistent with the perceived basic cultural assumptions and believed to be greater than the stress of going through the changes (Burke, 2002). Yet, there are few studies that study multiple changes (for exceptions, see Schweiger et al., 1993; Stylianou, Jeffries, & Robbins, 1996), and the few that do fail to explore implementer change messages related to these complicated change situations. Therefore, I argue that the existing body of literature is unsuitable for understanding and explaining multifaceted change. More specifically, it is insufficient in exploring the perceptions stakeholders have for constructed implementation messages about multifaceted change; it also fails to explain how organizations construct and package messages for these change efforts. Hence, this project initially seeks to create a better understanding of multifaceted implementation communication. The initial question for this project and the guiding question of Study 1 is:

*Research Question 1: What identifiable downward communication messages do employees report receiving about forthcoming multiple changes?*

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD AND RESULTS

### STUDY 1

#### Initial Change Message Perceptions are Considerably Different

The central goal of Study 1 was to identify the downward implementation strategies that implementers or organizational leaders shared with their stakeholders during a multifaceted change situation. More specifically, this study sought to understand (a) if change messages that stakeholders receive within one company differ from those disseminated across the organization, (b) the ways that messages differed across stakeholders, and (c) the degree to which the messages reflected a multifaceted change. This chapter begins with a general description of the research site and history of the organization. Next, the interview sample, data collection methods and data analysis process are discussed. Finally, this chapter closes with an examination of the emergent and categorical initial message perceptions reported by stakeholders within one organization.

#### *Research Site and History*

The site for this complex organizational change begins with the merger of two industry giants. Midwest Company (MC) and Eastern Company (EC) are both leading industry corporations. MC is a leading global supplier and manufacturer of bakery ingredients, food ingredients, specialty chemicals, polymer additives, and specialty blending equipment for a number of consumer-based food companies. EC has been a leader in baking technology for over 100 years. They supply cutting edge products and

services to the baking industry around the world. Together these organizations generate annual sales upwards of \$330 million in US dollars. In an effort to maximize control of the market, these two organizations merged on January 2, 2007, forming a new organization now known as Food Company (FC).

Both organizations were midsized companies employing approximately 300 full-time employees each. MC was located in two large midwestern metropolitan areas while EC was located in several smaller cities near New York City. Both legacies included a team of sales representatives dispersed across the United States. MC's corporate office was downtown near the center of the city. EC was located in four physical locations near NYC. Since the merger, Food Inc. has procured a new location in a suburb of Midwest City, where Food Company's corporate offices are now located; this location also includes the Research and Development lab for the organization. The entire executive team for the newly formed organization, including the former EC chief executive officer (CEO) and vice presidents are now corporately located in Lenexa. The former MC downtown corporate office is now vacant, and the EC corporate office has been reduced to a small team of administrative personnel; all other (8 total) production and distribution locations remained unchanged.

The negotiations between the CEOs of the two firms were characterized as friendly and cooperative by those involved and took approximately six months to complete. Both CEOs were committed to implementing the merger with as few adverse affects on their respective organizations as possible. It was decided that the CEO of MC would become the CEO of the combined firm, and the CEO of EC would become its

president and chief operating officer (COO). However, about six months after these decisions were made and about two weeks after the official merge, the CEO of the new organization (the former MC CEO), announced that he would be stepping down to accept a position with another (noncompeting, but industry compliant) company. Although a bit surprising to the organization, this occurrence is not uncommon. According to a survey in the *Wall Street Journal* (1992), “[n]early 50 percent of executives in acquired firms seek other jobs within one year and another 25 percent planned to leave within three years.” At that time, the COO, was named the new CEO. No new person has been named as COO. Other staffing decisions included offering those back office position-holders (Human Resources, Customer Service, Accounting) in the Eastern City corporate office an opportunity to relocate to Midwest City in a comparable position. Eastern City employees who held duplicated positions and were unwilling to relocate were provided with exit packages. This project was initiated after the newly appointed CEO (formerly MC) agreed to the study design. Additionally, EC’s former CEO and director of human resources gave their approval and commitment. Data for both studies was collected from employees in all ten locations who perform a number of duties for the organization.

While data collection did not commence until January 2007, the changes for this project initially began in late spring 2006. Prior to this time, rumors that their organization would be merging with an industry competitor had been circulating for months and, according to some, circulating for years. However, these rumors were never officially confirmed and in several cases were outwardly dismissed. One interview informant recalls:

...about a year ago it [the rumor] got real strong. So much so that at the National Sales meeting, which in 06 was in January..... We wanted to hear it from the big guy. And, so I remembered asking [my co-worker] “well, ask the guy.” He goes, “no, why don’t you ask him?” So finally, I said “ok,” so I asked him. He stood up in a room full of people and said there would be no merger. So I thought that was quite stupid for [this important organizational leader] to say this because he didn’t destroy anybody else’s own personal credibility except his own when he did that because then about 5 months later, the merger was announced. And I think, he probably at the time said that because he wanted to suppress anything. But what he probably should have said is, “look, right now, as far as everyone in this room is concerned, that’s just not open for discussion or debate, what we do we’ll do, and blah blah blah, and we’ll make a decision... I think the answer would have been the same because nobody believed me when he said it, and boy, 6 months later they announced the merger. And everybody thinks, “oh, now [this leader] of [our organization] is a liar...” (Rick, MC)

During the interviews, some of the informants reported that they knew about the merger as well as some of the other changes prior to the company-wide announcements for various reasons; nonetheless, in early May 2006 the merger, and the start of the multifaceted changes, became officially disseminated throughout the organizations in about three days.

*A legacy organization* is the original hiring company for employees who are consolidated from two or more organizations into one larger entity. This means that FC is

comprised of two legacies: those employees originally hired by MC and those employees originally from EC. Considering that in early May 2006, the legacy organizations were two completely different companies with their own cultures, it is not surprising that information about the merger may be disseminated differently. According to the new CEO, decisions about how to handle the announcement were discussed among the consolidating leaders but were handled internally by each legacy organization. It was explained to me that the executive staff was apprised of the merger first. The general decision was that large town hall meetings conducted by the governing CEO at the time would be used for all mid management specialists groups and office-type employees (i.e., the “white” and “pink collar” workers). For hourly or plant employees, information about the merger would be communicated by their shift lead or supervising manager. In respect to the merger, both internal and external formal announcements were prepared.

Subsequent changes, however, were disseminated differently to different groups and were generally based on a need-to-know basis; that is, a determination was made by a person with authority as to if and how particular groups of people needed to know about a change. For example, information about the acquisition was only shared with employees who would be directly affected by the acquisition. However, one informant recalls how he and his department, a department directly impacted by the acquisition, discovered they would be absorbing another company and their product lines. He shares, “... I realized something must be happening because we saw new products on our production list... before it was MC 3 and now you have a product name of ACQ 4412.”

While EC and MC both experienced communication about the merger as separate organizations, the subsequent and often overlapping changes were delivered to a consolidated company (FC). In an effort to keep this project manageable, eight additional changes were identified during the 12-month change timeframe. The other changes were named after the merger, but some occurred prior to the official, public external merger announcement (e.g., relocation/new Corporate Center, new technology). The nine changes under study are identified as follows, including the month and year of their initial widespread announcement or implementation process: Merger, May 2006; new CEO, January 2007; Restructuring, November 2006; Policy and Procedure changes, January 2007; Responsibilities changes, October 2006; Location or Condition changes, June 2006; Technology changes, October 2006; Pay and Bonus changes, May 2007; and the Acquisition, February 2007. The lifespan of each of the changes was different, and additional changes within a change were also noted to occur (e.g., departments were restructured several times, new policies and procedures were continually released over several months even through the close of data collection). The formal and informal organizational communication about changes are critical this study.

#### *Communication Plan and Rollout*

The findings of the Study 1 are discussed later in this chapter. These findings suggest specific interpretative recalls about the change communication. However, the accounts provided by the respondents vary to a great degree. And while it seems the organization's execution of the communication plan appears to be a bit fragmented in that different legacies managing this process differently and different departments used

different methodologies to share information, my conversations and correspondence with the CEO of FI and the former human resources (HR) director seem to suggest that a loose communication plan was initially planned.

Rumors about a possible merger circulated in both organizations for over a year. According to the CEO of EC, the formal announcement was made to his organization on Tuesday, May 2, 2006 (See Appendix A). This information was disseminated electronically, conducted over the phone and also shared face-to-face in a series of town hall meetings. The CEO of MC managed this dissemination with fewer channels but with more communication links. Once finalized, he shared details of the merger with his executive team. They shared this information with their direct reports. Employees (about 300) also received memos electronically or by posting. Managers at MC took it upon themselves, as they saw necessary, to hold small group meetings with their teams or with their laborers. The virtual workers at both MC and EC (i.e., sales) were involved in conference calls to share and discuss this information. The CEO of EC conducted the conference calls for his sales employees. The vice president of sales at MC conducted the conference calls for his sales employees. In addition, employees at both legacies were provided with a FAQ sheet (Frequently Asked Questions) that asked and answered specific questions about the reasons and goals for the merger. It was disseminated to the employees through email, in paychecks, and posted in break rooms for hourly workers. This document highlighted the most general concerns employees have about mergers (e.g., benefits, job security). It also provided the reasons and goals for the merger and detailed many next steps and a general timeline. This document also stated “should any



changes occur which may require modifying transition and completion dates everyone will be given notice” (See Appendix B). In other words, it appeared that the initial communication documents indicated the possibility of future correspondence and follow up. The CEO explained that he believed this method was managed professionally and provided a comprehensive communication approach. However, it should be noted that, while a few of the employees mentioned receiving the memo and/or attending individual or town hall meetings, only one of the 46 respondents referenced receiving the FAQ document.

The formal follow-up communication to this initial round of communication occurred about 90 days after the first announcement. At the end of July 2006, internal and external stakeholders were informed of the official name change, which included names taken from both legacies. At this time, details were provided about the new corporate office located in MC. The respondents at EC saw this as a huge defeat. As explained by Marie, one of the specialists at EC, “only one of us could be ‘top dog’ and when we found out that *they* (her emphasis) were getting the corporate office, we knew it wasn’t going to be us.” She additionally talked about the downsizing that occurred soon after that announcement. She explained how difficult it was to see people who worked in their corporate office leave every month. It was explained by another employee at EC that some of the employees were given the option to move to MC but that the employees did not seriously consider the offer. According to the (HR) director, only one EC employee made the move to MC. Employees were provided basic information about reorganizing. As noted by one of the sales employees at MC, the reorganization that was announced in

July of 2006 changed three times in one year. He also added, "...[b]y the time the reorganization was finalized, it looked strangely similar to the first organizational chart... which was much like we were organized at MC prior to the merge."

The consolidation became official on January 2, 2007. Transitions with technology (i.e., phone number, email addresses) began since October, but in January a new website launched and legacy websites became inactive. During the third week of January, the CEO of MC announced his resignation to the newly formed executive team. He left later that day, and a formal memo was released to all employees noting the resignation and naming of EC's new CEO, the former president of FC.

The acquisition occurred in February of 2006. For legal reasons, management was unable to release any information about this change until it occurred. This change was sent out to the employees via a memo. However, implementation of this change occurred prior to formal notice. The plants began producing new materials before the memo was circulated.

Small changes, both related and unrelated to the merger, were continually communicated and occurring over the next nine months. According to HR, a series of memos were released outlining new changes. For example, employees at MC were given explicit restrictions for office décor and general conduct. Rita, an employee at MC shared her disdain for the rule about "no real plants in offices" as well as having to "use library voices" in hallways of the corporate center. Laborers also talked about the new attendance and tardy point system. In each of these cases, employee information was shared via formal communication channels, but employees would also informally discuss

these changes occasionally with direct supervisors and almost always with coworkers. Changes related to the merger continue today. Communication about these changes continues to occur using systematic memo and random informal channels. A timeline of these changes is located in Appendix C.

## Method

### *Sample*

On March 5, 2006, two weeks prior to interview selections, all employees were provided a memo (under the name of the CEO) about the project and possibility of being contacted by the researcher to participate in a series of confidential interviews (See Appendix D). As explained in the memo, interviews would take place onsite and occur during regular business hours (or assigned shifts).

The goal of assembling interview informants for Study 1 was to invite employees from a variety of different organizational segments to represent perspectives from both legacies and various organizational demographics. Therefore, the sample selection was conducted by using a stratified sampling process. To achieve this, the HR director provided me with a copy of the employee database. Employees were selected via a three-step sorting method. First, employees were sorted by legacy. After two groups were formed, employees were secondarily sorted by organizational area (job type and job position/title). Once groups of employees were created according to area in the company (e.g., production, sales, customer service), a convenience sample was drawn from narrow area groups to include members with varying status (e.g., customer service manager, production-blender), tenure, sex and ethnicity. To prevent any bias in selecting particular

participants, the HR director refrained from any commentary or suggestions with the researcher's choices. She did, however, comment that I had chosen some "interesting characters" and would likely get a large range of information about the communication.

A total of 45 employees were initially selected and invited to participate the Friday prior to the interview schedule. The HR director sent an email recruitment invitation to selected members and reattached the March 5 memo as a point of reference. Employees were reminded that their participation would assist a dissertation project, the decision to do so was completely voluntary, and any and all information shared would be held confidential. Employees with company emails directly received the invitation to participate. Employees without access to email were sent an invitation via their supervising manager. Of the 45, one invitee declined interest in being interviewed, two employees never responded to the invitation, and one employee did not understand English well enough to be interviewed. However, an additional three employees, hearing about interviews were asked to be added to the interview list; thus, there was a total of 46 individual interviews informants. When possible, the interviews were conducted onsite. As a result, most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in private employee conference rooms ( $N = 35$ ), but several interviews were also conducted via telephone ( $N = 11$ ) due to travel (e.g., sales representatives) or conflicting schedules (e.g., management meetings).

A sample of employees ( $N = 46$ ) representing both the Eastern legacy (EC) and the Midwestern legacy (MC) participated in Study 1. Informants worked in a variety of positions for their organization including management ( $n = 3$ ), supervision/lead ( $n = 5$ ),

sales and marketing ( $n = 7$ ), technical/specialist positions ( $n = 7$ ), administrative or customer service ( $n = 8$ ), as well as production worker or laborer ( $n = 16$ ). Similar to the proportion of men to women in the actual population there were more men ( $n = 33$ ) than women ( $n = 13$ ) in the sample. The age of the employees participating in this study ranges from 25 to 66 years ( $M = 39.7$ ,  $SD = 9.74$ ), job tenure ranged from less than a year to 37 years ( $M = 7.0$ ,  $SD = 6.33$ ), and all were full-time employees. All but one had an original legacy (“*EC*” = 20; “*MC*” = 25) as he was hired after the merge. Approximately, 70% reported their ethnicity as White/Caucasian, 15% as Black/African American, 11% as Hispanic, 2% as Asian, and 2% fell into an ethnicity not provided in the survey options.

#### *Data Collection Procedure and Interview Guide*

In the email from the HR director, informants were asked to participate on a particular day. Informants agreed to participate by emailing the HR director with one or two preferred times. Interviews were scheduled in 1-hour increments and occurred most commonly in a private company conference space. If informants did not respond, they were not contacted again. For interviews conducted by phone, informant location ranged from transit space between the airport and their vehicle, their home, or their office. Interviews ranged in length from eleven minutes to one hour and twenty-five minutes but averaged about 40 minutes in length.

Each interview began with a brief explanation of the dissertation project as well as the overview of the interview process. Each informant was provided with a consent form (See Appendix E) and was informed that the goal of this project was to understand

how change is communicated to employees in an organizational setting. Informants were then told the interview would be audiotaped and later transcribed in order to locate general reoccurring themes across all employee interviews. In two cases, informants refused to participate with an audiotape record. Researcher interview notes documented these interviews.

A semi structured interview guide was used in an effort to gain consistency across interviews and enable conversational flexibility. Key questions on the guide included asking participants to discuss how they found out about the merger and their initial impression of this decision. I also asked informants to talk about the benefits and disadvantages of combining with another organization. In addition, informants were prompted to discuss what kinds of changes happened after the merger and what kind of information they were provided with about those events. A final key question included soliciting information from informants concerning how communication about change could be improved. The use of the interview guide was intended to foster not limit discussion topics in the interview. Informants were also encouraged to bring up any other issues they felt were important or relevant to the conversation.

#### *Analysis of Interview Data*

A system of ongoing, independent *open coding* (see Browning, 1978; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) was performed throughout the interview process and at the completion of interview transcription. At different points in the early interview process, salient general themes emerged. As recommended by Browning (1978), coding themes were initially determined by identifying overarching dimensions suggested by the

response content. From there, descriptive labels or categories of change communication types were preliminarily assigned. After about 14 interviews, I reviewed the informant responses several times and wrote several analytic memos to help identify initial categories and make sense of my early findings. These categories, or emergent themes, were also used to check the strength and relevance of the interview guide. About midway through the interview process, the interview guide was slightly modified according to shifts in the data themes from this initial analysis.

