CREATING AND SUSTAINING A CULTURE OF CIVILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION DURING TIMES OF RAPID ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY

by

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(Under the Direction of Aliki Nicolaides)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research study was to explore through the process of first-person inquiry, how college and university faculty can co-inquire into the process of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change. The study was guided by two research questions, which were: (1) How can faculty and administrators establish holding spaces for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change? and (2) What organizational or systems conditions support or inhibit faculty and administrators in creating and sustaining a culture of civility in a rapidly changing institution of higher education?

Qualitative research methods consisting of observations of meetings, researcher memos, and interviews for data collection and analysis took place over a period of two years. Key themes emerged speaking to (1) faculty members searching for holding spaces in order to foster a sense of connection, and (2) faculty members searching for transparency in order to foster a sense of consideration. In addition, the study further enhances our understanding of Theory U. By examining the inverted U process or “the dark side” of the U, we can investigate the implications for the resistance to organizational change within an unsafe system from the

perspective of absencing rather than presencing. The results of this study also increase our understanding and practice of organizational change regarding the developmental capacity of facilitation in the sense of having clarity of purpose, asking the right questions, and adapting to individual, group, and systemic challenges that constrain change.

INDEX WORDS: Action Research, Civility in Higher Education, First-Person Inquiry, Theory U, The Inverted U, “The Dark Side” of the U, Facilitation, Incivility, Bullying, Workplace Aggression

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my major professor, friend, advisor, and mentor Dr. Aliki Nicolaides without whom this study would never have come into being. Over the last seven years of my doctoral journey, Dr. Nicolaides has inspired and motivated me in so many ways. Through her patience and encouragement, she has taught me to become more aware of and reflective about my own developmental capacity as a scholar, practitioner, and facilitator of organizational change. Her confidence and assertiveness have inspired me to take up and assert my own voice, to confront my doubts, fears, and insecurities, to be willing to be made uncomfortable in the process of learning, to confront the messiness that change requires, and to push myself in tough situations where I once would have backed down. While I have learned to become more confident as a scholar, I have also learned to become more humble about my learning and more reflective not only on action, but in action. I have discovered the importance of not needing to have all the answers, putting aside what I think I know, and being open to the future emerging around me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For more than the last two decades, a considerable amount of research has focused on the issue of incivility in the higher education classroom. Since educators must successfully navigate the challenges of effective classroom management, the issue of incivility in higher education has garnered significant interest and attention (Boice, 2000; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Feldmann, 2001; Frey-Knepp, 2012; Plax & Kearney, 1990; Ward & Yates, 2014). Feldmann (2001) explains incivility in the classroom as "any action that interferes with a harmonious and cooperative learning atmosphere in the classroom" (p. 137). Nevertheless, if we agree incivility is a problem in higher education, can we now redirect our attention toward discovering solutions that benefit not only individuals, but the very systems within which the problem takes place?

By concentrating specifically on interactions between faculty and students within the higher education classroom, Feldmann's (2001) definition focuses on incivility at the individual level within the particular context of the classroom. However, in order to move beyond studying the problem of incivility on the individual level, we must refocus our efforts toward addressing the issue by concentrating on the organizational systems in which incivility occurs. While realistically we can never totally eliminate the existence of incivility, we can nonetheless focus our attention on creating conditions within the system of higher education that encourage cultures of civility which render acts of incivility less potent.

Through refocusing our research attention toward inquiry on creating conditions for cultures of civility within the context of higher education, we can engage collaboratively in

creating systemic change for civility so that incivility does not become the fall back expression of disagreement, privilege, power, or exclusion within academia. Gilroy (2008) explains how such a model of civility presents the expectation "that the role models for civility begin at the top with college trustees and administrators charged with fostering civil behavior through leadership" (p. 39). Hence, a culture of civility transcends individual interactions between faculty and students within the classroom and extends to all levels of the organization as a system. The remainder of this chapter details the identification of the research issue, the purpose and research questions, the conceptual framework of the study, and significance of the results.

Issue Identification

If higher education serves as a community fostering engagement and democratic participation in the public sphere, then the topic of civility is one that needs to be examined more closely within this context. More specifically, the question becomes focused on how we can engage collaboratively toward bridging the notion of civility from the individual level to the systems level within the context of higher education. Much like Carter's (1998) emphasis on the importance of civility and community, Fritz (2013) contends civility is involved in the very role of citizenship and the very act of being a citizen involves the moral obligation of taking on the role of a "social actor responsible for the welfare of the larger society" (p. 64). She explains the strength of the public sphere "depends upon the quality of interaction among members of society, which serves as a marker of the extent to which social actors are committed to the cooperative project of civic life…within which decisions affecting the larger community are made" (p. 64). Therefore, if higher education serves as a community where critical thinking and learning is valued, and if such learning is based on the quality of the interaction of those who comprise that community, then it becomes imperative for scholars and practitioners of learning

and organizational change to work collaboratively in creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education not just in the classroom, but systemically so as to pervade all levels of the institution and create conditions that contribute to the well-being of all who make up the institution.

Framing the Issue

In my own experience in higher education, I have found discussing the issue of civility in academia can be a challenging prospect. Faculty members seem more willing to contextualize the issue and discuss civility in the classroom where they often perceive students as being the instigators of negative behavior. However, they are very reluctant to talk about their own civility behaviors or the behaviors of their colleagues. For example, in some of my initial conversations with colleagues inquiring if they wanted to join the civility study, one person feared such a discussion of civility would disrupt the progress her colleagues had made toward becoming a more civil and cohesive department. Another pointed out while his colleagues had at one time engaged in "bullying" types of behavior, they had since worked beyond such issues and talking about civility at that point would be unnecessary and counterproductive.

Consequently, in order to study the phenomenon of civility, one has to take into consideration how to frame the issue so as to garner support and willingness to engage in the dialogue. Based on what I learned from talking with colleagues, I have found the topic is less threatening when it is framed from a more positive perspective of civility rather than from the negative approach of incivility. The reluctance to talk about the issue is troublesome for me as I have experienced the phenomenon of incivility firsthand in my interactions with faculty members and administrators within the context of higher education. As a result, I have often felt frustrated in the futility of my attempts to adequately address and make meaning of these

experiences. This frustration has led me to question my own self-efficacy as an educator, scholar, colleague, and even at times, worth as a human being deserving kindness and respect.

Keashly and Neuman (2010) pose the question of how negative interpersonal communication behaviors could take place in the very places of higher learning claiming to value such ideas as intellectual study, spirited debate, critical thinking, and reason. They argue the very characteristics defining academia such as individual autonomy, tenure, collegiality, and academic freedom also contribute to what seems to be a contradiction of this culture. Furthermore, Keashly and Neuman (2010) explain while research has focused on aggression in the workplace, the phenomenon of incivility and bullying in academic institutions of higher education has often been overlooked. These authors emphasize how "academic settings are worthy and in need of concerted attention by researchers in workplace aggression and bullying" (p. 49). Clearly, the problem of incivility within academic contexts has been recognized and those of us who have experienced the phenomenon are not alone.

In addition, while we often associate the context of higher education with learning and accomplishing educational goals, it is also a workplace. Fritz (2013) states, "In the workplace, treating others with civility creates a constructive, humane environment that makes the context of work functional and even enjoyable" (p. 3). Keashly and Neuman (2010) point out while bullying in the workplace is not unique to higher education, "the academy represents a somewhat unique context in which bullying may thrive" (p. 54). As the results of the current study suggest, institutions of higher education are indeed workplaces characterized by hierarchical structures where there may be an uneven application of civility, privilege, and diversity. Moreover, the leadership styles of many administrators may reflect the chilling effects of a culture of fear and intimidation rather than a culture of civility this study is attempting to investigate. Hence, the

need for continued research exploring the phenomenon of civility in higher education is underscored to an even greater extent.