Once all the interviews concluded and transcription was completed, a more formal process of open coding was performed. Similar to the earlier process, but with more vigilant attention, I read through each transcript several times and coded all the interview responses to capture more general theme(s) about initial change communication. Once again, through the use of analytic memos repetition, forcefulness and reoccurrence of responses were applied to identify strong themes. This process revealed very broad communication categories like *merger communication only* or *rumor communication*. At this point in the process themes were too general and did not respond very clearly to the research question.

Once open coding processes were completed, I engaged in the process of analytical induction (Bulmer, 1979; Huberman & Miles, 1994) to reduce the general data into more precise and salient themes related to the specific research question. . This reduction process continued until any and all relevant data was accounted for. The result of this stage produced five subcategories discussed in Table 1. These categories emerged as the result of coding 433 lines of data taken from 46 interviews. Because only a small

portion of the entire interviews was used to respond to Study 1's research question, a large portion of the interview transcriptions were not used or coded.

I performed two procedures to check and strengthen the validity of my results. The first was a review and analysis comparing actual change messages to the informant perceptions of communication messages. These documents included the formal internal memo announcing the merger and the FAQ sheet sent along with the memo.

The second procedure applied to ensure analytic rigor involved the use of member checks (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This is a test of content agreement of the study findings with organizational member experiences. In other words, a member check is used to see if the results of the data analysis are, at face value, consistent with employee perceptions of the situation. Three member checks were performed. The first member check was with the HR director. She was hired just prior to the changes examined in this project; thus, she was freshly present for all communication. Also, as the person mainly responsible for sending correspondence, she was aware of what correspondence was being sent to internal stakeholders, familiar with the communication messages and served as a good contact to discuss analysis results. My second member check was with my main informant, a sales representative that has been with MC legacy for almost eight years and was very familiar with the standard operating procedures of MC. My final member check was the new CEO. He was originally the CEO of EC and personally executed four town hall meeting for the employees at EC.

It is important to note that both document comparison and member validation (or invalidation) do not necessarily privilege the opinions of the informants above the



researcher's insights from data analysis. As a result, the checks were used to ensure fidelity. In some cases the documents were supportive and in many cases the member checks were consistent; therefore, no changes were made to the analysis.

### Study 1: Results and Interpretations

*Research Question 1: What identifiable downward communication messages do employees report receiving about forthcoming multiple changes?*

The purpose of study one was to understand what communication messages about impending organizational changes the members were told. Given the fact that organizational information often differs among rank and, perhaps, department or location, in terms of its content (e.g., an executive vice president is likely to be given information about a possible acquisition, but sales representative may never be told) or quantity (e.g., a plant supervisor may be told that a new line of products will be produced soon and how that process will be implemented, but the mixer may only receive a new recipe for a new product one night at work), data was gathered from key informants in a variety of ranks and roles. A list of the interview participants and their status for this study is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

#### Interview Key Informants by Selected Demographics

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Midwest Company (MC)	151
Eastern Company (EC)	93
Highest Status	49
Moderate Status	94
Low Status	25
Limited or No Status	63

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Four main categories emerged to represent the different types of message(s) recalled by employees regarding the forthcoming changes. Because of the interview selection process, random, a fifth category that emerged. For the most part, this category included employees hired after the main series of changes began and as result were viewed as a non-salient perspective for initial change communication. The results of the first part of Study 1 indicate that employees report receiving communication about change as uni-change, multidimensional change, multiple change, and multifaceted change. These emergent message types are described in greater detail by using direct excerpts from selected interview accounts. In addition, definitions of and variations in each message and employee reactions to this message are discussed (Research Question 1, part b). Message types, interview frequency counts (i.e. occurrence for each type of message), definitions of the message type, and an exemplar of the message appear in Table 2. Also included in this table is a category that accounts for the types of information respondents provided that was unrelated to relevant initial change messages. In these instances, a respondent did not discuss an initial message related to the salient and emergent theme captured in the first four types. This information in this fifth type of change message is provided for the reader to account for responses in the interviews that were unrelated to the change(s) under study.

Table 2

## Typology of Change Messages associated with Multiple Organizational Change

	Message Type	Occurrence	Definition	Example
Change Message #1	“Uni-Change”	19	Initial messages about change only discussed one change, but did not bring mention to any other changes. In this case, the organization discussed the merger with the employees, but no other changes were discussed.	“I was told that we would be merging with Midwest company.” (Brenda, EC)
Change Message #2	“Multidimensional Change”	12	Initial messages about change were presented as one change, but contained smaller related changes. In this case, the organization discussed the merger and the small change effects that would result from the merger.	“I was told the merger will also mean restructuring direct reports, possible new job assignments and likely new policies.” (Cindy, MC)
Change Message #3	“Multiple Change”	4	Initial messages about change were presented as a series of several different changes. In this case, the organization discussed the merger as well as several other significant changes that would also be forthcoming subsequent to the merger.	“In addition to the merger, I was also informed that we would be getting new home office, we will also be naming a new CEO, and likely ready to acquire.” (Rob, MC)

Change Message #4	“Multifaceted Change”	7	Initial messages about change were presented as several larger changes containing smaller related changes. In this case, the organization not only discussed the merger and the small effects that would result from the merger, but also introduced the subsequent changes to the merger and the details of those changes.	“The merger will have a lot of related changes like restructuring and new procedures. In addition to the merge, we will building a new corporate center that will have new rules and policies...” (Aaron, EC)
Change Message #5	“Unrelated”	3	No initial messages about change were discussed. In most cases, respondents were hired after the initial change was introduced. In this case, the information provided was vast and did not relate to any of the other prominent categories.	“I really don’t know what they told employees. By the time I started they had already merged. All I know is that things seem out of control...” (John, MC)

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*Uni-Change*

The most common occurring message that employees reported receiving about the forthcoming change(s) was identified as the uni-change message. This type of message involved being told about only one of the forthcoming changes. In these cases, employees shared accounts of being told that a change was coming or that they were in store for one big change. In all of these cases, employees were told they were going to merge; for

example, EC employees were told they were merging with MC or vice versa. In most cases, employees suggested a lack of disclosure about anything but this one change, and they purported that no information was provided concerning whether and how this change might create additional, subsequent changes. For example, the following passage was taken from Claire, an administrator at MC. The following excerpt details her initial communication experience:

[I]t was May 2<sup>nd</sup>, ... yeah, May 2<sup>nd</sup>. And I think how I absolutely found out, that yes, this is going to happen, was in a meeting. Yeah... Jimmy called us all down to the Annex Conference Room and told us. He explained that we would be merging with Eastern Company. He told us when it would be happening for sure and a bit about what would be happening, but that was all he knew. That's all that was said. It took about 10 minutes ...then, you know of the acquisition of the ADM stuff. I think *that* took a lot of people by shock. I mean it was just a little bit of surprise there and it happened right after the formal merger. And I think people were very inundated with the merger stuff. So it was a little bit of a shock when you add acquisition on top of that...I think it was a memo that came through email from [the President]. (Claire, MC)

Employees shared the method and manner by which the change was shared with them. Even when the information was shared collectively in a town-hall meeting style, information about the changes was still limited to just the merger. This is apparent in the following excerpt taking from Marco, a production worker at EC. He explains that

change was presented quite positively and that management provided very little or no information about the potential fallout for members of the organization:

[T]hey make a meeting, the company (sic). They talking about, everything company merging. I go to the meeting, my supervisor told me to, you know, the committee told me the company become more strong now...because merger is big company...and then supervisor said “this is what it means...it is going to be better for us”...we say “great”! (Marco, EC)

Nevertheless, there was fallout from the change. Other employees discussed not only how they received very little and untimely information about change, but they also mentioned that the change was not presented realistically. In this excerpt, Brian, one of the laborers at MC recounts, “We found out right before it happened. They told us that we would be merging with this other company but that it wouldn’t affect us... business as usual they said. But we did see changes to our jobs, mostly more products... we don’t have the space for it, and that has really affected my job. It would have been nice to know that the merge meant more than business as usual.”

One might assume that a higher status might privilege more information. However, in an interview with Jack, one of the persons in management at MC, he explains that, “[the CEO] was not the kind of person who gave that kind of information out, so basically I found out we were going to merge from people who were more involved in it. But that’s about all I knew at the time.”

These accounts are just a few representations of the most dominant initial message that employees reported receiving about the upcoming changes. In their

discussions of the initial communication, they talk about the organization presenting the changes as singular change; also, this change was framed as one that does not seem to have any additional implications or changes.

### *Multidimensional Change*

The second type of initial change communication messages employees reported receiving involved information about one major change as well as the residuals that would accompany this change. This change can best be described by understanding that one large change would produce subsequent changes. They suggest that the residual effects were a very natural part of this first change. The following passage is indicative of a multidimensional change communication type of message taken from an interview with a specialist at EC:

[W]e came to work and found this email with the exclamation point saying there is a meeting this morning for the entire company... that's when they told us... we were merging...and that this would also mean some minor changes related to becoming a new company... it's funny because later that day, there was a change immediately. We no longer answer to Robert. We were no longer under his supervision. We now fell into operations, so now we answer to Ronnie, which was an immediate change... yeah, it happened immediately... (Marie, EC)

Similarly, Henry, a warehouse worker at MC shared his memory of the initial change rollout and discusses in his narrative how the change was not a simple change, that the merger would have a degree of additional fallout. He recalls, "Well they had an organized meeting with everybody and kind of broke everything down and told

everybody what was going on. Our big boss explained that they would be changing the company name, and would have to change packaging uniforms and even changed our building boards.” In this instance, the initial message shared with this worker depicts the change as a layered change with several parts. Simon, another laborer at a different physical location within the same legacy recalls the meeting with his supervisor and the way he initially heard about the changes. Simon’s story is quite similar to Henry’s experience:

[I know we merged] because our name changed. ...[I found out by] word of mouth. My supervisor walked around and told us. We were told us we bought a new company. Then they said we gonna take the new company’s name. (Simon, MC)

Like his laboring counterpart, he realized from the individual meetings with his supervisor that this change would bring about some additional minor effects. But this type of message was not just limited to laborers. This message theme was also the second most dominant theme among the interview participants. Rebecca, one of the administrative employees at EC recounted the email message she received about the merger. She explained that she thought the details and the process of the merger were fairly detailed. However, when I asked if she knew about any additional changes besides the merger, she said, “...had no idea that anything else was in store for us.” As noted earlier in the actual communication rollout, employees with email access were provided a FAQ sheet. Although Rebecca did not reference this specific correspondence, this may have been part of the detail that she was referencing.



In each of the accounts, employees recalled receiving an initial message about change that detailed small effects of the merger and, to some degree, fallout of the merger, but the message did not allude to any additional larger changes. In fact, it would be fair to say that these employees thought that any forthcoming changes would be specifically related to the merger as it was detailed to them in town hall meetings, personal conversations and formal organizational messages.

### *Multiple Change*

Identified and known as the multiple change message, this initial message was the least occurring theme of the four. In this theme, employees discussed the initial message as a series of changes that may have been, but did not specifically seem to be related to the merger. The important element to this theme is that employee accounts were about multiple big changes rather than details about one change (or details about multiple changes). For example, Patty, an employee at EC, discussed what her location had heard. She explains that she did not receive this information from a formal communication channel but, rather, from her informal networks:

[I] believe some of the employees were called out to the parking lot for a large town hall meeting. It was pretty common to have those. I wasn't at it... from what I had heard, the downsizing was going to be followed by a merger, and then we were going to move all of our processes to the other company and that our company was no longer going to be producing the same kinds of things we used to... I think I even heard that we were going to get a new plant. (Patty, EC)

Patty further explained that once the downsizing hit, it was one change after another. Lisa, part of the MC legacy, similarly discussed the communication about changes as serial and large in scope. She said that her direct supervisor told her they were in for some major changes. Lisa explains,

[I] think the first change was going to be a location change... we would be moving [across town] into a new building, new technology would soon follow, and once we merged, we were going get a new lab. Funny thing is, that the change I resisted the most was the adoption of new policies and procedures. The won't let me have real plants in my office and I have to whisper in what they call a 'library voice.' (Lisa, MC)

Lisa's rendition of the communication she received, while informal, indicates that she was aware of several big changes consistent with the multiple changes theme.

Bonnie, a sales representative from the MC legacy, shared a bit of her frustration with the amount of change that has occurred in such a short span of time. Exasperated, she declared that "...[w]hoever planned a merger and acquisition, a relocation, and in my group, a reorganization – whoever planned to do all that within a 4 month period must have been smoking something!" This account of change information suggests that the communication about the changes was more about large types of changes. While this message theme was the most infrequent, it did emerge with enough salience to suggest that others in the organization may have experienced this type of communication; therefore, it was included in the findings for Study 1.

### *Multifaceted Change*

The fourth and final theme is referred to as the multifaceted change message. Multifaceted change, as defined earlier, is about providing information containing discussions of change as multiple changes with multiple parts. In a few instances, informants provided accounts wherein they reported receiving information about more than one change and they also talked about how those changes might create some additional smaller, but related changes. Instances of this theme surfaced more than the multiple change messages but were not as forceful as the other two message themes.

Bill, an EC manager, explained that he received information about the changes in a couple of different ways; in each case, he said, detailed information was provided (or discussed) about the forthcoming changes. Bill explained:

[T]here was like an email and it talked about the merger and what might result when the merger was formally implemented... and then I think something came out in our paycheck. And you know, they [the organization] just covered all the bases. Not only did they discuss the details of the merger, but I know they mentioned that we were in store for some other changes... a new inventory program,... and the folks in MC were getting a new building that would become our new corporate offices. Well, I might have heard about the new building in a meeting.... I felt pretty informed and fairly prepared.

In this instance, Bill described a multifaceted communication. However, it appears that his account is more the result of a patchwork of communication rather than one comprehensive message provided by the organization.

Unlike the previous example, though, other employees suggested receiving a more comprehensive initial message rather than an assemblance of messages. For example, Pete, a sales employee, explains that a package of changes was initially rolled out to them in a meeting. However, most of the employees, especially the ones most likely to get laid off, did not really think it was going to happen because rumors of a potential M/A had circled for some time. However, he recalls that leadership said very plainly, “[w]e are in store for some big and painful changes.” He then said to me, “[i]t couldn’t get any clearer than that.” In addition, Adam, a production employee at MC explained, “[I]t was as detailed as it needed to be, . . . I can’t complain.”

While the density of initial multifaceted change accounts were fairly infrequent, there were enough to assume that others in the organization may be receiving these types of messages and be influenced by them.

#### *Unrelated*

Although infrequent, there was also a small category of miscellaneous responses that emerged from the data. Information extracted from these three interviews was unable to be categorized into the change message frame that emerged from the larger set of interview respondents. Given that respondents were selected from an employee database that minimally listed tenure as one year for every employee, two of the 46 respondents were not members of the organization at the time of the merger announcement. In these cases, these respondents simply reflected on what has been socially shared about the initial message or what they were experiencing as a result of the changes. For example,

John, a third shift employee at MC, discussed how he was hired about a month after the actual merger and just after the acquisition. He shares:

[I] really don't know what they told the employees. I wasn't here. By the time I started, everyone already knew about the merger. I was hired as a FC employee. All I know is that things seemed out of control. I was hired in February and I haven't had a day off in thirteen days. I took this job so I could see my family more, and all I seem to do is work because we are shorthanded and the acquisition has really increased the workload. (John, MC)

John is no longer with the organization. Information provided six months later indicated that John had quit. In another case, Lydia, a support person at MC, explains that she was hired after the merger to assist with the growing department. Her interview suggested that she was provided with the information that she needed to perform her job. Her only complaint about the change communication was that there did not appear to be a clear or comfortable channel for expressing discontent with larger organizational issues. She said she discussed these with her direct supervisor, and he provided for her needs as he was able; nonetheless, she also commented that she was unsure how employees at FC were seen as anything except "microcosms of small units within a larger company" rather than a large interdependent group. She also said, "You know, employees often see things that management doesn't see or understand. We do the work... I guess it would be nice to think they might consider what we think. I really like my manager, but I am pretty sure that any thing I say stops there."

The third instance accounted for in this category was so disconnected from the interview guide that it was difficult to conduct the interview. This respondent was most interested in understanding what role I might be able to take in helping him with personal favors. Material offered about change was incomplete or arbitrary.