My doctoral journey has provided me with numerous opportunities to reflect on my experiences. Confronting my encounters with the phenomenon of incivility and has also increased my willingness to discuss my experiences with others. In doing so, I have come to realize that I am not alone in grappling with the problem. By discussing the issue with colleagues over the course of my research, I learned my experiences with incivility are not unique and other faculty members have experienced this phenomenon. Moreover, they also expressed their interest in further exploring how to render incivility less accepted by creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education.

The level of interest and enthusiasm expressed by my colleagues led me to further reflect on what faculty can do collaboratively to move beyond just talking about the problem of incivility and focusing instead on how to create conditions where civility becomes the norm by which we interact with each other across departmental, college, and institutional levels of institutions of higher education. This study reflects an attempt to begin an open and honest dialogue through first-person and second-person inquiry to co-inquire more deeply into the phenomenon. However, the results of the study also reveal the difficulties facilitators of change face on individual and systemic levels when attempting effect change through the process of action research. If anything, as I discuss through the process of first-person inquiry in Chapter 4, this study illustrates what can be thought of as a failed attempt at changing the system. Upon reflection, the nature of this failure can be attributed to my own limitations as a first-time facilitator engaging in insider action research constrained within an unsafe system characterized by a culture of fear and intimidation rather than a culture of civility.

Given such a caveat, this study also has transferable implications for faculty members and administrators interested in using action research to co-inquire into the process of how to create and sustain cultures of civility in the context of higher education; especially during times of rapid change and uncertainty. By examining the impact of change on civility, this study addresses how educators can more effectively negotiate the complexity involved in adapting to the challenges brought about by unexpected and rapid institutional change. By employing the expression "culture of civility" in this research, the term "culture" is operationalized using Schein's (1990) definition consisting of

> A pattern of basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore is taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 111)

As was apparent in the current study, and as Schein (1990) points out, the consolidation of two different institutions of higher education resulted in numerous issues related to cultural compatibility that were either not brought up or not worked out until after the merger had already occurred. In addition, and as is often the case when a consolidation or merger of two organizations takes place, conflict often arises due to a lack of consensus between stakeholders on their underlying and often taken for granted assumptions regarding the traditions, values, and behaviors of the organization. Moreover, in the current study, the lack of a common culture and perceived disregard by administrators for input from key stakeholders contributed to considerable ambiguity regarding the mission and identity of the new institution combined with significant uncertainty and fear among organizational members in expressing their ideas as well as concerns about moving forward.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this action research study was to explore how college and university faculty can co-inquire into the process of creating and maintaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change. The action research team in this study was comprised of twelve faculty members who, over a period of two years, investigated the three research questions that guided this inquiry. By assembling an action research team, I was able to work collaboratively with my colleagues as an insider action researcher in co-inquiring more deeply into an issue that was of mutual interest and concern. As Coghlan and Brannick (2010) point out, unlike traditional research where participants are the objects under study, action research involves the active collaboration between the researcher and participants within the system being studied.

The three research questions driving this study were as follows: (1) How can faculty and administrators establish holding spaces for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change? (2) How does an appreciative inquiry approach to action research support our understanding of creating conditions for faculty and administrators to co-inquire into the process of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education? and (3) What organizational or systems conditions support or inhibit faculty and administrators in creating a culture of civility in a rapidly changing institution of higher education? Maxwell (2005) recommends "well-constructed, focused questions are generally the *result* of an interactive design process, rather than being the starting point for developing a design" (p. 66). Thus, as I discuss in Chapter 3, the research questions were revised over the course of the study to more accurately reflect the research topic and context under investigation in order to better guide the process of inquiry.

Conceptual Framework

An understanding of the conditions creating cultures of civility must also be situated within a conceptual framework serving to guide this research. This study utilized action research methodology. According to Stringer (2007), the goal of action research is the collaborative co-inquiry of a problem with systematic action by key stakeholders in an attempt to address the problem. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) describe action research as a collaborative, democratic, and cyclical process in that organizational members actively engage in the research process through the following steps: (1) pre-step, (2) constructing, (3) planning action, (4) taking action, and (5) evaluating action that leads to (6) further planning, action, and evaluation. Through this iterative Lewinian process of planning, action, and reflection, action research involves research *with* rather than simply *on* participants. Consequently, organizational members serve as key stakeholders who become part of an action research team co-inquiring into problem-solving and enacting change rather than only serving as subjects in a study.

Appreciative Inquiry

Since the major focus of this study examines how faculty and administrators can co-inquire into the process of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education, my rationale for selecting appreciative inquiry as the particular action research method by which to provide structure around AR team meetings and to engage participants in discussion was the emphasis it places in enacting organizational change by focusing on organizational strengths rather than deficiencies. By emphasizing what the organization does well, change can come about by building upon and improving that strength.

In addition to the emphasis appreciative inquiry places on discovering and building upon organizational strengths, the method also stresses the importance of communication,

collaboration, and discourse as a means for engaging stakeholders to work together in generating ideas for organizational change. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) describe eight principles upon which appreciative inquiry is grounded. Upon close examination, the common theme emerging from each of these principles focuses on the significant role communication, more specifically, discourse plays in social interaction. By actively participating in such communication techniques as interviewing, story-telling, questioning, imagining, and discussing, participants can create together conditions for wholeness, learning, and change to emerge as they work collaboratively through the different phases of appreciative inquiry consisting of (1) discovery, (2) dream, (3) design, and (4) destiny. In describing the importance of facilitation in appreciative inquiry, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) point out how "the questions you ask as a facilitator will determine what the groups discuss and create as their future" (p. 189). Thus, appreciative inquiry challenges facilitators to listen deeply and react in the moment to what stakeholders are discussing. Facilitators must also be mindful of shifts occurring within the group suggesting a readiness to move on to another phase of appreciative inquiry or to remain in a current phase.

Moreover, in returning to the process of framing the research topic so as to generate interest and participation rather than trepidation, emphasizing the positive aspect of exploring civility rather than the negative approach of examining incivility exerted a tremendous influence in the degree to which participants decided whether or not to engage in the research study. Torbert (2004) explains framing an issue as communicating your purpose and putting "your perspective as well as your understanding of the others' perspectives on the table for examination" (p. 28). In talking with colleagues, I discovered perspective taking is essential when studying a research topic that is often a sensitive issue to many people. No one really

wants to admit to being on the sending or receiving end of incivility. Thus, a key takeaway from this study is the topic of civility in higher education is much less threatening when it is framed from a more positive perspective rather than the negative approach of discussing incivility. The study also has significant implications for how to facilitate groups using appreciative inquiry. Through the process of first-person inquiry, I have come to realize how my own attempts at understanding and applying appreciative inquiry as a novice facilitator resulted in my over emphasizing the need for my team to discover the positive core of the institution at the expense of asking them to examine instances of civility. As a facilitator, my lack of specificity and focus on the research goals of the study no doubt contributed to the team's confusion and inability to move beyond the discovery stage of appreciative inquiry.

Theory U

According to Scharmer (2009, 2011) and Scharmer and Kaufer (2013), Theory U provides a methodology for leadership and organization change from the perspective that agents of change must let go of pre-conceived notions and ways of thinking about the past so as to allow the future to emerge. One way of understanding Theory U is that it functions as a phenomenon allowing for a deeper level of awareness to take place so as to allow people and organizations to bring something new into reality. Theory U also serves as a framework that provides change agents with a language to discuss deeper levels of experience usually not discussed in organizations. In addition, Theory U performs as a methodology that helps individuals and organizations more effectively operate from a deeper space (Scharmer, 2011).

Scharmer (2009) explains when individuals and organizations face challenges, they often resort downloading or seeking quick fix solutions based on what worked for them in the past. However, the problem with downloading from the past is that solutions that worked previously

may no longer be effective to adequately address the complexity of contemporary challenges faced by most organizations. Instead of focusing on the past, Scharmer (2009) advocates learning from the future as it emerges; which he describes as presencing. Presencing involves operating from a deeper space of learning that, if permitted to emerge, holds untapped potential for leaders, stakeholders, and organizations.

In moving toward presencing, individuals and organizations must first learn to resist the urge to react to change by implementing quick fixes or redesigning policies that do little to change the way organizational members think. Instead, individuals and organizations must respond to change by reframing how they think about and perceive situations. Of particular interest in the current study and its implications for understanding the complexity of organizational change was the exploration of downloading leading to what Scharmer (2009) describes as the organizational pathology of absencing or "the dark side" of the inverted U.

Significance

Around the time I was beginning my doctoral journey in May 2010, Levine (2010) notes President Barack Obama addressed students graduating from the University of Michigan and commented, "'The…way to keep our democracy healthy is to maintain a basic level of civility in our public discourse'" (p. 11). Levine (2010) also describes how more than a decade earlier, President Bill Clinton, in his 1997 inaugural address appealed to the nation for "'the politics of reconciliation'" (p. 11). More recently, Hillary Clinton, speaking on October 21, 2016 at the annual Al Smith charity dinner in New York, addressed the subject of civility by pointing out the need to "get better at finding ways to disagree on matters of policy while agreeing on questions of decency and civility" (para. 52). However, as I write this chapter in the fall of 2016, political discourse has changed significantly and is characterized by blatant incivility and overt disdain by

some of “political correctness.” As First Lady Michelle Obama stated during her speech at the 2016 Democratic National Convention, “When they go low, we go high!” (para. 8). As this comment illustrates, if the political discourse we are bombarded with on a daily basis by the media teaches us anything, it is the time is ripe and the issue is especially relevant for scholars and practitioners to focus their attention toward studying how to create and sustain cultures of civility. While realistically can never totally replace incivility, can nonetheless attempt to make incivility less of a potent force in organizations in general and institutions of higher education in particular.

Because higher education can be thought of as a community where faculty and students interact to inquire and develop critical awareness of different viewpoints, developing competence in learning how to disagree without necessarily being disagreeable despite differences is an essential element in developing a culture of civility in this context. As the results of this study suggest, civility involves the components of respect and listening. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) point out “the form of knowledge that action research aims to produce is practical knowing, the knowing that shapes the quality of your moment-to-moment action” (p. 36). While learning may challenge our existing ways of thinking and meaning-making, we as learners must first be willing to be disturbed. Moreover, as Connelly (2009) asserts, since higher education represents a microcosm of our larger society, it is the task or challenge of colleges and universities to take on the responsibility for raising civility awareness among both faculty and students. In addition, Levine (2010) contends “we need more studies of the processes and conditions that promote civility and the effects of civility on other aspects of democratic participation” (p. 15). Thus, a significant contribution made by this action research study is to directly and actively co-inquire with faculty and administrators into the process of how to systemically address the issue by

creating and sustaining a culture of civility in the context of higher education. Fritz (2013) explains civility involves communication competence in terms of understanding the context and one's role within that context, establishing appropriate communication goals, and generating messages to effectively achieve those goals while also operating according to one's role within the constraints of the setting. Therefore, institutions of higher education tasked with teaching civility must first serve as models by appropriately and effectively exemplifying the very behaviors and skills they are attempting to instill and also expect in others.

In addition to the exploration of civility in higher education, this study also contributes to our scholarship and practice by examining appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) as an action research method useful in providing facilitators of change with a structure for getting people to begin talking to each other in an attempt to create conditions having the potential to bring about positive change in organizations. However, while the focus of appreciative inquiry is on discovering and building on the positive, not all organizational change is positive and the results of this research suggest that despite the best efforts of change agents attempting to facilitate groups to navigate the process of appreciative inquiry, not all groups are ready to move through the different phases. As was the case with the action research team participating in this study, many groups get stuck at one phase and find they are unable to move forward. Of course, the inability of a group to move forward or to identify the positive core of an organization is in and of itself a rich source of data that may signal the existence of other issues taking place requiring attention. Consequently, this study contributes significantly to our understanding of organizational change during times of rapid growth characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity and how such uncertainty contributes to the inability of stakeholders to connect to the positives and move forward. If the results of this research are typical, then

appreciative inquiry seems to work best in established organizations where there is a clear sense among stakeholders of its positive core and how, through effective facilitation, they can build on that which is positive. However, facilitators must be clear about what they want the group to achieve and pose questions that help move the group forward so as to avoid confusion.

This study suggests stakeholders and organizations undergoing rapid, unplanned change are often faced with the uncertainty of not really knowing their identity and are searching for answers. As a result of their quest for identity, not all groups are ready to consider what they do well when they do not yet have a firm grasp on what their purpose is as an organization. It is also difficult for stakeholders to focus on the positive when there is considerable negativity taking place as a result of change. A takeaway from this study for facilitators to keep in mind is the importance of addressing the negativity by creating spaces for stakeholders to establish connections, talk about what they are feeling and, as recommended by Bright (2009), use appreciative inquiry to a method by which to explore how some positive outcome can emerge even from a negative situation for both them and the organization.

The current study also contributes to our knowledge and understanding of Theory U (Scharmer, 2009) as a theory of organizational change. A review of the literature (Chlopczik, 2014; Gibbs, 2013; Pillay, 2014; Reams, 2007), which I will examine in greater detail in Chapter 2, indicates a research interest in exploring Theory U from the positive perspective of individuals and organizations adopting a more progressive approach to engaging in change by actively and enthusiastically moving collectively toward presencing and embracing the possibilities of the future as it emerges. Cox (2014) maintains the presencing side of Theory U has been more fully developed than the absencing side. As the results of the current study indicate, not all organizations embrace positive change efforts that move them toward the future.

Instead, some organizations follow a quite different path by resisting change and getting stuck in dysfunctional patterns preventing them from moving forward. Scharmer (2009) explains presencing as an openness and willingness of organizations for moving toward the future. On the other hand, he also describes absencing as the opposite of presencing. Absencing involves resistance to moving toward the future by getting stuck in downloading the past. Hence, a major contribution made by the current study is it addresses what seems to be a gap in the literature by examining organizational change from the perspective of absencing and the inverted U rather than presencing. The results of the current study illustrate the pattern of absencing was taking place at the institution under investigation. Therefore, this study further contributes to our understanding of Theory U by examining how following the path of the inverted U results in organizations moving toward absencing rather than presencing and the effects the inverted U has on implementing positive change efforts.

Moreover, this study has important implications for our understanding of conducting action research in organizations. Attempting organizational change is often a difficult process because individuals and organizations often find themselves deeply entrenched in the comfort of the status quo and the possible constraints of the organization's culture. Readiness for change is influenced by the existence of both individual and systemic conditions that can combine to foster or interfere with change. In the roles of facilitators and organizational stakeholders, we must recognize that sometimes despite our best efforts as change agents, the resistance to change we face from within ourselves as well as from the system itself is often a challenging barrier to overcome. As individuals, we may experience a pull towards reticence around taking action. We may even begin to replicate the very systemic patterns we espouse to change. After all, the process of change is difficult and we try to avoid putting ourselves in situations where we feel

vulnerable, afraid, and uncertain. At the same time, the system feeds the pull towards inaction and encourages maintaining the status quo. I will return to these ideas in Chapter 4 by discussing my own reticence toward action. In the next chapter, I examine the literature surrounding the areas of civility in higher education, appreciative inquiry, and Theory U that serve as the conceptual framework for this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the literature providing the conceptual foundation supporting the research topic of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education. The literature review involved the examination of books and articles from scholarly and professional journals obtained from searching databases such as EBSCO, ERIC, Galileo, Dissertation Abstracts, ProQuest, Google, and Google Scholar. This study is based on the scholarly and professional literature in three areas: (1) civility in higher education, (2) appreciative inquiry (AI), and (3) Theory U.