### Summary of Findings

The research question for Study 1 was specifically interested in revealing what the stakeholder perceptions were of the content in the initial downward communication about the changes. Members across the organization recalled receiving a wide degree of communication messages. Further analysis of these messages revealed that the content of messages differed in one of two ways; more specifically, change message perceptions potentially but did not always contain two specific content features: *depth* and *breadth*. Messages with depth are change messages containing details about a larger change. For example, if an implementer was discussing the merger, information in the message may contain specific details about how the merger may affect job security, employee benefits, or even particular job responsibility changes. If all three of these details were explained along with the larger change, this message may be assumed to have depth. However, if the message about the merger did not contain much more than “we will be merging and this merger will likely not affect you much, in fact it will be pretty much business as usual...”, this message would be assumed to have little or no depth; this principle holds true even if the message also contained positively valenced messages like “... and this will actually make us a stronger company...”. In other words, change message depth is suggested to have layered detail about a change under discussion. On the other hand,

messages with breadth are change messages that discuss more than one change that will be occurring. For example, the implementer may introduce the merger as well as announce that there will also be a series of additional changes to occur after or alongside the merger; additional changes may include major restructuring, adoption of a new technology, and plans to erect a new corporate headquarters site. If several changes are discussed in the context of the first change, this message might be assumed to have breadth. However, if the message only contained information, however peripheral it might be, related to the merger (e.g., “The merger has forced us to have to let some wonderful folks go...”), then this message would not be characteristic of a broad message, or a message with breadth. It is important to note that including discussions about downsizing that results from the merger would be a message with some depth. Breadth and depth could also be labeled as high or low. Therefore, stakeholders could potentially recall receiving four kinds of messages: low breadth-low depth (uni-change message), low breadth-high depth (multidimensional messages), high breadth-low depth (multiple message) or high breadth-high depth (multifaceted message). Perhaps a more concise way to conceptualize the differences between the change messages types is to understand how simple or how comprehensive the message is regarding the total scope of changes. Taken together, multifaceted change messages are the most comprehensive. They contain information about the total number of changes (i.e. breadth) as well as information regarding subsequent fallout of each change (i.e. depth). Conversely, uni change messages are considered simple and the least comprehensive message encompassing the organizational change situation.

## Conclusions

When the actual communication as explained by the management is contrasted with various respondent reactions, these data demonstrate that, despite the top down initiative to deliver a universal message across stakeholders at two merging organizations, initial change messages may not only be delivered but also interpreted differently throughout the organization. Aside from the theoretical contributions to implementation communication research (discussed in Chapter 6), the practical implications present some interesting and unique challenges to managers undertaking large scale or complex change situations.

First of all, it may not be necessary to deliver the same message to everyone. Conrad (1995) argues that change messages need to be tailored. And despite management's best efforts to create a continuity of message, stakeholders are either receiving messages differently from their source or may simply just be reconstructing it differently over time. In addition, there appears to be a discontinuity of information about change once the initial message (inoculation) is delivered. Therefore, messages of change need to be considered as a continuous process of information exchange and follow up. Too often, communication about change is considered complete once the change commences. However, in many cases, changes themselves, once implemented, evolve over time as they adapt to both internal and external conditions. Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) discuss the use of traditional change preview as the most common practice for introducing change to stakeholders. They contend that management has come to the conclusion that over communicating increases anxiety associated with change. Therefore,



the typical practice is to create a comprehensive and limited formal communication message that is delivered at the latest acceptable moment and utilizing a channel that would make it difficult for members to inquire comfortably about details (e.g., memo or large meeting). Considering that changes are evolving over time and reconstructions over time are increasingly disparate, there appears to be a real need to have change messages that adapt over time and consider follow-up as an integral part of the rollout.

Notably, these findings become the basis for understanding what messages larger organizational stakeholders recall hearing from implementers and how these initial communication messages might lead to differences in how stakeholders perceive and respond the changes and their organization.

## CHAPTER 4: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### STUDY 2

#### Are Multifaceted Communication Messages the Superior Alternative During Periods of Complex Change?

The previous chapter described the method and results of Study 1. The findings indicated that members within the organization received different types of initial messages about change in the organization and suggested that these messages varied in terms of the number of changes communicated and the details about each change. Four types of initial messages emerged during multiple change: (1) multifaceted change messages, (2) multiple change messages, (3) multidimensional change messages, and (4) uni-change (or single change) messages. Considering that organizational change more often creates a situation of multiple changes (e.g., Lewis & Seibold, 1998; Schweiger et al., 1993; Stylianou et al., 1996) and that organizational change is not well understood, we should study it from this perspective. Moreover, failing to do so can have important consequences at all levels of the organization (Beer & Walton, 1987). The effort to understand the process and communication of multiple changes will also illustrate why the complexity of change in this context must be accounted for from the outset of implementation efforts. In lieu of these overarching purposes, multifaceted messages, or initial change messages that contain comprehensive information about the multiple changes in the organization, were of particular interest in Study 2. This study reports the effect of receiving multifaceted messages, as compared to the three other message types,

on stakeholders' (i.e., employees') subjective experiences with the multiple changes. In other words, the purpose of this study was to present a view of how initial message perceptions about multifaceted change alter the experience of change for its stakeholders.

This chapter is organized into several sections in an effort to catalogue the relevant literature for the current investigation. To begin, the extant literature surrounding stakeholder reactions to organizational change is discussed. Following this, research on message quality, emotional reactions, coping efficacy, deceptive messages, organizational trust, and organizational competency in the context of organizational change is reviewed. Using the findings of Study 1, specific hypotheses are posited in relation to each of these organizational and individual outcomes.

### Reactions to Organizational Change

Researchers argue that communication is a critical component of the organizational change process; it is the mechanism by which change is launched, directed, and ultimately achieved. The importance of employee reactions to change in affecting successful change implementation is frequently noted in the existing literature (e.g., Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992; Piderit, 2000; Porras & Silvers, 1991). There are a number of factors discussed in relation to implementation messages delivered by management that have important consequences for organizations as well as the individuals that comprise them. For example, stakeholder uncertainty, which is defined as “[a]n individual’s inability to predict something accurately” (Milliken, 1987, p. 136), is a psychological state commonly reported by individuals experiencing change within their organization. It is a frequently studied outcome of change due to its associations with

stress (Ashford & Black, 1996; Miller, Joseph, & Apker, 2000; Pollard, 2001; Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991), satisfaction (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; Nelson, Cooper, & Jackson, 1995), commitment (Ashford et al., 1989; Hui & Lee, 2000), trust (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991; Stahl & Sitkin, 2001), and intent to remain (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991). Employees possessing high degrees of uncertainty would likely be more resistant to participation in change efforts, and they may respond with verbal opposition or avoidance such as silent resistance or refusals to participate (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). On the other hand, employees may not experience high degrees of uncertainty. The reduction of uncertainty has been linked to information sharing and seeking (Harter & Krone, 2001; Miller & Monge, 1985). When employees are provided with or request salient information about change, the ambiguity of the situation reduces and, therefore, uncertainty is controlled. For example, after a major change is announced (e.g., the closing of a production facility), management may distribute a bulletin outlining the timeline and restructuring details. The exchange of additional information may also occur more informally such as an employee asking his/her supervisor how implementing a particular technology will impact his/her deliverables process. Further, Miller and Monge (1985) argue that as the quality and regularity of employee information increases, their attitudes about change shift. During times when organizations undergo continuous or multiple changes, the implementation messages become even more critical for successful change attempts; that is, in these situations uncertainty would presumably be an even greater risk and more information sharing may be more difficult to handle. Assuming that (a) uncertainty is a common stakeholder response capable of producing numerous

unfavorable reactions and (b) increasing the amount of useful information about change mitigates uncertainty, enhances receptiveness and participation in change efforts, it is important to understand what makes destructive or constructive reactions to implementation efforts more likely. That is, what are the mechanisms that influence the overall effectiveness of multiple changes in organizations?

Few would dispute that the ultimate goal for implementers is overall change effectiveness. Unfortunately, management and stakeholders may have different perceptions of whether a change was effective. For example, implementers may consider change implementation effective if it is met with little resistance (Dent & Goldberg, 1999) or if commitment levels are high (e.g., Bennebroek Gravenhorst, Werkman & Boonstra, 2003; Chawla & Kelloway, 2004). Stakeholders, on the other hand, who oftentimes are the recipients of most change efforts, may consider an implementation effective if they simply like the change (Lawrence, 1958; Miller et al., 1994). It may also be considered effective if it has the ability to improve work life, employees were invited to participate in the process (Beer & Walton, 1987; Bennebroek Gravenhorst & In 't, 2004; Miller & Monge, 1985; Weick & Quinn, 1999), or members' needs for information during the organizational change was satisfied (Colvin & Kilman, 1990). Therefore, determining whether change is effective is seemingly a subjective and relative measure. *Change effectiveness*, in general, is the degree to which change is perceived to have met intended and unintended goals for all stakeholders — management and employees alike. Both Miller and Monge (1985) and Miller et al. (1994) theorize that perceived adequacy of information increases stakeholder willingness to participate in change. If messages

about change influence stakeholders' willingness to participate in and be open to change, it is plausible that the quality of change message information is an *antecedent* to desirable change process outcomes.

As previously noted, theoretical and empirical perspectives on change effectiveness have been documented in the literature, especially pertaining to a single implementation effort. While researchers suggest that change is neither a one-dimensional construct nor an isolated event (e.g., Lewis & Seibold, 1998; Schweiger et al., 1993; Stylianou et al., 1996), this notion has not been tested empirically. The current study addressed this concern and attempted to capture stakeholder perceptions of multifaceted change by providing a preliminary explanation of how to introduce change and the significance of these communication choices to multiple change implementations. If change is a multidimensional construct, effectiveness may be determined through other, more specific outcomes of change. It is useful to parcel these areas out to isolate the specific effects of multifaceted implementation messages on change in organizations.

One possible factor associated with multifaceted change messages is *change satisfaction*, which refers to a pleasurable or positive emotional state from the appraisal of one's experience with implementation efforts. Since a lack of communication during change efforts is related to job dissatisfaction (Schweiger & DiNisi, 1991), it is possible that the quality of the communication is linked to change satisfaction. Multifaceted change messages are proposed to contain information about changes that is more comprehensive and explanatory concerning anticipated and unexpected consequences of change. Therefore, a multifaceted message could mean carefully addressing the types and

number of changes as well as the details associated with changes in the initial communication about the change(s). . While no formal predictions will be made about change satisfaction, the following research question was posed:

*Research Question 2: What is the relationship between change satisfaction and multifaceted messages about multiple changes in the organization?*

### *Quality of a Change Message*

While management literature suggests well-designed implementation efforts are the main reason for success (e.g., Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Kanter, 1983), Miller and Monge (1985) argue that well-constructed and well-delivered implementation messages are the precursors to support for and success of change efforts. In particular, Miller and Monge's work suggests that the perceived adequacy of information from organizational sources announcing the change significantly influences how employees judge the helpfulness of the information and how they react to the change itself. More specifically, *quality of information* is the extent to which employees feel that official information is "useful," or "timely," or "adequately answers questions about the change" (Miller & Monge, 1985, p. 385). If the quality of information is higher, employees tend to perceive the information to be more helpful overall. In addition, poor information quality is directly related to uncertainty, the most common and destructive reaction to organizational change. Thus, increasing information quality would likely decrease uncertainty for members who experience sustaining changes (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

Quality of information, referred to as *communication quality about change* in the present research, is comprised of two dimensions of change communication. The first is

communication adequacy (Miller et al., 1994). This dimension reflects the extent to which employees perceive the information received to be adequate for their needs. For example, perceptions of the amount (e.g., “I received enough information”) or usefulness (e.g., “I understand what will result from the change or what the change entails”) of information provided in the message contribute to communication adequacy. Miller et al. (1994) argue that appropriate and timely information fosters the openness to change necessary for successful change efforts.

The second dimension of communication quality about change is communication expectancy. This dimension of quality is concerned with employees receiving the information they anticipated (e.g., “I received what I thought I needed to know”) or felt entitled to know. Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) holds that people and groups consciously make judgments based upon their perceptions, attitudes, values, and beliefs; it also posits that their willingness to change is dependent on their perceived value in the outcome of the change (Lines, 2004). Therefore, it is not surprising that organizational members rate messages with high expectation fidelity more favorably than those requiring significant cognitive adjustment.

Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) conducted an experiment involving an expansion on the traditional Realistic Job Preview (RJP). The RJP is a unique part of the socialization into work process. More specifically, the RJP is a recruitment procedure in which organizations provide both favorable and unfavorable job information to their job candidates (Meglino, Ravlin, & DeNisi, 2000; Rynes, 1991; Wanous, 1992). Realistic portrayals of work life are theorized to enable applicants to better evaluate their potential



“fit” with the position/organization (Ilgen & Seely, 1974), lower pre-entry work expectations (Porter & Steers, 1973), and increase their ability to cope with new work environments (Breaugh, 1983). Because information included in an RJP facilitates more effective organizational transitions, *realistic change previews* are likely to produce similar results. Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) suggested that successful change involves providing current employees with positive and negative information about the change prior to its implementation. The goal, here, is to provide employees with information about change to prepare them for the adjustment process and, thereby, increase the likelihood of successful implementation. Specifically, Schweiger and DeNisi provided an experimental group of employees with a realistic preview (both positive and negative effects) of the change and provided a basic announcement of the change to the control group. They discovered that employees receiving the realistic change previews reported higher levels of information quality which, in turn, affected a number of other organizational outcomes (e.g., lower stress, higher satisfaction with the change, higher support, etc.). Thus, it follows that multifaceted change requires even better quality of information regarding change(s) and that previewing change realistically serves to achieve desired outcomes

This review illustrates that stakeholders who perceive the information they receive about change as high quality at the beginning of an intervention experience reduced uncertainty and increased willingness to participate in the change process. Given that Miller and Monge (1985) also argue for accumulation information regarding change information, it is quite possible that despite concern for information overload about

change (e.g., Smeltzer & Zener, 1994), multiple change situations require specific amounts and types of information in order to be most effective in terms of quality assessments by receivers. Beer and Walton (1987) contend that change communication is often flat and devoid of depth. Because stakeholders tend to be more inclined to participate in a change when the information is perceived to be of good quality, it is logical to assume that change messages, which contain detailed, comprehensive information (i.e., multifaceted implementation messages) will be perceived to be higher in quality than other, less informative messages. In light of this, the following hypothesis was posited:

*Hypothesis 1: Employees indicating the initial message received about change was multifaceted will report that the communication about change is of higher quality than those who report receiving uni-change, multi-dimensional change, and multiple change messages.*

#### *Emotional Responses to Change and Change Messages*

In addition to providing high quality messages about change as a goal of implementation communication, stakeholders' affinity for a particular intervention might also contribute to successful implementation efforts. The liking of change, or its favorability measure, has been found to be associated with the level of cooperation or openness one feels toward the change (Miller et al., 1994). Lewis and Siebold (1996) examined the construct of *change liking* in relation to stakeholder enactment of coping strategies. They suggest that liking accounted for a significant portion of the variance in aiding stakeholder coping strategies. While it appears to have an influence on change

processes, it is overlooked in the literature as an outcome of change; nonetheless, it is clearly a critical element to organizational change processes. Likewise, given the systematic nature of change (Beer & Walton, 1987) additional changes often accompany initial changes (e.g., Stylianou et al., 1996) and having employees like all, or at least some of the changes may be of even greater importance.

Miller et al. (1994) reported a direct association between information quality and positive emotional responses to change. More specifically, initial messages perceived by employees as timely, informative, and useful positively influenced their attitudes about change and created a generally favorable disposition toward the change. Essentially, stakeholders who perceived that they had been given good information about the change rated the change as more favorable.

Although willingness or openness to change has been a construct of interest for change scholarship (e.g., Miller et al., 1994), change affinity as an emotional response to change has not been directly explored or empirically tested in the literature. In addition to the relationship between message quality and openness to change, research also suggests that information perceived to be credible by organizational stakeholders not only increases trust in top management but also mitigates the traumatic effects of change on employee wellbeing (Schweiger & DiNisi, 1991). Employees with an increased sense of security resulting from credible information are potentially likely to feel more favorably about change than those who are uncertain because of the lack of credible information. Additionally, poor communication during change efforts is believed to create adverse effects with such outcomes high degrees of dissatisfaction and job stress; this would in

turn impact stakeholders' emotional response to a change or changes. Therefore, it is plausible that during a potentially disruptive event such as multiple changes, initial change messages, which explain the number of, and details concerning the forthcoming change would produce increased favorability over messages that fail to include this content. On the other hand, some change communication scholarship suggests limiting the amount of information about change. In particular, Hogan and Overmyer-Day (1994) suggest that disseminating too much information to employees increases their anxiety, especially in situations where employees already feel uncertain about job security. This finding supports the ideas that a large quantity of information about change does not replace adequate, useful, and necessary information (i.e. quality information).