Civility in Higher Education

Ward and Yates (2014) define civility, more specifically civility in the context of higher education, as involving "respect for one another, tolerance of ideas and persons, good manners, and even the Golden Rule" (p. 165). Fritz (2013) describes civility as "a communicative virtue that protects and promotes respect of human beings and supports the various social contexts within which human lives find meaning and significance" (p. 3). She contends, "Workplaces that encourage civil interaction among employees reap the benefits of increased employee satisfaction and productivity and decreased personal and organizational harms associated with incivility" (p. 3). Hayden (2010) defines civility as involving more than just politeness or courtesy toward one another. He argues that civility "focuses on civic responsibility and forging a common good" (p. 20). The notion of "forging a common good" implies people working together collaboratively and taking action in order to achieve some common or social goal.

Hence, each of these definitions examines civility from the perspective of people interacting competently individually and collectively within a community in order to achieve their objectives.

Hayden (2010) also argues civility is an "essential student competency for living and engaging with our deepest differences" (p. 20). He states, "If we as campus leaders are to educate students to participate as citizens in a democracy, we must explore not only fundamental differences on the basis of religion and ideology, but also our models of engagement" (pp. 19-20). This call for examining our models of engagement encourages us as scholars and practitioners of adult learning to actively participate in discourse on the topic of civility in higher education. In essence, despite our differences, we must show a respect for and a commitment to creating conditions that encourage freedom of expression and reasoned engagement. Moreover, as Sandberg (2012) suggests, such collaborative discourse can also create opportunities for greater understanding and goal achievement.

Heron and Reason (1997) point out engaging collaboratively "roots the individual within a community of peers, offering basic support and the creative and corrective feedback of other views and possibilities" (p. 287). When people reach understanding and agreement, they are implying that the views expressed have some degree of validity. In terms of understanding this process as applied to civility, the concept of validity implies a confirmation of another person's views as well as respect for and acknowledgement of that person's right to express his or her views. Likewise, if the purpose of communication is, as Kingwell (1995) suggests, an "orientation toward mutual understanding" (p. 152), then our attempts at creating a culture of civility in higher education must also consider the conditions under which mutual understanding and respect for different perspectives can take place.

Carter (1998) describes civility as people "setting aside their own needs and desires for the sake of living in society with others" (p. 4). On the other hand, Carter discusses incivility as a breakdown in the social connection and mutual cooperation people need in order to maintain a shared sense of community. Therefore, civility involves some level of personal sacrifice and consideration as we navigate the journey of living and working with others so as to make that journey more tolerable. Carter (1998) also contends we have in some way lost the willingness to sacrifice and care about the needs of others. With our preoccupation of our own individual needs, we tend to view others as obstacles or competitors rather than fellow passengers on the metaphorical journey on which we all are travelling. The pervasive focus on the needs of the individual over the community might also explain the tendency for incivility rather than civility to occur in our ways of thinking and being in the world. An examination of social media, especially in terms of contemporary political discourse, certainly confirms the notion of extreme preoccupation with all things related to self-interest at the expense of civility.

Connelly (2009) maintains civility is a virtue centered on "the sincere belief in the value of living as part of a diverse community and the conviction that the goal of living successfully in each community calls us to serve the common good, not just function out of self-interest" (p. 52). Therefore, in examining the issue of civility within the context of higher education, it becomes important to consider what conditions are necessary within the system of higher education for civility to exist and what, if any, individual, collective, or system sacrifices are required. In addition, Connelly (2009) contends since higher education represents a microcosm of our overall society, "Colleges and universities should assume responsibility for raising civility awareness in the students they touch" (p. 54). If civility involves working together to forge some type of common good, then the process of creating a culture of civility within the context of higher

education also involves the input of faculty members, staff, and administrators engaging collaboratively in the process of inquiry to achieve such ends. Gilroy (2008) explains how such a systemic model of civility presents the expectation "that the role models for civility begin at the top with college trustees and administrators charged with fostering civil behavior through leadership" (p. 39). Therefore, by refocusing our research attention toward inquiry on creating conditions for cultures of civility within the context of higher education, we can more inclusively engage stakeholders representing the various levels of the system in working together to create conditions for systemic change. Such collaboration can also enhance stakeholder perceptions of the system's commitment to creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education that transcends individual interactions between faculty and students within the classroom to all levels of the institution as a system.

Leskes (2013) argues how the decline in public discourse is damaging not only to U.S. democracy and national credibility, but also how such practice undermines the very climate in which the academic community thrives. Leskes (2013) contends democracy, like the U.S. Constitution itself, is created and sustained based on the foundation of compromise and diversity of thought. However, based on recent political and media events, the art of compromise seems to have given way to virulence, bitter personal attacks, and inflexible dogmatism. Leskes (2013) challenges academia to commit to improving civil discourse as a tool for democracy not only for the next generation, but for the public overall. By citing Leach (2011), Leskes (2013) argues civility is not necessarily about focusing on manners and politeness, but about argumentation that generates debate for social good. Thus, creating opportunities for argument to take place can strengthen democracy and should be an integral part of undergraduate education. Furthermore, creating opportunities for debate to take place systemically in higher education can provide those

who actually make up the different levels of the system not only with a place at the table, so to speak, but also with a voice to express their input.

In an effort to create conditions that make a culture of civility more of the norm in higher education, Gilroy (2008) notes professors can, in their syllabi, establish classroom management policies that address possible "disciplinary action for those who disrupt the academic freedom of others and interfere with learning through threatening words or behavior. Some have taken the strategy further and are asking their students to sign a contract on classroom behavior" (pp. 38-39). Levine (2010) maintains colleges and universities "provide literal spaces in which citizens can meet and talk" (p. 16). Thus, institutions of higher education can serve as holding spaces that facilitate public discussion, provide adult civic education, offer professional development opportunities for educators interested in teaching civility and public discourse, and educate students in how to challenge ideas and issues without attacking the people who advocate differing viewpoints. Moreover, Connelly (2009) discusses how colleges and universities can adapt the notions of civility and community into the curriculum of the first year experience so as to acquaint new students entering the academic environment for the first time with the rules and norms for what is considered acceptable civil behavior in the classroom. Thus, by professors taking these initial steps at establishing cultures of civility within their classrooms, the idea that civility is valued and expected as a norm can gain momentum and eventually extend across campus as well so as to be embraced as a culture of civility.

Gilroy (2008) points out many colleges and universities are adopting civility statements or codes of conduct that ask students and employees to take personal responsibility for their speech and actions. Such actions might very well be a significant step in the direction of establishing a culture of civility on campus. Gilroy (2008) explains civility codes are often

implemented to reduce intolerance and prejudice and also attempt to address hate speech such as racial slurs and anti-Semitism. Of course, such codes often come under fire by both liberal and conservative groups and have been struck down in court when students and employees are punished for exercising their right to free speech. Therefore, while colleges and universities can adopt codes of conduct for civility, they cannot enact punishment to those who violate the code.

In addressing the recent controversy in higher education surrounding the use of "trigger warnings" and attempts to curb free speech by invoking "civility," Shapiro (2014) argues being civil does not involve sweeping controversial issues under the proverbial rug. She maintains that such attempts to limit free speech only serve to demean learning. Moreover, if higher education is a community that values the rigorous debate of difficult issues, then it is up to the community to establish standards upholding its values without sacrificing individualism and academic freedom. Nelson (2014) contends civility should not come at the expense of free speech and that academic freedom should protect faculty member and students from reprisals for exercising that right. She also points out that while people have the right to free speech, they are not protected from criticism for what they write and say. In addition, Nelson (2014) asserts creating an "oasis of sanity" or what this study refers to as a culture of civility on campus, does not involve preventing free speech, but is about urging faculty and students to engage in productive dialogue that does not prohibit the passionate advocacy of ideas. While civility should lead us to treat others, even those with whom we disagree, with respect, it does not mean that all ideas and arguments merit respect.