Reichers and colleagues (1997) suggest that nonsupportive behavior during times organizational change may be attributed to a lack of information, communication, and respect received from supervisors as well as to employees' negative dispositions about change. Lawrence (1958) also noted that negative dispositions tend to create delayed or thwarted efforts for change initiatives. Given the current argument surrounding the role of message quality in the change process and the need for implementers to construct messages with enough information to maintain, or potentially create interest in or affinity for change, it is possible that positive attitudes about change may also be directly related to the initial communication message. The affinity or emotional response of interest to this study is liking, or liking change. Change liking is conceptualized as a positive reaction to the change(s) in the organization. Since liking change can influence willingness to and, subsequently, effectiveness of change, it is possible that multifaceted

change messages may be capable of creating a positive disposition for the change. As a result, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*Hypothesis 2: Employees indicating the initial message received about change was multifaceted will report higher levels of change favorability (or liking) than those who report receiving uni-change, multi-dimensional change, and multiple change messages.*

#### *Coping Efficacy with Change and Change Messages*

The ability to handle change is important for organizational stakeholders. The rhetoric demanding organizations to perpetually evolve in order to remain competitive has created a global craze for change. Zorn et al. (2000) have suggested that organizational life is obsessed with change. However, social science literature reflecting organizational change seems to have a predilection toward making organizational implementation more successful rather than focusing on shaping strong stakeholders who are capable of handling and coping with numerous change efforts. Poole (1999) wrote about the “dark side” of organizational change such as “the social and human costs of modernization” (p. 448) and suggests that researchers expand their research agendas to address moral and economic consequences brought on by changes in the workplace. For instance, he asks how stress can be minimized rather than accentuated when organizational changes are made. Further, he asks “How can companies assist surviving workers in making the transition to the brave new Workplace?” (p. 452). Therefore, given the prevalence of change efforts in organizations, there appears to be an organizational imperative to discover methods for making continual interventions easier for employees.

Notably, then, a central reaction to organizational change involves the extent to which stakeholders cope with the uncertainties which radical change introduces into their work lives. Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, and DeLongis (1986) define coping as "[t]he person's cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage (reduce, minimize, or tolerate) the internal and external demands of the person-environment transaction that is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources" (p. 572). While not all coping behavior is effective or beneficial for the individual (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004), research has shown that persons who effectively cope with organizational change participate more actively in the change process (Cunningham, 2002) and are more likely to perceive the change as positively contributing to the organization (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999).

Research suggests that there are a number of antecedents to coping efficacy. Judge et al. (1999) identified two personality characteristics indicative of one's coping behavior: self-concept and risk tolerance. Specifically, their study suggests that individuals with a positive self-concept and a high tolerance for risk (i.e., openness to experience, tolerance for ambiguity and low levels of risk aversion) successfully cope with changes. In addition, research has also shown that problem-focused coping strategies are more effective (i.e., dealing with the stressor) than are emotion-focused strategies (i.e., dealing with emotional responses brought on by the stressor; Callan, 1993; Folkman, et al., 1986). Moreover, additional research by Wanberg and Banas (2000) discovered that change acceptance was significantly associated with both job satisfaction and turnover intentions; whereas, Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) advance support for stakeholder commitment to change as a major contributor to subsequent change-related

behaviors of adjustment.

Communication research has recently begun to devote more attention to understanding how proper implementation communication influences the change process (Barrett et al., 1995; Fairhurst, 1993; Fairhurst, Green, & Courtright, 1995; Lewis, 1999, 2007; Lewis et al., 2001; Zorn et al., 2000) and has lightly begun to consider how communication impacts stakeholder coping or adjustment processes. Most notably, Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) discovered that providing a realistic portrayal of an organizational merger reduced uncertainty and ameliorated stakeholder adjustment to the merger. Similarly, Callan and Dickson (1992) found that employees were able to employ more effective coping strategies, such as information seeking, when they received continual, internal communication about the changes associated with the merger. Central to the ability to cope with the merger was management's particular use of specific details about the merger in follow-up communication. Uncertainty is likely to impair the adjustment process, not only because the person will have difficulty accurately evaluating the significance of the event for his or her level of wellbeing, but also because a high level of ambiguity will interfere with the development of appropriate coping responses (Folkman, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1979). Simply, stakeholders will experience high levels of uncertainty with an insufficiency of communication surrounding change, and reducing uncertainty with communication leads to higher adjustment potential. While there is an abundance of literature examining predictors of coping with organizational change, there is, unfortunately, a paucity of research dealing with change communication and coping efficacy. However, while there is some evidence suggesting that change communication

messages lead to more effective employee adjustment, current studies seem to neglect this issue. Multifaceted communication is suggested to contain more comprehensive information than the other types of messages. These kinds of details may be capable of reducing the information-seeking need related to reducing uncertainty, which can potentially create well-adjusted employees.

Current literature and practitioners alike will benefit from understanding the potential of a multifaceted message to create perceptions of well-adjusted employees who are capable of coping with the strain of multiple, large-scale and enduring changes. Based on the current review, multifaceted messages appear to have content advantages over other messages employed by implementers capable of increasing employee adjustment to changes. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*Hypothesis 3: Employees indicating the initial message received about change was multifaceted will report higher degrees of coping efficacy during change than those who report receiving uni-change, multidimensional change, and multiple change messages.*

#### *Deception Related to Change and Change Messages*

Deception, or *deceptive communication*, has been defined as a “speaker’s ability to lead the listener to a predefined thought or action” (Deetz, 1990, p. 230). Deception involves lying (Bok, 1978), equivocation or strategically vague or ambiguous information (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990), and evasion or intentionally omitting or strategically avoiding communication (Galasinski, 1994; Turner, Edgley, & Olmstead, 1975); all three are considered to be equally deceptive. Although deception is commonly



viewed as a destructive act, it has been suggested to be a part of everyday discourse (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996; Turner et al., 1975). However, simply accepting deception as commonplace can have a serious impact on our personal and professional lives. For example, Strout (2002) found that of 316 sales and marketing executives surveyed, 47% of managers suspected their sales representatives had lied on their sales calls, and only 16.5% had never remembered a representative making an unrealistic promise to a customer. Circumstances have been suggested to be a powerful force in deception (e.g., Green & Farber, 2000), but they are not the only influence.

Typically, people will deceive others for a reason (Bok, 1978), and it is usually a means to another desired end state. Deception for self-gain and deception to benefit others are cited as two of the most common motivations. For example, a person may lie about how they spent their time because telling the truth may mean engaging in a fight. Alternatively, an organization may intentionally withhold information about a possible acquisition because sharing that information may harm stakeholders in the organization. Lies are often told more for self-gain rather than for other's benefit. People are more likely to lie, omit and evade the truth to protect their *own* credibility rather than to safeguard another's (Levine et al., 2000). Additionally, Levine and associates (2000) reported that omission was substantially more common than outright lies, equivocation, or evasion. Given that deception occurs to protect personal credibility and is likely to occur, it is likely that the deceptive communication may contain missing information that benefits the withholder.

Deceptive motives have been shown to correlate with type of relationship (Seiter,

Bruschke, & Bai, 2002). For instance, lies are told more often in casual relationships than in close ones (Burgoon, Buller, Ebesu, White, & Rockwell, 1996). Alternatively, DePaulo and Bell (1996) found that deception happens more often with close interactants than with those not as well liked. While current literature has shed much light on deceptive communication in interpersonal relationships, studies of work relationships in this vein appear to be neglected.

As noted, circumstances are a powerful force in deception (Green & Farber, 2000), and organizational change can present potentially stressful and dissonant experiences for stakeholders. When stakeholders are not invited to participate in the change, the information they receive from the implementers may be considered vague or even truncated (Miller & Monge, 1985). This may lead stakeholders to perceive the communication as deceptive. Furthermore, Levine et al.'s (2000) work suggests that missing information is the most common type of deception. It is reasonable to expect that messages with scant or limited information are likely to be perceived as significantly more deceptive than messages with robust information about changes. Therefore, in this case, the multifaceted message would likely be perceived as the least deceptive message regarding a situation involving change(s). Therefore, in support of this reasoning, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*Hypothesis 4: Employees indicating the initial message received about change was multifaceted will report less deception about change those who report receiving uni-change, multidimensional change, and multiple change messages.*

Understandably, perceptions of deception in initial change messages can very quickly and easily lead stakeholders to have trust concerns for their organization. To determine if message-related deception can potentially extend to a larger level of feelings toward the organization, organizational trust was also examined.

#### *Organizational Trust Related to Change and Change Message*

Previous discussion observed that change could create uncertainty for stakeholders that can, in turn, lead to a number of negative outcomes (e.g., stress, job dissatisfaction). When an organization undergoes change, employees evaluate management in terms of whether they can be trusted with concerns about their welfare and interests (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979). Understandings of trust, in general, include “a view based on confidence in another’s goodwill” (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994, p. 93), “positive expectations about the behavior of others based on roles, relationships, experiences, and interdependencies” (Ellis & Shockley-Zalabak, 2000, p. 383), or “a psychological state comprising of the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau, 1998, p. 395). Employees trust their organization when they feel that the organization cares about their welfare and behave in accordance with this judgment (Kanter, 1983, 1989). Research on organizational trust has suggested that it influences both perceptions of the organization (Muchinsky, 1977) as well as stakeholders’ beliefs in the ability of the organization to attain goals and act in the best interest of the associates (Gilbert & Tang, 1998). Zaheer, McEvily, and Perrone (1998) argue that organizational trust has its basis in individual members of the organizations rather than the organization as a whole. . A definition that

accounts for this suggests that organizational trust is “the degree to which managers hold a positive attitude toward employees’ reliability and goodwill in a risky situation and vice versa” (Lamsa & Pacetaite, 2006, p. 131).

Trust is argued to be fundamental to the function of organizing (McEvily, Perrone, & Zaheer, 2003) and an essential relational element between an organization and its stakeholders in a major organizational shift (Kickul, Lester, & Finkl, 2002). Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1999) suggest that trust in management effects belief in the reasons for organizational change and the perceived legitimacy of those changes. In support of this, Applebaum, Lefrancois, Tonna, and Shapiro (2007) compiled strategies from numerous M/A studies, and they reveal that leadership trust, along with organizational communication about change, is one of the four key elements for successful M/A implementation and execution; the other two included were organizational culture and stress and change adaptation. Trust is critical to the effectiveness of an implementation effort, and while it has been argued to be a difficult concept to build and poorly understood by organizations (Tyler & DeGoey, 1995), it does appear to be built by communication processes.

Since change is perceived as such an uncertain event, it is plausible to suggest that stakeholders view change in the organization as a risk. Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman (1995) contend that organizational trust leads to a willingness to risk which, in turn, leads to risk-taking behaviors in a relationship. In other words, a higher level of trust in a work partner (or an organization) increases the likelihood that one will take a risk with a partner (e.g., cooperate, share information), and/or it increases the amount of risk

assumed. Risk-taking behavior, in turn, is expected to lead to positive outcomes (e.g., individual performance, organizational influence, or employee attitudes). For example, McAllister (1995) found that employees who trusted their coworkers were more likely to cooperate with that person whether they were of equal status or otherwise. Likewise, Robinson (1996) found that trust in the organization has a positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior. Therefore, when organizational trust exists, it is possible to assume that stakeholders will be more willing to take risks such as participating in change efforts which contribute to change effectiveness (e.g., Miller et al., 1994).

While a robust body of literature offers generous support for the relationship of organizational trust or trust in the leadership and successful implementation, perceived trustworthiness of change messages are not explored in current literature. Strong empirical evidence exists for the important role of communication in explaining perceived trustworthiness (e.g., Butler, 1991; O'Reilly & Roberts 1976; Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998). Karten (2008) argues that trust is not the product of a single change message but an element of the climate created prior to the change; he/she also simply suggests that it is something built in advance of announcing the change. However, providing employees with a realistic view of changes associated with a change is argued to drastically increase employee trust levels in the organization because information (a) demonstrates concern for employees' future welfare, (b) reduces employee uncertainty, and (c) ensures employees that they are cared for as adjusting members (Dugoni & Ilgen, 1981; Meglino, DeNisi, Youngblood, & Williams, 1988; Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991).

However, Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) note that over time trust levels may return to pre-change announcement levels even for members who receive less information or no previews about changes.

Trust is both a communicative process and an outcome of communication. As organizations communicatively demonstrate concern and respect stakeholder vulnerability, trust is suggested to increase; accordingly, trust is a desirable outcome of change communication given its critical relationship to successful implementation (e.g., Brewer, 2007; McAllister, 1995; Robinson, 1996). Multifaceted change messages are seemingly capable of resulting in increased trust perceptions as they often contain macro-level information about change and details associated with those changes. As a result, these kinds of information about a large number of changes demonstrate the characteristics necessary to make a work partner vulnerable and willing to take risks such as engaging in large or ongoing change efforts. Therefore, in support of this reasoning, the following hypothesis was posited:

*Hypothesis 5: Employees indicating the initial message received about change was multifaceted will report higher degrees of trust for the organization than those who report receiving uni-change, multidimensional change, and multiple change messages.*

Naturally, if organizational trust is low, then issues of credibility and competency come into question. Stakeholders not only react to their organization based on their levels of trust, but they will also likely react based on how capable they perceive the

management to be in its leadership and execution. The perceptions stakeholders maintain about their organizations competency levels will likely influence subsequent reactions.

#### *Organizational Competency to Change and Change Message*

Defined as the general disposition stakeholders perceive about the ability of the organization or organization's leadership, the construct of *organizational competency* is especially scant in the literature. Organizational "competencies" are particularly plentiful, but generally refer to particular organizational benchmarks or criteria. The following review of literature is arguably tangential to the concept of organizational competency. However, it provides a degree of support for examining this concept in the context of initial change messages, and it will extend our understanding of the impact of change communication message on multifaceted change.

Miranda's (2004) definition of organizational credibility is a similar construct to organizational competency. He suggests that a credible organization is viewed as capable and competent. More specifically, he infers that properly deployed and utilized implementation efforts can help implementers "[r]egain control over their organizational credibility and remove barriers throughout the enterprise" (p. 59). Therefore, successful implementation may contribute to favorable perceptions of organizational aptitude. Lightly related, in his study on the external communication related to the Anthrax crisis, Barrett (2005) revealed that the use of multiple spokespersons and poor message control resulted in a seemingly fragmented Center for Disease Control message and apparent loss of organizational credibility. The study concluded that limiting the number of spokespersons and appropriate use of strategic communication might afford organizations

with an opportunity to avoid confusing and contradictory messages; this, he argues would protect organizational credibility.

Findings from attribution research (e.g., Jones & Davis, 1965) indicate that if actions are distinctive when norms and roles do not require it, they reflect true dispositions. Thus, individuals whose behaviors are considered as benevolent are likely to be perceived as more trustworthy than those whose actions are role prescribed. Although they acknowledge that the results indicate organizational credibility affects commitment, they also suggest that additional studies need to identify the moderating conditions under which these trust dimensions affect commitment.

While it is not particularly clear if organizational competency is related to communication, there is evidence suggesting that credibility can be built by communicating effectively. Moreover, implementers might also be perceived as trustworthy if they are viewed as ambassadors of goodwill, and fully representing multiple changes in a multifaceted communication message may be viewed as benevolent. Considering organizations are often more concerned about their credibility than if people like or trust them, posing a question about multifaceted change communication and organizational competency will add much to this study and potentially contribute significantly to the literature.

*Research Question 3: What is the relationship between perceived organizational competency and multifaceted messages about multiple change in the organization?*



In each of the hypotheses, multifaceted change messages are suggested to provide organizations with a useful tactic for announcing change to organizational stakeholders. Furthermore, the research questions are interested in understanding the role of a comprehensive message approach to initial implementation efforts. While research argues that change messages contain particular content information to achieve desired organizational goals (e.g., change effectiveness or a favorable change experience), this study explores whether the literature is sufficient to account for multiple change situations. And while it may be “[n]o one change technique or class of techniques works well in all situations” (Nicholas, 1982, p. 540), we are beginning to see an empirical story develop that points to the vigilant change message construction as an antecedent to successful change efforts for everyone.

## CHAPTER FIVE: METHOD AND RESULTS

### STUDY 2

#### Multifaceted Communication Messages Create Differences in Stakeholder Perceptions

The central goal of Study 2 was to determine if multifaceted implementation messages influenced stakeholder perceptions surrounding multiple changes in the organization. More specifically, the literature on change message content and specific individual and organizational outcomes suggests that stakeholders who are communicated with initially about large-scale change efforts through multifaceted messages will have more favorable perceptions of information quality and the change itself as well as greater coping efficacy, lower perceptions of deception and higher organizational trust in comparison to other types of initial implementation messages. In addition to the hypotheses posited, two research questions pertaining to the relationship between multifaceted messages and stakeholder perceptions of change satisfaction and organizational competency were also explored.

Informants participating in Study 1 determined messages stakeholders initially receive from their implementers about multiple change situations. These messages served as the foundation for launching Study 2. This next study included several hundred stakeholders from both original legacies recently merged and discussed nine total changes occurring in a 12-month timeframe. Multifaceted change involves one organization undergoing several changes at the same time. Multifaceted communication messages provide information about each of the implementation efforts. Stakeholders

completed surveys for this portion of the project. As detailed below, respondents began by indicating which message about multifaceted change best represented their initial communication experiences. Following this, respondents completed a series of individual and organizational measures. This chapter begins with a description of the interview sample and study procedures. Next, this chapter provides a detailed examination of the instrumentation. Finally, this chapter presents the results of the hypothesis testing and analyses of the questions posed in Chapter 4.