Summary of the Literature on Civility in Higher Education

Based on an examination of the extant literature, I have attempted to identify the apparent gap in the research concerning the study of civility in higher education. The primary argument

made is that while some research has begun to investigate civility in higher education, the focus of many studies has typically concentrated more specifically on exploring the problem of incivility in higher education among teachers and students and its effects on teaching and learning in the classroom. However, the gap that appears to remain in the literature relates to how educators can collaboratively address the problem by refocusing their attention toward replacing cultures of incivility with cultures of civility that characterize higher education from a more systemic rather than individual perspective.

As this review suggests, the consensus in the literature relates to higher education being the context where the study and practice of civility should begin since higher education serves as a microcosm of the larger culture within which it is situated. Faculty members can, in their classrooms and on a grassroots level, take steps to create conditions that nurture the emergence of a culture of civility which has the potential to "catch on" at a more systemic level. This research sought to address the issue by examining civility from a systemic perspective as it existed within a particular institution of higher education on departmental, college, and institutional levels.

In the current study, it was argued that if a culture of civility does exist in the context of higher education, it more likely exists at the departmental level and requires intentionality on faculty members to create and sustain a space for connections to occur. Furthermore, by refocusing the systemic emphasis of this research effort toward examining the positive aspects of developing a culture of civility in higher education, the study also lent itself to using appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) as the method by which to structure discussions with stakeholders engaging in this action research study.

Appreciative Inquiry

As Coghlan and Brannick (2010) point out, within action research there "are multiple paradigms or methodologies, each of which has its own distinctive emphasis" (pp. 43-44). Since the major focus of this study addressed how to create a culture of civility in higher education, the rationale for selecting appreciative inquiry to engage participants in discussion was the emphasis the method places in enacting organizational change by focusing on organizational strengths rather than deficiencies. By emphasizing what the organization does well, change can come about by building upon and improving that strength. In addition, appreciative inquiry seemed especially effective for use in this study based on the emphasis it places on communication, collaboration, and discourse as a means by which individuals work together in generating ideas for organizational change.

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) describe eight communication-related principles upon which appreciative inquiry is grounded. By actively engaging in such communicative techniques as interviewing, story-telling, questioning, imagining, and discussing, stakeholders working collaboratively through the different phases of appreciative inquiry can ideally create conditions for wholeness, learning, and potential change to emerge. Furthermore, since civility is a communication construct (Fritz, 2013; Troester & Mester, 2007), then using appreciative inquiry as a method by which to actively engage stakeholders in co-inquiring into the process of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education was also an attempt to enhance our understanding of how to more effectively create conditions for organizational change using action research.

Appreciative inquiry consists of the four phases of (1) *discovery*, (2) *dream*, (3) *design*, and (4) *destiny*. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) explain the discovery phase involves

"appreciating the best of 'what is,'" the dream phase consists of "envisioning 'what could be,'" the design phase involves "co-constructing 'what should be,'" and the destiny phase includes "sustaining 'what will be'" (p. 47). Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) argue "organizations are centers of human relatedness, first and foremost, and relationships thrive where there is an appreciative eye—when people see the best in one another, share their dreams and ultimate concerns in affirming ways, and are connected in full voice to create not just new worlds but better worlds" (p. 61). Moreover, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) describe how people and organizations often become the very things they study. These authors contend that through the process of appreciative inquiry, "human organizing and change at its best is a relational process of inquiry, grounded in affirmation and appreciation" (p. 1). Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008) maintain by creating appreciative learning cultures, organizations can sustain "innovative thinking by creating a positive focus, a sense of meaning, and systems that encourage collaboration" (p. 204). Hence through the process of creating appreciative learning cultures, organizations can take steps to create and sustain spaces that encourage generativity of thought and creativity involving stakeholders rather than merely providing pre-packaged solutions to problems.

Bushe (2013) discusses various approaches for what can be thought of as creating spaces for appreciative inquiry to take place within organizations. Such approaches range from a single facilitator working with a small representative group of people all the way to gathering together large groups representing the whole system in an appreciative inquiry summit designed engage the entire "4-D" process in a compressed timeframe. Rather than seeing appreciative inquiry as a single event, it might be more effective to think of it as an ongoing process in the sense that change comes about from repeated interactions, continuing discussions, sharing personal stories

and ideas, and through reflection. Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, and Griffin (2003) describe the appreciative summit as "an emotionally safe space where a highly diverse group of people feel invited to express themselves and their most cared about and creative ideas" (p. 208). Hence, the appreciative summit is characterized as offering a safe, inviting, generative environment that must also meet the needs of the organization, community, and situation.

Bushe (2015) maintains the role of leadership, especially when applying appreciative inquiry to meeting adaptive challenges, is to create conditions for "good ideas and new, adaptive practices to be recognized and integrated into the organization" (p. 11). Furthermore, as a means by which to increase generativity, Bushe (2007) discusses the importance of creating spaces for discussing negativity. Rather than asking people to avoid describing what they do not like about their respective organizations, a key takeaway for managers and facilitators is to engage in generative conversations exploring people's images of what their organizations should be and what they would like to see more of.

Bushe (2007) contends even though focusing on the positive is what many people think is at the core of appreciative inquiry, what really is central to the method is the idea of generativity. In other words, appreciative inquiry is more than "action research with a positive question" (p. 30). Bushe (2007) also points out maintaining a focus on the positive can support generativity since "people experiencing positive feelings are more flexible, creative, integrative, open to information, and efficient in their thinking" (p. 32). In addition, a focus on that which is positive supports change efforts through relationship building and connecting on a very human level through the use of generative questions and conversations. However, Bushe (2007) does acknowledge how using appreciative inquiry as a means of suppressing dissent can also be perceived by stakeholders as a form of repression by those in power.

Since appreciation involves discovering and valuing the positive core that gives life to the organization, the challenge for organizational leaders is to create and maintain conditions that encourage discourse focusing on what the organization can continue to become. However, as the results of this study suggest, and what also points to an apparent gap in the appreciative inquiry literature, is that in order for stakeholders to further explore what the organization can become, they must first be able to grasp what the positive core of the organization is in the first place. Without this sense of organizational identity, stakeholders may become stuck and have a difficult time moving beyond the discovery phase of appreciative inquiry. The current study provides facilitators with a vivid example illustrating the point that not all groups move through all four phases of appreciative inquiry. The takeaway for facilitating change is the importance of observing and reacting to what is emerging from the group without attempting to rush through the "4-D" process until the group is ready to do so.

Cooperrider and Srivastva (2005) argue appreciative inquiry is a mode of action research useful for generating theory that addresses not only the epistemological concerns of science as a means of producing knowledge, but also the metaphysical concerns of existence as miracle that can never be fully comprehended. Cooperrider and Srivastva (2005) explain how more than a "method or technique, the appreciative mode of inquiry is a way of living with, being with, and directly participating in the varieties of social organization we are compelled to study" (p. 63). In addition, the authors discuss appreciative inquiry as a "distinctive complement to traditional action research" that encourages the action researcher to inquire and reflect beyond superficial appearances and instead shed light on the "factors and forces involved in organizing that serve to nourish the human spirit…that goes beyond merely a secularized problem-solving frame" (p. 63). Accordingly, the authors contend how, in generating theory for social transformation,

appreciative inquiry also serves as a method by which theory and practice are no longer separated.

Head and Young (2005) describe applying appreciative inquiry as an intervention for initiating culture change in the context of higher education. These authors suggest that the culture of autonomy prevalent in academia can often serve to prevent faculty collaboration necessary for organizational change to occur. However, such resistance to change and the complexities inherent in the context of higher education require processes designed to engage active faculty support and collaboration. Hence, Head and Young (2005) maintain change in higher education must come from the voice of the faculty. Based on this line of argument, appreciative inquiry, with its emphasis on active collaboration by those involved in a change effort, provided an effective method for implementing organizational change in the particular context of higher education studied by Head and Young (2005). The results of the current study were somewhat different in that the common perception among faculty members was they felt they had no real voice in influencing the change taking place within their institution. Nonetheless, the results of this study support Head and Young's (2005) contention that change in higher education is more likely to be successful when faculty members are provided with a voice in determining what types of change are taking place and how change is to implemented and managed.

By clarifying the distinction between framing issues as opportunities that give life to organizations rather than as problems to be solved, Head and Young (2005) insist that unlike traditional problem-solving methods seeking "to identify and analyze problems in systems and relationships, AI seeks to appreciate and dream about their possibilities. Where problem-solving views organizations as a series of problems to be solved, AI looks at organizations as mysteries

to be embraced" (p. 259). Moreover, Head and Young (2005) maintain an organization's core values are often associated organizational effectiveness. The authors explain that exceptional organizations, in comparison with other organizations, are "guided more by a core ideology—core values and a sense of purpose" (p. 260). In addition, Head and Young (2005) discuss the degree to which organizational members understand the core values of the organization can result in a greater sense of trust and shared purpose necessary for creating and sustaining change. In the current study, the inability of stakeholders to move beyond the discovery phase of appreciative inquiry and identify the core values of their institution also contributed to their failure to identify its strengths as well.

Cooperrider and Avital (2005) point out while we may be intrigued by the positive bias of appreciative inquiry "toward the good, the better, the exceptional, and the possible—it is the power of inquiry we must learn more about and underscore" (p. 6). They note the process of inquiry "involves systems of exploration by which people make sense of their experiences in, organize their knowledge about, and relate to the world" (p. 6). The positive bias of appreciative inquiry has been explored by Barge and Oliver (2003) and Fineman (2006) who hold appreciative inquiry can create conditions in organizations which can possibly marginalize critical voices and maintain power differences by providing those in power with an additional means by which to manipulate and control those with less power and influence.

On the other hand, Bright (2009) argues that with the emphasis appreciative inquiry places on collaboration and relationship building, the method also has considerable generative capacity to bring about positive organizational change by engaging stakeholders even during turbulent times characterized by negativity. Bramson and Buss (2002) maintain appreciative inquiry serves as an effective method for implementing whole systems change. They point out

as organizations “shift from traditional hierarchical structures to more flexible, participative, networking ones, leaders need change processes that foster the engagement and commitment of many more people, aligning them to common goals” (pp. 211-212). Consequently, as society and organizations become more diverse, what we think of as traditional problem-solving methods based on hierarchical authority must give way to more participative decision-making as is the case when using appreciative inquiry. Finegold, Holland, and Lingham (2002) provide a number of examples where appreciative inquiry has been used to bring about whole system change in both public and non-profit sectors. These authors point out since sustainable change efforts involve the input of multiple diverse stakeholders, appreciative inquiry provides a method by which public dialogue can actually thrive.

Zandee and Cooperrider (2013) explain appreciative inquiry challenges action researchers “to find value and possibility in the full spectrum of human experiences and to overcome tendencies toward reductionist thinking in either/or (positive/negative) dichotomies” (p. 191). Alternatively, these authors state appreciative inquiry provides action researchers with an intuitive method by which to engage in the complexities of organizational life by asking questions focusing specifically on “the practice of a particular group in a specific time and place” (p. 191) while attempting to provide participants with voices to challenge and transform the status quo. In the current study, appreciative inquiry served as a means by which to engage faculty members within a particular context of higher education undergoing rapid change and uncertainty and their attempts to make meaning of that change. In addition, the complexity involved with navigating organizational change, and the implications such complexity and uncertainty have for facilitators using appreciative inquiry, was further illustrated by the difficulty the participants in the study had with identifying the positive core of the institution.

Summary of the Literature on Appreciative Inquiry

In this section, I have examined the research on appreciative inquiry and have attempted to frame its use in the current study as a method for structuring and facilitating meetings and discussions among organizational stakeholders who participated on my action research team. Since the major focus of this study was to examine how faculty and administrators could co-inquire into creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education, the rationale for selecting appreciative inquiry was the emphasis the method places in enacting organizational change by focusing and building on organizational strengths rather than deficiencies. In addition, with the emphasis appreciative inquiry places on collaboration as a means by which stakeholders can work together in the process of co-inquiry and generating ideas for potential organizational change, the method served as an effective tool in the current study for engaging stakeholders in talking about the research topic under investigation. However, a review of the extant literature combined with the results of the current study suggest the gap remaining in our understanding and application of appreciative inquiry relates to how scholars and practitioners attempting to facilitate organizational change must adapt when groups are not ready to move through all four phases of appreciative inquiry.

While the participants in this study did not move beyond the discovery phase of appreciative inquiry, the method was still useful from the perspective of group facilitation and helping me and my action research team gain greater understanding of the complexity involved with the degree of change taking place within our institution. Bushe (2015, 2016) argues appreciative inquiry can be extremely useful in helping organizations meet adaptive challenges and transform by seeking out diverse perspectives and building connections. Over the course of the study, my team members and I were able to establish connections with our colleagues from

across the university which allowed us to use first, second, and third person inquiry as we attempted to navigate the U process in exploring many distinct perspectives on how change brought about by the consolidation impacted civility at the different levels of the institution.

Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2012) state, "No one ever arrives at being a master facilitator; it is a journey of a lifetime of learning, experimenting, and attempting new ideas" (p. 122). The experience I gained as a facilitator through the process of this study as well as over the course of my doctoral journey has provided me with numerous opportunities to let go of what I thought I knew and be open to that which I did not. This openness to the unknown challenged me to explore new ideas and experiment with new methods for engaging my action research team. In addition, since appreciative inquiry served as a method by which to navigate the Theory U process, our inability to progress beyond the discovery phase served as an indication the team being stuck and unable to identify the positive core of the institution also reflected where the organization was in terms of its own development and movement toward absencing rather than presencing.

Theory U

As a theory of organizational change, Theory U places considerable emphasis on the importance of learning and transformation through the practice of reflection, active listening, and collaborative dialogue. According to Scharmer (2009) and Scharmer and Kaufer (2013), Theory U provides a methodology for leadership and organization change from the perspective that agents of change must let go of the tendency to download pre-conceived notions and ways of thinking about the past in order for the future to emerge. In a sense, Theory U functions as a phenomenon for a deeper level of awareness to take place allowing people and organizations to bring something new into reality. Theory U also operates as a framework providing a language

for discussing deeper levels of experience not usually talked about in organizations. Furthermore, Theory U performs as a methodology for helping individuals and organizations operate more effectively from a deeper space (Scharmer, 2011). Essentially, Theory U argues organizations either navigate the process of change productively and move forward toward the emerging future through the process of prescencing, or resist change and become unproductively and dysfunctionally stuck in patterns of the past by engaging in the practice of absencing. I will explore the phenomenon of absencing, or what I refer to as "the dark side" of the inverted U in greater detail in Chapter 6 as it applies to the implications of this study.

According to Scharmer (2009), a key component of Theory U is the concept of presencing, or the idea that individuals and organizations must be open to the future as it emerges around them rather than relying on the past as a source of inspiration for problem-solving. When they are faced with decision-making during times of rapid change and complexity, many individuals and organizations resort to the process of downloading or addressing contemporary challenges by looking to the past for quick fix solutions. However, the problem with such thinking is what worked in the past may not be applicable in handling the complexity associated with more challenging contemporary global problems.