### *Sample*

A total of two hundred ninety-two ( $N = 292$ ) organizational members participated in Study 2. Two hundred two of these were submitted online (69%). Of this initial sample, only 244 were valid. Fifty-one of the original respondents noted that they were hired after the merger and, therefore, did not receive the initial change communication message regarding the forthcoming changes; consequently, they were excluded from the study. At the time Study 2 was initiated, the organization registered 652 employees; of that population about 90 were hired since the merger, yielding an approximate response rate of 43% of usable questionnaire data (i.e., employees that were originally a member of a legacy organization).

Of the 244 eligible participants, members from both legacies—EC ( $n = 93$ , 38%) and MC ( $n = 151$ , 62%)—participated. Slightly disproportionate response rates are attributed to the fact that MC maintained most of the administrative and back office positions after the merger. The individuals in these positions at EC were downsized. Legacies are much more proportionate among other roles (e.g., management, specialist,

laborer). The majority of the participants were between the ages of 35 and 54. The number of participants indicating they were between the ages of 35 and 44 was seventy-five ( $n = 75$ , 31%), and participants between the ages of 45 and 54 was seventy-two ( $n = 72$ , 30%). Three participants indicated they were between 18 and 24 ( $n = 3$ , 1%), 52 were between 25 and 34 ( $n = 52$ , 21%), 35 were between 55 and 64 ( $n = 35$ , 14%), 6 were over age 65 ( $n = 6$ , 2%), and only two people indicated they were either under age 18 or over age 65 ( $n = 2$ , 1%). The sample included White/Caucasians ( $n = 178$ , 73%), Black/African Americans ( $n = 22$ , 9%), Latino/Hispanic Americans ( $n = 28$ , 11.5%), Native American/American Indian ( $n = 4$ , 2%), and Asian American/Pacific Islander ( $n = 3$ , 1.2%). Nine participants indicated that their race was either not listed or chose not to indicate race (4%).

A range of tenure was also represented in the sample. Tenure represents the length of time they worked for their legacy organization as well as the newly formed firm. Five participants ( $n = 5$ , 2%) indicated they were employed for less than a year but hired before the merger. Twenty-three ( $n = 23$ , 9%) reported 1 to 2 years of service, 49 ( $n = 49$ , 20%) for 2 to 5 years, ( $n = 69$ , 28%) for 5 to 10 years, 69 ( $n = 69$ , 28%) for 10 to 20, and 29 ( $n = 29$ , 12%) reported working for the lineage of this new organization for over 20 years. In addition, participants were drawn from a variety of organizational positions that ranged from high status to low/no status. These four categories were represented by the greatest degree of status to include management ( $n = 49$ , 20%), followed by supervisor/sales/specialist ( $n = 94$ , 39%), next administrative/customer service ( $n = 25$ ,

10%) with the production worker/general laborer ( $n = 63$ , 26%) categorized as the role with the least degree of organizational status.

### *Procedures and Data Collection*

Both paper and electronic questionnaire were used to collect data for Study 2. The questionnaire was offered in both English and Spanish; since approximately 1/6 of the organization is of Mexican decent, a Spanish version was utilized in an effort to increase response rate. Once the survey was constructed in English, a native Spanish-speaking professional translated the survey into Spanish. All employees (600+) at FC were recruited to participate. As reported in Study 1, respondents were initially informed about the project in a memo distributed by the CEO. Six months following this original memo and the completion of Study 1, employees were reminded about the questionnaire portion of the communication project. Employees with access to email received an email solicitation inviting members to complete an online questionnaire. Attached to this email message was the original memo from the CEO. Supervisors of employees without access to email were asked share the invitation by word of mouth. In some cases, supervisors shared this information informally with their subordinates. In most cases, supervisors printed their email and attached it to the bulletin board by the time clock. In both, the invitation messages (email memo and paper memo) stated that participation was completely voluntary and any information shared would be anonymous. It was also explained in the memos that the questionnaire could be completed in Spanish, and entry into a raffle was offered as incentive to participate. Details about the raffle included the process for entry and the prizes. Specifically, employees were told they were eligible for

raffle entry with a submitted questionnaire. Employees were then eligible to win one of four prizes: a 42-inch plasma television or one of three \$100 cash gifts. The distribution and collection of the questionnaire and raffle entry differed for email employee and nonemployees.

A week after the original email invitation, Internet employees received a follow-up email message containing a web link to the online questionnaire. By selecting the link in the message, respondents were directed to a survey monkey website. Once the questionnaire was completed and submitted, respondents were automatically directed to a separate webpage and entry screen with the raffle entry information. It was explained that entry names could not be tied to any particular questionnaire, so the individual responses would remain confidential. Respondents were given the option to participate in the raffle or to select out of raffle consideration.

For members without access to email, a memo was attached to employee paychecks approximately two weeks prior to the physical distribution of the questionnaires. This memo detailed the process for the questionnaire distribution and collection. Specifically, it explained that questionnaires would be attached to the next paychecks. A prepaid, preaddressed envelope was also included in every survey packet. At the completion of the questionnaire, respondents could submit questionnaires one of two ways. The first way questionnaires and raffle entries could be returned was by using in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided in each packet. Sealing packets and dropping them into ballot boxes located in each plant break room served as an alternative method for returning questionnaires and raffle entries. It was reported that English

version, both electronic and paper, took respondents about 30 minutes to complete.

Spanish questionnaires were said to average about 45 minutes.

Two weeks after the close of data collection, a drawing was held to determine the four raffle winners. Regardless of questionnaire usability, all raffle entries were considered eligible for the drawing. Each entry (192 online and 95 paper entries) was assigned a number. From a bag, four chips with numbers ranging from 1 to 287 were drawn from the bag and matched to the entry name and number. The HR director contacted the winners about the process for claiming their awards.

### *Instrumentation*

The questionnaire for Study 2 consisted of three parts: (a) the set of initial change communication message/communication scenarios, (b) several organizational and individual change outcome scales, and (c) a demographic section.

#### *Part 1: The Initial Change Communication Message/Package*

The type of communication message introducing and initially framing the multiple set of changes (i.e. the change announcement) was created from the emergent themes discovered and developed in Study 1 and was captured in a single item. For this part, respondents were instructed to read all five initial change communication message scenarios and:

...think about the time you were first notified about upcoming changes select the one that best represents how FC or you legacy organization communicated upcoming changes to you. Please select the message that best describes *what you were told* at the beginning of the change(s).

*Initial change message type.* This measure determined what message participants' recall receiving from the organization. Participants were asked to select from one of four choices. Specifically, participants indicated if the initial change message was about a single change, a multidimensional change, a multiple, or a multifaceted change. A multifaceted change message is a message that contains multiple change information (information explaining the number) and multidimensional change information (information detailing each of the changes) in the same message. Participants were asked to review four different descriptions of possible change announcements and select the one that best describes the manner in which upcoming changes were presented to or shared with them. The four nominal categories included the following: "We were *just* told that there would be one big change" (uni-change); "We were told that there would be one big change and that one change would bring many other smaller parts with it" (multidimensional); "We were *just* told that there would be several big changes" (multiple change); "and, "We were told that there would be several big changes, and the big changes would bring many other smaller adjustments with them" (multifaceted change). *Part 2: Organizational and individual outcomes of multiple organizational changes*

Several scales were used to assess outcomes of the changes and change messages. This section followed the initial message section and asked respondents how they felt about the communication and the recent changes at FC. For each scale, they were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about the changes.



*Change satisfaction.* Change satisfaction refers to the extent respondents approve of the changes or perceive them positively. This construct was measured using a 2-item scale, which was a modified version of Evers, Frese and Cooper's (2000) 6-item scale on job satisfaction. These items asked respondents to consider if they were more or less satisfied with their job since the implementations and then rate their responses on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Example items included: "I was more satisfied with my job before all the changes" (R) and "Since the changes occurred, I am less satisfied at Caravan." The mean, standard deviation and alpha reliability for the perceptions of change communication quality scale were as follows:  $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 1.82$ , and  $\alpha = 0.82$ .

*Quality of change communication.* The quality of the change communication was measured with a 6-item scale developed based on recommendations in the extant literature surrounding change. Characteristics of effective change communication and previous measures of quality of change communication (e.g., Miller et al., 1994), particularly, the subscales of communication expectancy and communication adequacy, were utilized. . These items asked respondents to think about the extent they believe the change communication to be helpful, useful, and effective, rating their responses on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Example items included: "I expected to be given better information about changes in the company than what I was provided" (R) and "The information I received about changes in this company effectively answered my questions about the changes." The mean, standard deviation and

alpha reliability for the perceptions of change communication quality scale were  $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ , and  $\alpha = 0.90$ .

*Emotional response to the changes.* The degree to which participants favored the changes or believed the changes were positive was measured using a 3-item scale. These items asked respondents to think about the extent that they liked the changes or thought the changes were beneficial, rating their responses on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Example items included: “I am really happy about the changes that have occurred in the company over the past year” and “I am satisfied with the effects of the recent changes in the company.” The mean, standard deviation and alpha reliability for the perceptions emotional change response scale were  $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ , and  $\alpha = 0.87$ .

*Change coping efficacy.* The ability cope with the multiple changes occurring was measured by creating a composite measure of coping efficacy with the individual changes. In this study, nine changes, as discussed in Chapter Two, were of interest. Therefore, to create this variable score, a 4-item scale was created for each change wherein respondents were asked to think about the extent to which they have been able to handle or deal with each one of the nine changes in their organization. Respondents rated their ability to cope with each of the changes on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). The mean for each of these nine subscales was used to create a sum score that was averaged to create a composite coping score. Sample items were contained within each of the nine changes and included items such as “It has been particularly difficult for me to adjust to [the merger]” or “I am successfully coping with

the day-today changes brought on by [the new policies and procedures].” The mean, standard deviation and alpha reliability for the perceptions of coping efficacy scale were  $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ , and  $\alpha = 0.95$ .

*Change communication deception.* The degree to which respondents believed the organization was deceitful about the changes was measured using a 5-item scale. These items asked respondents to think about the extent they believe the organization misled the members or was not forthcoming with information about the changes, rating their responses on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Example items included: “FC held back information about the changes from us” and “I was lied to about the changes.” The mean, standard deviation and alpha reliability for the perceptions of change communication quality scale were  $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ , and  $\alpha = 0.82$ .

*Organizational trust.* To capture individuals’ perceptions about the trustworthiness of the organization, a 3-item scale was developed using a combination of two independent measures from Elving, Werkman, & Benneboeck (2007) and Lewis and Laster (2007). Participants were instructed to consider the trustworthiness of their organization. They indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *very strongly disagree*; 7 = *very strongly agree*). Items assessed the extent to which the company, or direct supervisor, can be trusted. Examples included: “I trust the people running this organization” and “I do not trust this company (R).” The mean, standard deviation and alpha reliability for the perceptions of change communication quality scale were  $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ , and  $\alpha = 0.87$ .

*Organizational competency.* Organizational competency was measured with a 3-item scale developed for this study. Participants were instructed to consider how capable they perceived the management in their organization to be in terms of organizational leadership and execution. They indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *very strongly disagree*; 7 = *very strongly agree*). Items assessed the extent to which the participant believed the organization or management in the organization to be proficient or competent. Examples included: “I trust the people running this organization” and “I do not trust this company (R)”, “When facing important problems, management is capable of having the right people fix the problems” and “I have concerns with top management’s ability (R).” The mean, standard deviation and alpha reliability for the perceptions of change communication quality scale were  $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ , and  $\alpha = 0.83$ .

### *Part 3: Demographics*

Basic descriptive demographics were then requested, which included participant’s age, gender, tenure, organizational role, organizational status, and former legacy/affiliation, if any.

## Results

As previously discussed, the survey prompted employees to indicate which initial change message best represented the message they received from their legacy organization about the impending changes. Based on these responses, participants were categorized as those who received uni-change, multidimensional change, multiple change, or multifaceted change messages. Differences between these groups as well as

associations between the type of initial message and various outcomes of change (i.e., change satisfaction, communication quality, favorability, coping efficacy, communication deception, organizational trust, and organizational competency) were assessed. The results are reported herein. It is important to note this study is primarily interested in testing if multifaceted change messages give rise to different responses than other kinds of initial messages about changes.

### *Research Question 2*

The second research question was explored to assess the relationship between employees who indicated receiving a multifaceted change message as the initial type of change communication and their satisfaction with the changes. To explore this relationship, a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test for differences between the initial change message type and change satisfaction. Results showed a significant main effect for the type of initial message,  $F(3, 234) = 7.55, p < .001$ , suggesting that employees' perceptions of change satisfaction differed based on the type of initial implementation message they received about the changes. To test whether multifaceted messages were significantly different than each of the other three message types, planned comparisons for each were then conducted. Results revealed that perceptions of change satisfaction were significantly higher for employees who report receiving multifaceted messages than were those who indicated the initial message received was a uni-change,  $t(234) = -4.62, p < .001$ , multidimensional,  $t(234) = -3.78, p < .001$ , or multiple change,  $t(234) = -2.65, p = .01$ . The relational query revealed that employees who recalled receiving multifaceted change messages ( $M = 5.54, SD = 1.50$ )

reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction with the changes than did those who indicated they received an initial change message that was uni-change ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ), multidimensional change ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) and multiple change messages ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ). While no formal predictions were made, this finding suggests that introducing multiple implementations as anything less than a multifaceted communication message will decrease stakeholders' levels of satisfaction with the changes.

### *Hypothesis 1*

Hypothesis 1 predicted that employees who indicated the initial message received about change was multifaceted would report that the communication about change was of higher quality than those who received uni-change, multidimensional change, and multiple change messages. To test this hypothesis, an ANOVA was performed. The results yielded a significant main effect for initial message,  $F(3, 232) = 21.44$ ,  $p < .001$ , suggesting that employees' perceptions of communication quality about change differed based on the type of initial message they received about the changes. Planned comparisons revealed that communication quality perceptions of those who received multifaceted change messages were significantly different from those who received uni-change,  $t(232) = -7.71$ ,  $p < .001$ , multidimensional change,  $t(232) = -4.70$ ,  $p < .001$ , and multiple change messages  $t(232) = -3.43$ ,  $p < .001$ . As hypothesized, employees who received an initial multifaceted change message perceived the communication about change to be significantly higher in quality ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) than did those who received the multiple change ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ), multidimensional change ( $M = 3.76$ ,

$SD = 1.31$ ), and uni-change message ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ). . In sum, Hypothesis 1 was supported and suggests that evaluations of message quality progressively decrease as messages are represented more simply during multifaceted change.

### *Hypothesis 2*

Hypothesis 2 posited that employees who indicated the initial message received about change was multifaceted would report higher levels of change favorability than those who received uni-change, multidimensional change, and multiple change messages. To test this hypothesis, an ANOVA was performed, revealing a significant main effect for initial message,  $F(3, 236) = 11.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ; this suggests that employees who liked the changes differed based on the initial message they reported receiving about changes. Planned comparisons between the messages revealed that change favorability of those who received multifaceted change messages were significantly different from those who received uni-change,  $t(236) = -5.32$ ,  $p < .001$ , multidimensional change,  $t(236) = -4.27$ ,  $p < .001$ , and multiple change messages  $t(236) = -2.20$ ,  $p = .029$ . As hypothesized, employees who received an initial multifaceted change message reported liking change significantly more ( $M = 5.56$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) than did those who received multiple change ( $M = 4.84$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ), multidimensional change ( $M = 4.22$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ), and uni-change messages ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ) from the organization. As such, Hypothesis 2 was supported and suggests a direct relationship between comprehensive message content and liking for changes. That is, employees appear to be progressively more favorable about changes when the message content is acknowledged communicatively as much more comprehensive than when it is presented more simply

### *Hypothesis 3*

Hypothesis 3 proposed that employees who indicated the initial message received about change was multifaceted would report higher degrees of coping efficacy about change than those who received uni-change, multidimensional change, and multiple change messages. An ANOVA was used to test this hypothesis and revealed a significant main effect for initial message,  $F(2, 221) = 14.61, p < .001$ ; this suggests that employees' perceptions of coping efficacy and change differed based on the type of initial message they received about the changes. Planned comparisons revealed that the ability to cope with the changes for employees who report receiving the multifaceted message was significantly easier than employees who indicated the initial message received was a uni-change,  $t(221) = -5.61, p < .001$ , or a multidimensional,  $t(221) = -4.21, p < .001$ . The difference between employees who reported multifaceted messages and multiple change messages was not significant,  $t(221) = -1.27, p < .21$ . As hypothesized, employees who received an initial multifaceted change message reported significantly higher degrees of coping efficacy than those who indicated the initial message received was uni-change ( $M = 4.70, SD = .94$ ) and multidimensional change messages ( $M = 4.90, SD = .77$ ). However, because no significant differences were found between the multifaceted message ( $M = 5.69, SD = .81$ ) and the multiple message ( $M = 5.44, SD = .86$ ) as it relates to employees' ability to cope with the changes, this hypothesis was only partially supported. The finding suggests that coping efficacy may be related to implementers' representation of the total number or a trajectory of changes prior to the execution of these changes. Employees were less able to cope when



information about the total number of changes was omitted from the initial announcement regardless of the sharing of related minor details.