Scharmer (2009) describes four levels by which individuals and organizations respond to change: (1) reacting, (2) redesigning, (3) reframing, and (4) presencing. Many organizational learning methods approach change by addressing the first three levels through single-loop and double-loop learning (Argyris and Schon, 1995). However, Scharmer (2009) contends relying only on single-loop and double-loop learning involves learning from past experiences—which may not be adequate in addressing and succeeding in modern-day, multifaceted, global situations characterized by abundant complexity. Instead, Scharmer (2009) argues that level four learning,

or presencing, more adequately addresses the complexity of contemporary issues by focusing on the future as it emerges and being open to one's highest future potential rather than relying on the past for answers. In spite of this, many leaders continue to mindlessly look to the past for quick fixes rather than being open to the unknown emerging future.

Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) explain the practice of habitual downloading and looking to the past when coping with organizational change is an example of absencing, or operating from a blind spot. Absencing is also characterized as an inversion of the Theory U process. Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) explain the process of absencing as contributing to what they describe as organizational pathology creating "a trajectory of denial (not seeing what is going on), de-sensing (lacking empathy with the other), absencing (losing the connection to one's higher Self), delusion (being guided by illusions), and destruction (destroying others and ourselves)" (p. 32). Consequently, getting stuck in the pattern of absencing encourages fundamentalist thinking involving adopting a closed mind, heart, and will. Furthermore, absencing is also characterized by engaging in one truth or ideology, one "us versus them" way of thinking and seeing the world, and one rigid will in terms of decision-making.

Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) also contend adopting such a rigid worldview can influence individuals and organizations to engage in "(1) unilateral, linear thinking, (2) low, exclusion-based transparency, [and] (3) an intention to serve the well-being of the few" (p. 33). As I discuss in Chapter 6, the results of this study not only contribute to and enhance our understanding of Theory U as a theory of organizational change, but also extend our knowledge of the inverted U and how it contributes to absencing or "the dark side" of organizational pathology that prevents meaningful change from taking place. More specifically, the study provides significant transferable implications for scholars and practitioners attempting to

facilitate the difficult process of organizational change in the context of higher education during times of rapid growth and ambiguity.

Scharmer (2009) explains organizational learning and change is characterized by movements in one of two directions consisting of downloading from the past or presencing from the emerging future. When organizations face challenges and resort to the practice of downloading, they resort to seeking solutions that worked for them in the past. Scharmer (2009) cautions how "moving toward a future possibility requires us to become aware of—and abandon—the dominant mode of downloading that causes us to continuously reproduce the patterns of the past" (p.119). Likewise, the problem with learning from the past is solutions that worked previously may no longer be effective to adequately address contemporary challenges.

However, most organizations and leaders continue to repeat unproductive patterns of behavior and decision-making because they are unaware of their blind spot, or inner source from which they operate. The challenge for effective organizational leadership is to first recognize the existence of the blind spot within all systems and to also be mindful of when it occurs. Scharmer (2009) argues,

> The blind spot at issue here is a fundamental factor in leadership and the social sciences. It also affects our everyday social experience. In the process of conducting our daily business and social lives, we are usually well aware of what we do and *what* others do; we also have some understanding of *how* we do things, the processes we and others use when we act. Yet if we were to ask the question 'From what source does our action come?' most of us would be unable to provide an answer. We can't see the source from which we operate; we aren't aware of the place from which our attention and intention originate. (p. 7)

In addressing the blind spot and learning by focusing on the past, Scharmer (2009) advocates the second type of learning which involves presencing or learning from the future as it emerges. Presencing involves operating from a deeper space of learning that, if permitted to emerge, holds untapped potential for leaders, stakeholders, and organizations. In moving toward presencing, individuals and organizations must first learn to resist the urge to react to change by implementing quick fixes or redesigning policies that do little to change the way organizational members think. Gibbs (2013) maintains when leaders move into presencing, they begin looking at what future possibilities may arise in some area that has yet to manifest itself. Hence, when assessing an individual's leadership potential, it may be easier to look back on their decision-making to examine how many decisions they made that were based on the past compared to how many decisions they made that emerged as the situation evolved.

Senge and Scharmer (2001) explain the temporal source of emergent learning is the future or the "*coming into presence* of the future" (p. 203). On the other hand, the temporal source of reflective learning focuses on learning and reflecting on experiences of the past. Scharmer (2009) addresses critics who contend learning from the past is the only way to learn while learning from the future is impossible by noting sometimes "the experiences of the past are actually the biggest problem with and obstacle to coming up with a creative response to the challenge at hand" (p. 8). Presencing involves the combination of the words "presence" and "sensing" and involves being open to the one's highest future potential. In order to access one's future potential higher level "Self" compared to one's present "self," Scharmer (2009) discusses cultivating, on both individual and collective levels, a new social technology comprised of three instruments or capacities each of us possesses he refers to as the open mind, open heart, and open will. Scharmer (2009) describes the open mind as being related to intelligence or IQ that "allows

us to see with fresh eyes, to deal with the objective figures and facts around us" (p. 41). The open heart is associated with emotional intelligence or EQ referring to "our capacity to empathize with others, to tune in to different contexts, and to put ourselves in someone else's shoes" (p. 41). Lastly, the third capacity of the open will refers to SQ or spiritual intelligence and intention relating to our ability to connect with our authentic purpose or self in order to let go and let come.

In addition to these three capacities, Scharmer (2009) discusses three enemies that interfere with entering the deeper territories of the U when attempting to connect with the Self. These three enemies are the Voice of Judgment (VOJ), the Voice of Cynicism (VOC), and the Voice of Fear (VOF). The Voice of Judgment interferes with accessing the open mind and prevents us from making progress toward creativity and presence. The Voice of Cynicism gets in the way of accessing the open heart. Gaining access to the open heart means allowing ourselves to become vulnerable which is difficult to achieve when we are experiencing the feeling of distancing brought about by the Voice of Cynicism. Finally, the Voice of Fear blocks our access to the open will which leads to insecurity and an inability for us to let go of who we are and what we have. Scharmer (2009) points out we may fear many things such as ridicule, lack of economic security, death, and being ostracized. However, the essence of leadership and letting go of our old "self" in order to "let come" our new "Self" means confronting the Voice of Fear so as to overcome the reluctance of venturing into the unknown. Thus, operating from deeper levels of the U means confronting the resistance to change presented by these three enemies.

According to Reams (2007) and Cox (2014), Scharmer (2009) devotes considerable emphasis to describing the journey down the left side of the U toward the space of social

emergence of presencing. While much of the focus of his discussion is concerned with presencing, Scharmer (2009) also addresses what he refers to absencing, which is of particular interest to the current study. Absencing is the opposite of presencing and is described as the destructive space of anti-emergence in organizations rather than the constructive space of presencing. For example, if presencing is characterized by such individual and collective practices as seeing, sensing, prescencing, crystallizing, prototyping, and performing, then the process of absencing involves the opposite practices of not seeing, desensing, absencing, illusionizing, aborting, and destroying.

By not seeing, individuals and organizations find themselves stuck in the ideology of fundamentalism distinguished by the inability or unwillingness to recognize new ideas that challenge their existing ways of thinking. Desensing results in an "us versus them" way of thinking characterized by an inability to engage in empathy and perspective taking. Absencing involves getting bogged down in the past through the practice of downloading which interferes with the individual and collective capacity to be open to the emerging future. Furthermore, the inability to be open to the emerging future can create the resulting cycles of illusionizing, aborting, and destroying which contribute to individuals and organizations getting stuck in what Scharmer (2009) describes as one intention, one worldview, and one truth.