#### *Hypothesis 4*

Hypothesis 4 predicted that employees who indicated that the initial message received about change was multifaceted would report less deception about change than those who received uni-change, multidimensional change, and multiple change messages. This hypothesis was tested with an ANOVA. The results yielded a significant main effect for initial message,  $F(3, 232) = 17.58, p < .001$ , suggesting that employees' perceptions of communication deception about change differed based on the type of initial message they received about the changes. Planned comparisons between the messages revealed that deceptive communication for those who received multifaceted change messages was perceived as significantly less deceptive than from those who received uni-change,  $t(232) = 6.31, p < .001$  and multi-dimensional messages,  $t(232) = 4.09, p < .001$ . However, the analysis did not reveal a significant difference between perceptions of deceptive change communication and the multiple change initial message,  $t(232) = 1.39, p = .17$ . As hypothesized, employees who received an initial multifaceted change message reported significantly less deceptive communication than did those who reported the initial message received was a uni-change ( $M = 4.14, SD = 1.32$ ) and multidimensional change message ( $M = 3.65, SD = 1.19$ ). Albeit, no significant differences were found between the multifaceted change ( $M = 2.59, SD = 1.25$ ) and the multiple change message ( $M = 2.58, SD = 1.09$ ) as it relates to employees' perception of deceptive communication about change. Therefore, this hypothesis was only partially supported. This suggests that

regardless of the supplementary details implementers provide about a change, representing change as more of a single change or single detailed change creates a perception of deception for employees when there are subsequent effects and certainly additional impending changes.

#### *Hypothesis 5*

Based on the assumption that employees who perceived change messages as deceptive and in accordance with the literature on communication and trust, Hypothesis 5 proposed that employees who indicated the initial message received about change was multifaceted would report higher degrees of organizational trust than those who received uni-change, multidimensional change, and multiple change messages. An ANOVA was used to test this hypothesis and revealed a significant main effect for initial message,  $F(3, 233) = 12.74, p < .001$ , suggesting that employees' perceptions of organizational trust differed along with the type of initial message they received. Planned comparisons revealed that the trust employees felt for their organization was significantly higher for employees who reported receiving multifaceted messages than employees who indicated the initial message received was a uni-change,  $t(233) = -1.72, p < .001$ , a multidimensional change,  $t(233) = -1.26, p < .001$ , and multiple change message  $t(233) = -0.67, p < .047$ . As hypothesized, employees who received an initial multifaceted change message reported trusting their organization significantly more ( $M = 5.90, SD = 1.14$ ) than employees who report receiving the multiple change ( $M = 5.23, SD = 1.37$ ), multidimensional change ( $M = 4.64, SD = 1.59$ ), and uni-change messages ( $M = 4.18, SD = 1.67$ ) from the organization. As a result, this hypothesis was supported, suggesting that

organizational trust evaluations are related to the richness of an implementation message and that reducing message information about multifaceted change can potentially reduce or erode stakeholders' trust for the organization.

### *Research Question 3*

The third research question was interested in determining the relationship between employees who indicated receiving a multifaceted change message as the initial type of communication and stakeholder perceptions of organizational or leader capability. To explore this relationship, an ANOVA was performed to test for differences between the initial change message type and organizational competency. The results of this analysis revealed a significant main effect for the initial message,  $F(3, 234) = 7.80, p < .001$ , suggesting that employees' perceptions of organizational competency differed based on the type of initial message they received about the changes. Following this finding, planned comparisons for each initial message type were examined. Results of the analyses revealed that organizational competency evaluations were significantly higher for employees who report receiving multifaceted messages than employees who indicated the initial message received was a uni-change,  $t(234) = -4.53, p = < .001$  and multidimensional,  $t(234) = -2.77, p = < .001$ . However, comparative analysis did not reveal a significant difference between perceptions of organizational competency for the multifaceted change and the multiple change message,  $t(234) = -1.61, p = .11$ . The relational query about the employment of multifaceted change messages and organizational trust revealed this message to impact perceptions of organizational competency with uni-change ( $M = 3.60, SD = 1.59$ ) and multidimensional change

messages ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ). However, organizational competency evaluations did not differ between the multiple change ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ) and the multifaceted change messages ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ). While no formal predictions were made, this finding is similar to the perceptions of deception and coping. That is, the implementers' ineffectiveness in communicating the total number of changes in their initial change message greatly impacts perceptions that stakeholders maintain about their organization's aptitude. As with perceptions of deception and ability to cope successfully, stakeholders responses suggest that, regardless of the discussions of detail (or the omission of it), differences in perceptions appear when the amount of changes are improperly represented. Notably, the uni-change message mean for organizational competency was the lowest reported of all message types across all variables.

#### Summary of Findings

The goal of Study 2 was to determine if initial communication about change is best presented to stakeholders using a multifaceted message. Considering there is conflicting literature suggesting that implementation communication should be both comprehensive and limited, it becomes important to understand which perspective is most appropriate in the frequent times when organizations are preparing to experience multiple changes. . It is clear that stakeholders indicating initial communication to be multifaceted communication was consistently reported as bearing significantly higher levels/degrees of communication quality, change favorability, and organizational trust than any of their other three messages. Moreover, multifaceted change communication produced significantly higher levels of coping efficacy, lower perceptions of deceptive

communication, and lower perceptions of competency for organizational leadership than simple messages that represent change or a series of related changes as an isolated event.

A closer look at the results reveals an interesting pattern with the findings for the initial change messages regarding multifaceted change. The mean comparisons illustrate a linear relationship. In other words, all of the Study 2 analyses position the uni-change message as the poorest rated message (or highest in terms of the deceptive message) followed by the multidimensional and multiple change messages. In each case, the stakeholders who indicated received the multifaceted change reported the highest group mean.

### Conclusions

Findings from Study 1 were used as the basis for understanding how initial change message recall is related to stakeholder reactions to change. The most basic conclusion for Study 2 suggests that different recollections about initial change messages created different change-related outcomes. More specifically, the data suggest that more comprehensive, or breadth-intensive, messages create more favorable responses among stakeholders than the slow release of information about change as management introduces it into the mix of changes. More investigation into breadth messages also suggest that when they are combined with depth messages, or messages containing details about each of the changes, these messages create even more favorable reactions to change. Therefore, any intention to withhold a trajectory of information will only be dangerous in terms of stakeholder recall over time. The challenge with implementation, as noted earlier, is that a change may evolve over time and may advance differently than

originally anticipated, or it may also create additional changes. Again, aside from the theoretical contributions to implementation communication research (discussed in Chapter 6), the suggested practical implications present some important and serious implications for managers undertaking large scale or complex change situations.

First of all, messages of change need to contain a projection of anticipated additional changes, both known and unknown. Considering that unknown changes are, by nature, not known, messages of change should not only account for potential fallout, but they should include a series of follow-up communication strategies. Over time, the initial message not only becomes a faded memory, but it also is often reconstructed based on a comparison of what is remembered and what has actually occurred. As changes evolve, the fidelity of the initial message and the developing change become more and more dissimilar. However, if messages of change are continuous, recall is often short term and accurately reflective of current situations. In addition, stakeholders that either receive or recall receiving messages about more than one change appear to have greater coping efficacy with change. It is possible that creating a continuous process of change communication may also, indeed, allow stakeholders to enact continuous coping abilities rather than responding to an initial message about a change that was introduced nine months earlier.

Chapter 6 will reflect on both of the studies comprising this project and provide individual discussions as well as study implications. This chapter will also review some of the study limitations and highlight how the finding and limitations of this study provide opportunities for future research.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Scholarship on change has assumed that change occurs in organizations one by one. Unfortunately, this is not how most people or organizations experience change. This dissertation provides a preliminary investigation of multiple change efforts and related outcomes of change communication within an organization. This project began by examining how multiple changes grow from a single change episode. In essence, it calls attention to the fact that one change often evolves into a set of interrelated, coordinated, and sometimes, uncoordinated changes. This study also reveals that additional unrelated implementation efforts do not occur at isolated moments or during discrete periods of time. Rather, there seems to be overlap with subsequent changes commencing prior to the completion of other changes. Indeed, it is suggested here that changes are punctuated and episodic, continuous, or both. Consequently, the planned efforts and unplanned emergence of multiple changes creates a challenging and complex situation for organizational stakeholders on various levels. For management, this may involve understanding how to communicatively prepare employees for change. Additionally, this experience can be difficult for stakeholders who already perceive single changes to be extremely stressful (Bastien, 1987; Davy Kinicki, Kilroy, & Scheck, 1988) and present additional challenges to how they adjust to change (e.g., Callan & Dickson, 1992; Folkman et al., 1979; Nelson et al., 1995; Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991).

Existing change literature emphasizes the importance of communication in announcing *the* change (e.g., Jick, 1993, my italics), and it acknowledges that these studies fail to study change as a process of continuous and overlapping changes (Beer &

Walton, 1987). One primary contribution of the current research is that it deviates from traditional social science methodologies used to study organizational change. Traditional approaches have primarily examined change cross-sectionally and with one methodology. According to Klein and Sorra (1996), research that includes more than one of the following—multiorganizational, multilevel, longitudinal, or quantitative and qualitative data—is moving organizational change research in a needed direction. This project investigates the commencement of one large change and follows it over time to understand the evolutionary effect of change. It also reviews change from individuals representing multiple levels in the organization, and it employs two methodological approaches to capture more than just a single snapshot of change. Further, this study sheds light on the unique nature of stakeholder experiences of multiple changes as it relates to implementer communication messages. Two studies were conducted to explore multiple changes occurring within an organization and the nature of the communication about change as perceived by stakeholders within the organization. The results and implications of the findings for Study 1 and Study 2 are discussed in turn. A general discussion of the theoretical and practical implications for the research findings is then provided. Limitations and future directions are discussed.

### Study 1 Discussion

*What identifiable downward communication messages do employees report receiving about forthcoming multiple changes?* The results of Study 1 suggested that (1) stakeholders within the same organization reported very different constructions about the size, scope, and complexity of the change/changes, (2) some of the initial representations



of upcoming changes irritated or surprised some of the stakeholders, and (3) some members felt that they knew more about what to expect from the merger and its related effects than did other members. In addition, results illustrated that it (4) may not be possible to reduce or explain change types as either punctuated and episodic or continuous and incremental; this study suggests that changes may indeed be both.

Study 1 sought to understand the kinds of information stakeholders are given about the multifaceted change in the initial communication message from management about change. In most cases, past scholarship on implementation dissemination has discussed the initial downward communication message in terms of general types of messages that are shared and have neglected specific content variables. For example, Ford and Ford (1995) argued that intentional change communication processes contain different combinations of speech acts that correspond with four different types of interactions (i.e., initiative, understanding, performance, and closure). They contend that the most common breakdown in the change communication process occurs due to a lack of understanding about the change(s). They suggest that this occurs because people almost exclusively rely on conversations for understanding (e.g., Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992; Kotter, 1990). Unfortunately, this can lead to inaccurate or insufficient kinds of information. Armenakis et al. (1999) argued that a change message should include several components; implementers need to make the case for change, demonstrate the capability to successfully change, convince members of their support for this evolution, illustrate the impact and outcome of the change, and establish value for the stakeholders. Other scholars (e.g., Porras & Silvers, 1991) have also explored message content, and

they argue that message content (e.g., what is said, how it is said) matters in producing behavioral change. However, these perspectives do not describe details about what is important in terms of what is said about change. The findings of the present study enhance the current understanding of change message content and, interestingly, suggest something quite different from this body of literature.

Study 1 showed that stakeholder perceptions about the initial change message were inconsistent across the organization and varied in the degree to which they contained (or lacked) two specific content features: depth and breadth about the changes. Messages with depth contain unambiguous and helpful details about the larger change or changes. This may also include outlining subsequent effects of this change. Messages with breadth simply explain that more than one change that will be occurring. Therefore, breadth messages set expectations for change and offer a trajectory of planned changes that may potentially forewarn stakeholders of additional unexpected events. Ford and Ford (1995) suggest that all changes produce “miscellaneous, unintentional, or unexpected outcomes” (p. 548), and these findings suggest that implementers should be prepared to acknowledge the subsequent nature of additional changes in their initial messages.

Through this view, two important implications about communication messages associated with multifaceted change efforts in organizations can be gleaned. First, although the context may modify change techniques, there appear to be two specific elements emerging in the recall of stakeholders’ experiences with the initial change message about multiple changes. These elements, depth and breadth, should be

conceptualized as part of the message content choices necessary for multifaceted change. Secondly, this study suggests a new view of change that is not adequately addressed in the existing literature. Research has explained organizational change as punctuated and episodic (e.g., Gersick, 1991; Weick & Quinn, 1999) continuous, and even incremental (e.g., Huber & Van de Ven, 1995; Miller & Friessen, 1982, 1984; Tsouskas & Chia, 2002). However, it appears that organizations can change in all of these ways at essentially the same time or within a fairly limited temporal frame. This study outlines nine changes, and it is possible that there are additional changes not accounted for or explained here. This study serves to provide an initial illustration of the matrix of change that exists for organizational stakeholders.

#### Study 2 Discussion

*How are particular individual and organizational outcomes related to the initial change message about multifaceted change?* The results of Study 2 suggest that employees who reported initially receiving a multifaceted change message reported more favorable individual and organizational change outcomes than members who reported receiving less comprehensive messages in respect to shared information about the number of changes (i.e., breadth) and the details outlining the changes (i.e., depth). Study 2 showed that satisfaction with changes, information quality about the changes, liking of the changes, and organizational trust were rated significantly higher for stakeholders who reported experiencing a multifaceted change message than the other three messages (i.e. uni-change, multidimensional, multiple change). Results also revealed that perceptions of coping efficacy, deception, and organizational competency were significantly higher and

perception of deception was significantly lower for those who reported receiving multifaceted change messages than for the uni-change and the multidimensional message. There was no significant difference between multifaceted messages and multiple messages. The nonsignificant finding suggests that the difference between these two types of messages may be located in sharing the total number of planned or expected changes.

RQ2 (satisfaction with changes), H1 (message quality), H2 (change liking), and H5 (organizational trust) all produced the same outcome. That is, for each of the dependent measures, the multifaceted change message was perceived in significantly different ways than the other types of messages, and it was rated highest in terms of associations with change satisfaction, liking for the changes, and organizational trust. The findings support and strengthen the need for change messages to contain both depth and breadth components. More specifically, organizational stakeholders are likely to consider this kind of message an acceptable message, which, in turn, may improve change experiences for stakeholders. The ability to improve change experiences may then contribute to individual and organizational goals related to change events.

Similarly, RQ3 (organizational competency), H3 (coping efficacy), and H4 (deceptive communication) shared the same finding. For each of these constructs, stakeholders who reported receiving the multiple change message and the multifaceted change message did not differ significantly. However, employees who reported receiving the multifaceted change message perceived significantly different (higher) outcomes as compared to those who reported receiving the uni-change and the multidimensional

messages. In other words, messages containing breadth (i.e. the multiple and the multifaceted messages) which included a discussion of the number of changes or trajectory of the full-scale change effort) were perceived similarly. It appears that the details of the changes were viewed as a less important distinction for these variables. Therefore, realistic and estimated representations about the number of changes are related to and affect perceptions of organizational competency and feeling deceived. Moreover, the ability to cope with change appears to decrease significantly if a change message is anything less than comprehensive about a projected number of total or possible changes. Because these perceptions were measured after several changes had occurred, it can be assumed that respondents' reactions to these measures could be attributed to their ability detect the consistency in the initial message and the changes actually occurring. Therefore, it appears that accurate but incomplete information has a significant impact on coping efficacy. In other words, stakeholders are likely to adjust to multiple changes and develop effective coping strategies when they perceive that the magnitude of change has been fully shared. In support of these particular findings, post hoc analyses revealed group differences between single change announcements (uni-change and multidimensional) and multiple change announcements (multiple and multifaceted). These findings elucidate some important similarities to and differences from existing literature on change communication as it is placed in the context of multifaceted change. Both research questions and all hypotheses were primarily focused on one message in particular the multifaceted change message. With respect to both the research questions

and the hypotheses, stakeholders evaluated other change messages more negatively than they did for the multifaceted messages.

Despite the increased attention communication has received in implementation research, Lewis (2007) argued that we still lack a comprehensive perspective on how implementation communication practices affect implementation processes. Initially, research focused on the reduction of resistance based on reduction of uncertainty. While this strategy is useful, this perspective treats communication as a medicinal method to get stakeholders to accept changes more easily, and it has mainly benefited organizational leaders and practitioner efforts (e.g., Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004; Griffin, 1993; Kreitner, 1992; Schermerhorn, 1989). More recently, research has considered the stakeholder as a more integral part of the process (e.g., Lewis, 2007; Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991) rather than just the organizational casualty of change. In Lewis' model of implementation communication, she discusses four features of the implementation process. Two of these features are (1) implementer strategy choice and enactment, and (2) stakeholders' concerns, assessments, and interactions concurrent with and in response to implementer strategies. Her model suggests that communication occurs between the implementer and the stakeholder as well as between stakeholders themselves rather than just top down dissemination.

Earlier work by Klein and Sorra (1996) assumes an implementer perspective and suggests that organizational decision makers create palatable conditions for innovation adoption; in particular, these conditions include a strong climate for change and a clear understanding of the innovation's value and fit for the organization. In doing so,

compliance, and, therefore, innovation success, will increase. However, Lewis (2007) adopts a more message-centered approach. Her model begins to account for downward message components. She provides a broader understanding of how change components affect one another and contain the following communication approach: the use of targeted, balanced, discrepancy-focused, and dissemination-focused messages. Lewis argues that research suggests that these elements are critical factors in change communication and that they impact the ways messages will be received. Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) provide a helpful contribution to change message research by suggesting that the use of *realistic change previews* reduces dysfunctional outcomes of a merger. Taken together, communication not only serves as a necessary part of change activities, but it also provides theoretical justification for how and why such communication is capable of impacting employees in particular ways. This study begins to provide a clearer and deeper understanding of the impact change messages have on organizational member perceptions.

The findings presented herein have important implications and make necessary contributions to existing research. To begin, change messages accounting for multiple (i.e., overlapping and/or continuous) change efforts with multifaceted change messages not only assist in reducing the uncertainty necessary to achieve top management goals (e.g., reduced resistance, willing participation by employees), but they also have significant implications for how the employees regard the implementers and decisions; for example, they influence the degree to which they trust the organization or consider management to be competent. In addition, multifaceted change messages are suggested,

here, to provide stakeholders with information that prepares or forewarns them about the upcoming complexities involved in multiple changes. In other words, when a realistic portrayal of change was provided, these messages provided an increased sense of coping efficacy for stakeholders experiencing multiple changes. Moreover, coping with one change at a time is likely different than coping with multiple changes, and considering change is related to high levels of uncertainty, accurate assessments of multiple changes can be assumed to be more critical. Thirdly, the previously neglected outcome of change satisfaction provides a helpful perspective on how utilizing multifaceted messages increases the degree to which employees feel content about the changes occurring in the organization. Considering that satisfaction with change will likely impact overall job satisfaction, this will, in turn, affect other important organizational outcomes such as commitment and intention to leave (Morrison, 2004; Patterson, Warr, & West, 2004; Renzi, Tabolli, Ianni, DiPietro, & Puddu, 2005; Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991).

Multifaceted messages are unique and different from alternative and, perhaps, typical types of communication choices about change. Arguably, they are received differently by employees and, thus, are reacted to differently. Specifically, employees who reported receiving the multifaceted message indicated the lowest degree of organizational dysfunction (i.e., an inability to cope effectively, a distrust for the organization). Another interesting conclusion supported by the data indicates that stakeholder appraisals were linearly related according to the simplicity of the message. In each tested relationship, the mean score was the lowest for the uni-change message and highest for the multifaceted message; multidimensional and multiple change message



means were located in between, respectively. This suggests that particular message elements need to be part of the message to be (1) considered multifaceted and (2) capable of producing the outcomes supported in this study rather than the assumption that more information is better. In short, the findings of this study suggest that a comprehensive change message is important in creating favorable individual and organizational outcomes. Moreover, the content differences appear to be linearly related. In other words, on the whole single and simple initial implementation messages (e.g., the uni-change message) are rated lower than the multiple and complex implementation messages (e.g., the multiple and multifaceted messages). The implications of these findings can be tied to and extend what is known about the impact of communication in a number of additional research areas.

Researchers have argued that people want information about change that is accurate, timely, credible, and delivered appropriately (e.g., Lewis, 2006; Miller et al., 1994), and the ability to meet these needs reduces the anxiety about the change. It is often the lack of communication that leaves employees uncertain about their futures that is so stressful for employees rather than the changes themselves (Mirvis & Marks, 1986). Uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1979) suggests that as verbal communication increases, the level of uncertainty decreases (Axiom 1), that uncertainty causes increased levels of information seeking (Axiom 3), and that high levels of uncertainty cause a decrease in liking, whereas low levels of uncertainty increase liking (Axiom 7). However, the simple increase of verbal communication is likely insufficient to thwart organizational dysfunctions related to change. Rather, the results of the current

study suggest that implementation communication providing stakeholders with information about all the changes and their anticipated effects of the change is optimal. Failure to do so will likely increase uncertainty and employees' willingness to rely upon rumors which are often inaccurate, tend to focus on the negative aspects of the change, and can further increase anxiety (Bruno & Bowditch, 1989). Therefore, the picture of change communication is emerging to suggest that it is simply inadequate to only provide stakeholders with accurate, credible, and timely information about the change and expect this information to reduce anxiety. Communication should be truthful, delivered properly and before the changes, and have deceptive information omitted. In turn, this communication appears to have significant effects on organizations experiencing the changes. Therefore, communication about change needs offer a realistic portrayal of the subsequent events (i.e. the whole story about the change) in order for it to be a match with later reality. In hindsight, employees judge issues of appropriate and effective communication when they compare the reality of the changes to the messages they received at the onset. Socialization literature suggests that realistic job previews are used to reduce overly optimistic expectations (Meglino, DeNisi, & Ravlin, 1993; Philips, 1998), and they also function to raise overly pessimistic expectations like those likely to occur with a large-scale implementation effort (e.g., Barber, 1998). Similar to realistic job previews, multifaceted messages serve two important functions; they provide employees with the necessary information to manage through the change, and they become the reference point by which organizational stakeholders judge the effectiveness of the communication efforts. Therefore, providing anything less than this kind of

information increases negative perceptions about the initial communication and, thus, creates problematic consequences for how employees judge the change effort and the implementers' communication efficacy. It also appears that messages need to maintain a sense of balance regarding the valence of the message to have a sense of believability.

Employees also seem to be able to make sense of negative information when encased in a full board view of the changes. Research on message valence has produced contradictory findings. While some research has suggested that change announcements be carefully crafted to prevent employees from experiencing painful information (Buono & Bowditch, 1989; Jemison & Sitkin, 1986a, 1986b; Marks & Mirvis, 1986; Pritchett, 1985; Schweiger, Ivancevich, & Power 1987), Pratt (2004) suggests that message credibility is enhanced when a moderate amount of negative information is communicated. Pratt further argued that two-sided messages (i.e., messages containing both positive and negative information about the referent such as a change) are perceived as significantly more effective than one-sided messages because of their ability to be perceived as realistic. He also suggests that balanced messages can be particularly persuasive in difficult situations. Change is arguably a difficult situation and a context in which the inclusion of some negatively valenced information is shown to have strong positive effects on how message receivers interpret and act upon the information that is presented. Therefore, the effects of multifaceted communication appear to provide salient support for the literature on message sidedness; in particular, it supports the view that a balanced message is capable of producing desirable outcomes during difficult or painful situations such as organizational change. In addition to the contribution to message

sidedness, this study offers some compelling support for change communication as it relates to the employee-employer psychological contract.

Psychological contracts are defined as “beliefs in paid-for-promises or reciprocal obligations” (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994, p. 246). They are subjective and reside in the eyes of the beholder. It is not unusual that parties are likely to possess different and unique beliefs about what each owes the other. These beliefs can arise from overt promises (e.g. bonus systems discussed in the recruitment process), interpretations of patterns of past exchange, vicarious learning (e.g. witnessing other employees' experiences), and through various factors that each party may take for granted (e.g. good faith or fairness, MacNeil, 1985). Notably, the psychological contract is distinct from expectations. In organizations, expectations refer simply to what the employee expects to receive from his or her employer (Wanous, 1977). The psychological contract, on the other hand, refers to the perceived *mutual obligations* that characterize the employee's relationship with his/her employer. The psychological contract, unlike expectations, entails a belief in what the employer is obliged to provide based on perceived promises of reciprocal exchange. In organizations, the psychological contract is inextricably tied to communication about the change. When implementers provide initial information about a change, it becomes, in essence, the psychological contract for that event (or events). Unless new information about change is provided, employees will continually reflect on the information initially provided, or the conditions of the initial contract, to ensure that the organization is upholding its promises.

Robinson, Kraatz, and Rousseau (1994) examined how psychological contracts

change over time. They found that during the first two years of employment, employees came to perceive that they owed less to their employer while their employers in turn owed them more. Study 2 not only supports this contention, but it also suggests that psychological contracts must also communicatively evolve over time. It also suggests that as the change is evolving and developing, contractual information that differs from the initial contract needs to be renegotiated to prevent negative outcomes of contract violation.

Violation of the psychological contract is distinct from unmet expectations and perceptions of inequity. Employees initially hold unrealistic expectations and when these expectations go unmet, employees may become less satisfied, perform less well, and become more likely to leave their employer (Wanous, Poland, Premack, & Davis, 1992). When a psychological contract is violated, the responses are likely to be more intense than in the case of unfulfilled expectations. The intensity of the reaction is attributable not only to unmet expectations of specific rewards or benefits but also to more general beliefs about respect for persons, codes of conduct, and other patterns of behavior associated with relationships (Rousseau, 1989). For example, a person may expect to be paid market wages in exchange for hard work and feel disappointed when this expectation isn't fulfilled. A person *promised* market wages in exchange for hard work that *does not receive* them feels wronged. Broken promises produce anger and erode trust in the relationship, and, thus, they are expected to have more significant repercussions than unmet expectations. Robison and Rousseau (1994) found that the occurrence of organizational employer-employee violations correlated positively with turnover and

negatively with trust, satisfaction and intentions to remain. Within a nine-month period, employees received in the upwards of eleven changes. In most recollected cases, and supported by the initial change rollout, employees were initially promised one or one layered change. Whether initially promised or continually contractually repaired, employees who believed they were initially in store for a number of changes reacted much more favorably about the change. Employees in hindsight are comparing the communication change contract against the reality of change. If different, employees are experiencing perceptions of violation this will, in turn, create potentially negative outcomes associated with change or organizational life in general (e.g., Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Change communication is a psychological contract continually in need of renegotiation; this is especially true in cases of complicated, multifaceted change.

#### General Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand initial communication messages in a multifaceted change environment and the impact of message selection on particular individual and organizational outcomes. Overall, this study began by identifying stakeholders' initial communication message experiences and then used the major message experiences to test for differences with helpful functional change outcomes. From there, the follow-up study provided greater evidence in support for giving employees broad and deep information about changes in order to create specific (and often organizationally desirable) outcomes of change. Employees across any one organization appeared to receive, or at the very least recalling, different initial implementation communication messages about the impending set of multiple changes.

In addition, these messages influenced how receivers perceive their situation. Moreover, the degree to which the messages employees recall receiving matched or did not match the change reality significantly affected the ways that receivers interpreted and reacted to the changes; such responses include their evaluations of implementer communication quality, their level of liking for the changes, their ability to successfully adjust to the uncertainty and changes, and their perceptions of the implementers and the organization to which they belong. We understand that people consider accurate but incomplete information about a future situation to be less capable of reducing uncertainty associated with change as well as to be deceptive. We also learn that individual adjustment increases when implementers give a balanced perspective that includes the whole story, not a truncated, protective message to its stakeholders. Over time, realistic and balanced portrayals better outcomes that may not be visibly present at the time of the announcement because the retroactive sense-making and comparisons have not been able to be assessed (e.g., Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991).

Organizational members retain information that is personally relevant to them better than they do abstract, general, or unfamiliar information (Klein, 1996; Pincus, 1986; Pincus et al., 1990). Nonetheless, change messages that appear to be inconsistent appear to be particularly problematic. It is this lack of fidelity between what is shared initially and what actually occurs that may be driving the effects found in this study. Implementers may have concerns about sharing the whole story. However, it does not appear to have a significant influence on increased uncertainty or stress as previous research has suggested (e.g., Hogan & Overmyer-Day, 1994). And, while some changes

cannot be revealed due to legal matters (i.e., a merger between two publicly owned companies), implementers may be concerned with this communication approach because it threatens management's ability to respond flexibly during a merger or acquisition process (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987) or it may change and be inaccurate at a later time (Ivancevich, Schweiger, & Power, 1987). However, the purpose of a multifaceted message is to provide employees with a comprehensive view of the change or changes that provides the most realistic portrayal of the future for the organization and them. This message can and should account for unanticipated effects of change. While Smeltzer (1991) suggests that key messages should be brief, simple, actionable, and have the ability to connect powerfully, Armenakis et al. (1999) suggest that the change message should encompass more information. These researchers argued that in order to be effective, the content of messages should focus on five factors: (a) making the case that change is needed; (b) demonstrating that the organization has the capability to successfully change; (c) convincing organizational members that it is in their best interests to change; (d) showing that those most affected by the change are supportive; and (e) establishing that the desired change is right for the focal organization. The data here suggest that the messages with the most comprehensive information—the multifaceted communication messages—were related to respondents who were the most satisfied with the changes, appraised communication quality significantly higher, and rated their affinity for the changes more favorably. In addition, respondents reporting receiving multiple and multifaceted messages trusted the organization more and coped more effectively than employees who reported receiving the other types of messages.



This study supports the contention that initial change messages are recalled differently across organizational stakeholders. It also suggests that there are significant differences between multifaceted messages and other message types in terms of how stakeholders perceive the changes. Further, their social constructions about change communication will influence attitudes and behaviors related to change(s). These social constructions appear to be the result of the ability of the message to fulfill necessary content components that provide a balanced and comprehensive view of forthcoming changes. Likewise, they appear to be a result of the discrepancy check between the initial message and the unfolding of the actual change events. It is suggested that comprehensive, balanced messages present a realistic view of a change and if there is consistency between the original message and the roll-out of the situation impact, hindsight and longer-term perceptions are significantly impacted. If the ultimate goal for enacting or theorizing about multiple or continuous change is organizational improvement, then the vital preparation step for achieving this goal lies therein with the messages management shares with employees about changes within the organization.

#### Limitations of the Project

While this study is produced within the organizational communication arena, a sub discipline of communication studies, it does take an interdisciplinary approach to change communication by reviewing literature and practices in fields ranging from organizational communication to organizational development, internal communication, organizational psychology and management. However, this research may ultimately be limited by the use of only one case to review the phenomena of multiple change

communication in an organization that has been experiencing enormous continuous change over the course of the past twelve to eighteen months. Eisenhardt (1989) argues that theory-building research is as close as possible to no theory under consideration and no hypotheses to test it (p. 536). Given the fact that this study only relied on the qualitative data to generate emergent initial internal communication messages about initial internal communication messages, this research may actually be potentially premature to theoretical conclusions. Therefore predicting the effect of initial implementation communication will require further research to understand this phenomenon across a broader population.

Another possible limitation in this study is that behaviors were assessed by self-reports and were not observed or documented in other ways. Some will argue that self-report data only captures philosophical views rather than actual behaviors. Others may suggest that self-report data may present social desirability concerns. With respect to social desirability, there may be an effect occurring with respondents who selected the more comprehensive message to also rate other outcomes more favorability to remain consistent with their perspective on the organization as well as how they organization may feel they would respond given the fact that they self-selected the best initial message. Congruent with case study methodology, multiple method were employed, including participant interviews, organizational questionnaire, ethnography as well as internal communication documents (e.g., newsletters, emails). However, cross comparisons between each of these data points were not comprehensively conducted limiting the ability to triangulate data therefore relying solely on the researcher for

interpretative analysis of the interviews and self-report data for the questionnaire.

Therefore, a more comprehensive approach that is more reliably aligned with case study method and enacting a critical triangulation process will ensure the most accurate depiction of the change communication situation occurring in this organization.

A third possible limitation to this study, and one connected to the limited methodology enactment, is the method variance associated with measuring data via a survey. Therefore, this study may be bounded by a limited sampling bias. While nearly three hundred members completed the survey ( $N = 292$ ), only two hundred and forty-four ( $N = 244$ ) were eligible to be included in the final analysis once new hires and partial completions were omitted. Considering that this organization employs over six hundred members, the usable response rate includes less than 50% of the total population. This sample most likely represents the perceptions of the entire population, but it may possibly be most indicative of those employees interested in participating in a project supported by upper management. In addition, a survey is a “special event in the ordinary life of the respondent” (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000, p. 614), and it may temporarily leave the respondent out of the day-to-day organizational life to reflect on that experience at only one point in time. As a result, an inflated, or deflated correlation may have been caused by the fact that some of the items measured both dependent and independent variables. Closely related to this, the fact that the independent variable was located at the beginning of the questionnaire prior to the dependent variables may have created a slight priming effect since respondents were able to see all the possible initial message responses listed in linear form. As a consideration of this, it may be more useful to consider utilizing a

random order generator for electronic questionnaires, different versions of the paper survey, or, perhaps, even alternate methodologies (e.g., experimental studies).

A fourth possible limitation to truly understanding initial multiple change messaging is that as a researcher, I am entering the scene a point that is likely convenient to my research timeline rather than a time that is the most optimal to studying the phenomena. While it may be argued that any place in time in the sequence of changes is helpful in understanding the process, it might be more salient to be able to be there a particular point in time (e.g., the very moment the announcement) or along the process (several points in time) in order to really capture the ongoing experiences of stakeholders. Interventions are processes (Beer & Walton, 1987) and we will continue to gather inconclusive data if we continue to neglect exploring this research as anything less than compound episodes of a long-term process. A likely response to this limitation is to be ready to enter a research site when the data to answer research questions can be optimized to include a longitudinal study to understand the ongoing process rather just a cross sectional approach to an interview data set and a questionnaire. Because this study is attempting to make conclusions about sequential, continuous change it is certainly best approached by an ongoing investigations rather than a one-stop retrospective glance. Longitudinal research will certainly provide a much clearer picture of the stream rather than a dip in the stream.

A final limitation involves the construction several specific scale construction. This organization notably experienced nine changes, some of which were large changes and others were sub changes or residual changes of other changes. The second part of the

instrument asked respondents to respond to questions about the comprehensive set of changes. The third part of the instrument asked respondents to respond to questions about specific changes. While all measures were found to be reliable (Cronbach's alpha ranging from .82 to .95), the measures for communication quality, emotional response (liking for change), and deceptive communication were the result of scales created from Part 2—questions about the changes in general. However, the scale for the ability to cope was actually developed by creating an average score for coping with each change and then summing the scores and taking the average of the sum scores. It is possible that when respondents are reacting to a wide-ranging set of changes, that their responses will be general and not specific to any one change and responses captured with the individual changes part may be more accurate to perceptions since there is a specific triggering prompt. As a result, it may be helpful to additionally include scales about communication quality, liking and deception to be included in the individual change sections for increased clarity of these variables and each change.

#### Directions for Future Research

Understanding the effect of initial implementation messages on individual behavior during ongoing change or multiple organization transformations can help advance research on employee reactions and engagement. Specifically, as it related to their satisfaction with changes, it can provide insight into job and retention efforts. This study has provided evidence to the fact that the initial change message regarding sequential implementation efforts matter in complex environments. Therefore, we need to know more about launching change information in ways that prepare organizational

members preventatively or allow for self-correcting. Conventional wisdom suggests we approach change dissemination from a Machiavellian perspective, one that predominantly gives shares information in a downward flow only. This unfortunately is not preparing employees for changes and seems to disallow for self-correction. The employees that received change messages well in advance and with appropriate levels of depth and breadth to the content responded much more favorably to the outcomes under study. And it this amount of information may have been what allowed employees to know when and how to respond to unknown or even unwelcome changes.

To achieve this understanding, the first recommendation for future research involves the employment of longitudinal studies. Intervention is a process—often a long-terms process and so much of the research overlooks time and is not sufficiently longitudinal (Beer & Walton, 1987). By assessing change events and their impact at only one nearly contemporaneous moment, research cannot discuss how permanent (or fleeting) the changes are. Different pre-test and post-test times are certain to support different conclusions, as would continuous observations and time sequenced interviewing efforts. Therefore, studies of one group or site over the duration of the organizational transformation are desperately needed, and a helpful place to start. Researching the employee audience prior to change announcements and then developing and executing a communication research plan based on that research will provide a fertile opportunity to survey and monitor employees throughout ongoing continuous multiple changes. In other words, studying the stream instead of the dip in the stream will tell us more about multiple transformational efforts. This study easily lends itself to the opportunity for such

a longitudinal design by administering the survey many different times to the same group of participants and expanding on both the quantitative and qualitative findings (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). Following real time studies of multiple change will allow for a way to understand when and in what ways shifts in understand change occur with multiple implementation efforts. In others words, a longitudinal examination will “detect the drift” that may be unavailable to find in cross sectional research. This line of research will certainly aid in understanding a fuller view of impact of communication occurring during continuous transformation efforts and will not only add to the body of literature on implementation communication, but can also provide additional avenues of research in social influence and collective sense making that may occur with members in organization or work groups as they are occurring.

A second and additionally productive extension to the findings in this study is to understand the driving forces in continuous change. These forces may be best explained by experimentally testing initial implementation messages. This will position to understand if the messages about upcoming changes are causing particular outcomes of multiple change or are the outcomes that members are experience (e.g., communication quality about, or satisfaction with, the changes) over time causing members to recall initial change messages in a particular way (e.g., a robust or lean message). As with this dissertation, this extension will continue to challenge the conventional wisdom on giving an employee base information just prior to a change or on a need to know basis and contribute to the organizational change communication literature and management communication base, but may also speak strongly to the socialization literature about

providing employees with a realistic change preview originally introduced by Schwiger and DeNisi (1991) regarding single change previews.

A third area of exploration is to extend the findings of this study by understanding if the construct of liking the change, changes, or having a personality construct that favors change in general is creating a moderating effect on any of the findings. For example, this study reports that multifaceted change message was, in each case the superior choice for introducing multiple changes, however, the variance in some of the dependent variables may be better accounted for if it could be determined if the respondent's disposition for change was interacting with outcome. Understating the role of liking change will provide a much more refined view of change message construction and if having stakeholders like change or if creating interest for the change in advance or along with the initial message increases outcome strength.

The last opportunity arising from this study involves an exploration into the relationship between time, communication, and the process of multiple implementation efforts. More specifically, data collected from this study reveal that the pace of the changes and the information about changes decreased in the frequency, quality and advancement of the messages as time evolved. In other words, in full consideration of the larger one-year implementation effort, the information about the first few stages was more helpful than information about later implementation stages. Members also suggest because the organization was already in a time of large changes, that it provided a prime or covert opportunity to insert more changes. Unpacking the interaction of time elements and the process of including more changes will allow for investigation into this area of



multiple implementation efforts. Research into this area may speak closely to literature on unplanned implementation efforts as well as possible inroads into change entrainment as it relates to change burnout. Each of these areas are just a few possible beginnings to continue research into multiple implementation efforts and add to our theoretical and practical understandings of an important and common occurring organizational event.

## Appendix A: Formal Change Memo Announcement

**To:** All FC Associates  
**Re:** Organization Announcement  
**Date:** May 2, 2006

ACME has decided to merge Eastern Company and Midwest Company into a single operating company. Both companies are very successful and the combination of the two will result in a more focused and competitive company.

**Eastern and Midwest** will be led by (Midwest CEO) **as Chief Executive Officer**. He will be responsible for leading the overall integration of the two companies, managing ongoing business activities through his executive management team and the continued development of innovative new products.

To maximize the marketplace potential of Eastern and Midwest, ACME is naming (Eastern CEO) **as President**. He will be responsible for leading the combined sales organizations, sales support and the activities of the combined bakery R&D and product development (applications) as well as all marketing functions for the combined entity.

The new company will be headquartered in Midwest City, where all back office support activities will reside. The combined Supply Chain organization will be led by Brian Smith, VP Operations, Midwest; Finance/IT by Michael Crossman, VP Finance, Midwest; and, Research & Development by Simon Davis, VP Technology, Midwest. Chris Coleman, VP Finance, Eastern, will assume new division-wide responsibilities as the VP Procurement.

The current Eastern and Midwest Sales organizations will not be affected by the merger, as well as the Eastern Plant manufacturing support services and Caravan Product Development Group, who will remain in Eastern City to provide the same level of customer support and service as experienced in the past.

As the transformation process unfolds, certain positions and individuals will be affected by the relocation of responsibilities. Although the exact timing has yet to be determined, appropriate arrangements and separation packages will be provided on an individual basis.

Company consolidation is a difficult process, especially since it impacts people who are loyal, hard-working and contribute to its success. However, by integrating Eastern's high-touch sales and service focus, with Midwest's excellence in manufacturing and R&D, ACME can offer products and services that are more closely aligned to the customers needs. The result is a focused organization with the ability to grow and prosper in a very competitive marketplace.

## Appendix B: Frequently Asked Questions Sheet

### **Eastern/Midwest Consolidation Q & A May 2, 2006**

#### **Question #1**

**Q. Why is ACME combining these companies?**

A. This initiative is directed at taking advantage of each company's strengths in order to make the combined organization an even more formidable force within the industry. In addition, it provides an opportunity to maximize sales & marketing and streamline administrative back-office processes while developing improved utilization of manufacturing facilities and sales organization capabilities aimed at improving profitability to ACME and its stakeholders.

#### **Question #2**

**Q. What does ACME expect to achieve from this consolidation?**

A. ACME has undertaken this initiative to become an even stronger and more valuable supplier to our customers in the fiercely competitive bakery ingredient and supply market. This will be accomplished by creating a more focused, stronger and efficient organization to more effectively compete in the markets we serve while providing future growth and return to ACME stakeholders.

#### **Question #3**

**Q. Are other ACME organizations being affected by this initiative?**

A. This action is a continuation of the ACME BSNA strategy to take advantage of operating company strengths and opportunities to synergize for efficiency and reduced costs. It supports the recent consolidation of the Company 1 bakery supply business units and the integration of Company 2, Company 3 and Company 4.

#### **Question #4**

**Q. What will happen with the Eastern and Midwest brands?**

A. Although the companies will be merged together and operate under a new name, in order to maintain and grow our business, we will retain the full existing product and brand assortment from both companies.

#### **Question #5**

**Q. When will Eastern and Midwest actually be merged into the new combined company?**

A. Functional teams between the two companies will be formed immediately to begin the steps necessary to consolidate the various business processes. Specific timing will be closely dependent on the integration of the Information Systems, but it is anticipated the integration will be completed and fully implemented by October 2006.

However, should any changes occur which may require modifying transition and completion dates everyone will be given notice.

**Question #6**

**Q. Why was Midwest City chosen for the headquarters for the consolidated company?**

A. Midwest City was selected as the headquarters location for the combined company since many of the requisite back-office services are already in place (BPCS Enterprise Software System and expertise; Research and Development laboratory and personnel; Manufacturing and Engineering support services). Also, its central location to customers and suppliers contributed to the decision to consolidate in the Midwest City location.

**Question #7**

**Q. What will become of the current offices and manufacturing plants?**

A. By October 2006, most IT, Customer Service, back-office finance and administrative activities will be consolidated into the offices in Midwest City. The Eastern Product Development Group will remain at the Eastern City manufacturing facility along with the Marketing team. Currently there are no plans to close any of the existing manufacturing facilities. However, opportunities to enhance and maximize manufacturing capabilities in the new organization will be initiated.

**Question #8**

**Q. How will we integrate our communication and information systems since they are different?**

A. Plans are currently being prepared by the IT department transition teams to insure a successful integration of Eastern into the Midwest BPCS Enterprise Software System. The Midwest BPCS-based operating procedures will be used and adopted by the newly integrated company as the standard.

**Question #9**

**Q. Will there be a reduction in the workforce? How many will be affected?**

A. There will be reductions in the workforce in activities that will be consolidated into the Midwest offices in Midwest City as described above. A complete and detailed explanation will be given to each person whose position is being affected.

**Question #10**

**Q. What will the Company provide for the exiting employees?**

A. A comprehensive separation plan has been developed for those individuals who will no longer have a position when the consolidation is complete, including career transition services to help prepare for a successful change to a new career. Again, a complete and detailed explanation will be given to each individual who is affected by this consolidation.

**Question #11**

**Q. Are there plans to add capacity or make investments in the current plants?**

A. The new company Operations team will begin analyzing how to maximize manufacturing capacity in the current environment in order to make recommendations for how to best meet our production requirements.

**Question #12**

**Q. What will happen to my pay and benefits?**

A. The company will continue to maintain a fair and comprehensive salary and benefit program consistent with the policies and procedures of ACME Bakery Supplies North America. Since all BSNA operating companies belong to the ACME America Group Benefit Program and Retirement Savings and Profit Sharing Plan, the benefits are essentially identical. Also, there will be no adverse impact on salary adjustments as a direct result of this consolidation.

**Question #13**

**Q. Who will my paycheck come from and will I still be able to get direct deposit?**

A. Through the course of 2006, all employees will become associates of the new Eastern and Midwest Company (known as Food Company). However, direct deposit and other payroll procedures will remain generally the same.

**Question #14**

**Q. Will we be changing our Human Resource policies and procedures?**

A. Other non-health and welfare benefits and personnel policies will be harmonized with an effort to keep all employees affected by this change substantially whole. Using the current Eastern and Midwest policies and procedures as a guideline, wherever practicable, we will try to create a common set of policies and procedures to maintain equity and consistency across the new organization. We expect each person to have an open mind and to give their best effort to adapt to any new or different approaches in policy.

## Appendix C: Timeline of Changes

May 2006	Formal change announcement is distributed. New Executive team is announced. Downsizing begins immediately.
July 2006	Midwest and Eastern Company customer and clients are notified of upcoming merger. New company name (FC) is announced. Updates on headquarters renovations are shared. Organizational restructuring begins.
October 2006	New corporate headquarters is completed. Limited departments/personnel begin moving into new space. New technology is launched. Phased downsizing ends.
December 2006	Remaining management, research and back office departments move into new corporate center.
January 2006	Merger becomes official and an announcement is publicly released. Midwest CEO resigns as FC CEO. Eastern's CEO is named as new CEO and President.
February 2006	Acquisition is announced and immediately effective. New policies and procedures are distributed and enforcement begins. Technology is integrated and implementation efforts slow.
July 2007	Several departments are re-structured.

## Appendix D: Memo Announcing Communication Project

March 5, 2007

TO: All FC Employees

As you are aware, we have had quite a year of changes at Food Company. As part of our efforts to better understand how this change process is working and how all of you are responding to it, we have enlisted the help of a communication researcher, Nicole Laster. Nicole is a former employee and is also a graduate student at The University of Texas in Austin. Currently, she is working on her dissertation concerning what communication is like in organizations as they experience mergers.

She'll be observing some of our meetings, talking with employees, and conducting some focus groups. She also will be disseminating a questionnaire in the upcoming weeks. Please note that her report to me will include the general responses across employees and will not identify anyone's individual responses. We would greatly appreciate your participation in Nicole's interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. The goal of her project is to understand communication effectiveness during these kinds of organizational events as well as provide an opportunity for us to learn how best to improve current processes.

This information will provide us with useful feedback about our communication processes and help guide decision-making. The more comprehensive the feedback gathered through this project, the better information we will have on which to base decisions. You will be getting more details soon about how to participate in the various feedback channels Nicole will be creating for us.

Sincerely,

CEO, President

## Appendix E: Interview Guide

1. How long have you worked for this company (or previous company before the merge)?
2. What area or department do you work? Can you tell me what you do for this company (today)?
3. Prior to the merger, did you hold other role or was your job different?
  - a. Has your role changed in any way since the merger? In what ways has it your job or communication changed since the merger?
  - b. Are you more/less satisfied? Same?
4. How did you find out about the merger? How was it communicated to you? Do you remember when and where you first found out that your company would be merging with (Eastern/Midwest)?
5. And what was your initial impression of this decision? What did other people think about it?
6. What do you think Food Company (as an entire organization) did well in the integration?
7. Did your department manage the merger any differently than overall management? How do you think this was similar or different to the way that other departments were handling the changes?
8. In what ways did the organization prepare you for the merger prior to it happening? What have they done since the official merge to help with the transition?
9. What other kinds of changes were shared with you other than the merger?
  - a. Were your expectations violated?
  - b. How were additional changes?
10. What has worked well with the merge? What didn't work well with the merge?
11. What do you think about the other changes – the changes that occurred after the merger, for example, the new CEO, restructuring changes, or new policies or procedures?
12. Do people make any kind of distinctions between original companies?
13. What do you think about the way this organization communicates?
  - a. What do you think about the communication here?
  - b. Formal communication? Informal Communication?
14. Is there anything you would like to add about the changes that have occurred?

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<sup>i</sup> This data was extracted from two consulting groups (The Gartner Group and The Standish Group) noted in Knodel (2004) but were un-cited in his references.



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## Vita

Nicole M. Laster earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies from The University of Kansas in 1991, a Master's of Arts in Communication Studies from Kansas State University in 1998, and a PhD in Organizational Communication from The University of Texas at Austin in 2008. Prior to receiving a PhD, Nicole taught as a full time Instructor for Clemson University for two years (1998-2000) and Kansas State University for one year (2000-2001). In addition, Nicole has over 8 years of full time organizational/industry experience spanning the Marketing, Public Relations and Training/Development sectors.

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