Scharmer (2009) argues the future of an individual or organization depends upon the field of emergence from which they choose to operate and states,

> Everyone can choose to operate from the social space of anti-emergence of absencing or from the social space of deepened emergence and presencing that determines how the future unfolds. Both spaces are available to all people and social systems all the time. (p. 258)

However, as the results of this study illustrate, not all organizations choose to operate from a space of emergence and presencing. Some choose to follow what can be described as the path of the inverted U which characterizes the process of absencing. In order to access the deeper sources and fields of emergence, individuals and organizations must set in motion the open mind, the open heart, and the open will. Moreover, whether or not individuals and organizations function from the space of emergence leading to presencing or the anti-emergence of absencing depends on their abilities to manage the destructive sources of resistance triggered by the Voice of Judgment, the Voice of Cynicism, and the Voice of Fear. Scharmer (2009) contends by confronting these three enemies or sources of resistance that contribute to downloading and absencing, individuals and organizations can more effectively address their respective blind spots and operate from a deeper space of awareness and creativity leading toward the emerging future. In addition, Chlopczik (2014) maintains developing the skills to overcome the sources of resistance are necessary in order to meet the challenges of dealing with increasing dynamic, social, and emergent complexity in the current environment.

In addressing Scharmer's (2009) discussion of the conversational conditions necessary for the emergence of the open mind, the open heart, and the open will, Cox (2014) points out how

> The application of Theory U methodology within an organization regularly leads groups into powerful breakthrough experiences of greater interpersonal connectedness, openness, creativity, will, and wisdom. However, sustaining these positive effects beyond the 'breakthroughs' remains a major challenge both for Theory U and for those seeking to facilitate our wise and conscious evolution, as individuals and as human systems. (p. 31)

By exploring the human forces that contribute to the resistance of absencing behaviors rather than presencing behaviors, Cox (2014) suggests communicating with open minds, open hearts, and open wills requires considerable vulnerability. Consequently, avoiding vulnerability is what also motivates a majority of individuals and groups to maintain the status quo of downloading.

As a result of not recognizing their respective blind spots, individuals can actively and intentionally prevent others from seeing or realizing things about them they would rather keep hidden. This tendency also helps people preserve their egos. In the workplace, individuals may engage in absencing behaviors because the level of vulnerability associated with communicating genuinely with an open mind and heart in that particular context may seem counterintuitive. The ego serves as the protective immune system that activates when we are experiencing and trying to avoid risk, danger, and vulnerability. Cox (2014) argues this need to protect ourselves from vulnerability in such situations results in our active and purposeful avoidance of engaging in the very presencing conversations we need to have in order for our best future selves to emerge.

Cox (2014) points out Theory U provides us with a well-developed methodology for moving toward presencing, but does not address why we actively resist the vulnerability of revealing to others that which is too threatening, embarrassing, or shameful. Moreover, the ego seeks to protect us from our blind spots that, if revealed in an open social field, would threaten our membership and standing in a group. Cox (2014) suggests engaging groups in conversations designed to illuminate their blind spots by presencing their absencing. In other words, engage people in deeper inquiry into their absencing by having presencing conversations about their experiences about being pulled back into absencing. Since people can never really leave their egos at the door, presencing conversations can help them to "see" and identify their egos in order

to confront absencing and to connect with, or as Scharmer (2009) would say, “let go and let come” of their best and authentic selves.

Nicolaides and McCallum (2014) discuss the cognitive and affective challenges faced by facilitators and groups when they are attempting to apply Theory U in action due to the conceptual complexity involved with the theory. By examining Theory U through the lens of Collaborative Developmental Action Inquiry (CDAI) (Torbert 2003, 2004), Nicolaides and McCallum (2014) illustrate the importance of understanding the influences of adult development theory as well as first, second, and third-person inquiry have on more effectively applying Theory U to help bring about generative change during times of complexity and ambiguity by accessing the blind spot.

Nicolaides and McCallum (2014) point out Scharmer’s (2009) contribution in Theory U was to revise the application of third-person organizing from previous past-oriented research to a new approach of focusing on first, second, and third-person organizing with an emphasis on the emerging future. Thus, first, second, and third-person inquiry as well as single, double, and triple loop learning are interconnected for learning and knowledge generation in Theory U. In addition, there is also congruency in both Theory U and CDAI between an emphasis on the emergent future as well as timely use of generative knowledge in action across four territories of experience. By aligning first, second, and third person inquiry along with the four territories of experience, participants can work collaboratively with the collective intention for creating a space for the potential future to emerge (presencing) while also maintaining attention of their own subjective experience.

Nicolaides and McCallum (2014) explain single and double-loop learning are involved throughout the U process. By engaging in the process of single-loop learning, individuals can

reflect on their past actions and adjust their behaviors in order to accomplish goals. In double-loop learning, by examining their assumptions, individuals can also identify their blind spots and reflect in action in order to modify the strategies that guide their behaviors. Therefore, by increasing their capacity to understand and reflect in action, individuals and groups can move toward triple-loop learning and mindfulness of their intention and vision and revising their behaviors accordingly. The capacity for individuals and groups to engage in triple-loop learning can also result in opening the heart, mind, and will and allowing for the future to emerge through presencing and connecting to the source at the bottom of the U process. Moreover, the capacity for engaging in triple-loop learning is also associated with the developmental capacity of not only group members, but also facilitators and leaders as they attempt to manage the challenges of moving groups through the U process.

Summary of the Literature on Theory U

In this section, I have examined the literature on Theory U and have attempted to illustrate its efficacy as the theory of organizational change guiding this study. Theory U provides scholars and practitioners with a methodology for leadership and organization change from the perspective that agents of change must let go of pre-conceived notions and ways of thinking about the past so as to allow the future to emerge. However, as the results of this study indicate, not all organizations move toward presencing and are often unable to let go of the practice of downloading. In addition, the gap identified through an examination of the literature combined with the results of the current study suggest more research is needed to examine the role of absencing and the inverted U when studying organizational change.

A significant contribution made by the current study to our understanding of applying Theory U in "real world" settings is to shed further light on the organizational phenomenon of

absencing or following the journey toward "the dark side" of the inverted U. As Scharmer (2009) points out, the path of absencing is characterized by the organizational pathology of anti-emergence and getting bogged down in the process of downloading the past rather than being open to the emerging future of presencing. If individuals and organizations choose to operate from the space of downloading and absencing, then they allow the voices of judgment, cynicism, and fear to prevent them from not only operating more openly through mind, heart, and will, but also from recognizing the blind spots getting in the way of the future waiting to emerge.

Of course, communicating with an open mind, an open heart, and an open will also assumes a willingness and an openness to vulnerability which some may find too threatening. As the literature suggests, reverting to and getting bogged down by practices of the past tends to be an easier and less threatening option than being open to the unknown emerging future. Examining the research on applying Theory U as a method by which to facilitate organizational change served as a reminder that absencing follows a very different path than presencing and is characterized by such individual and collective practices as not seeing, desensing, absencing, illusionizing, aborting, and destroying.

As further illustrated not only in the research literature, but by the results of the current study, absencing also involves an inability or unwillingness for individuals and organizations to recognize new ideas that challenge existing ways of thinking, an "us versus them" point of view, and an inability to engage in empathy and perspective taking. Perhaps by presencing their absencing as Cox (2014) suggests, individuals, organizations, and the facilitators attempting to lead them through the process of change, especially during times of rapid change combined with uncertainty, can gain greater understanding into their blind spots and recognize in action not only when they are engaging in absencing behaviors, but also why they are motivated to do so.

In addition, an examination of the research on Theory U provides groups and facilitators with additional tools to apply the theory more effectively and to understand how developmental capacity plays a significant role in more effectively navigating the U process. Pillay (2014) argues more research is needed to examine the role of the facilitator in the Theory U process. As Nicolaides and McCallum (2014) explain, by understanding the how single, double, and triple-loop learning combine with first, second, and third-person inquiry, facilitators and the individuals and organizations they work with can more accurately identify their blind spots and reflect in action in order to modify their behaviors. If they have the developmental capacity to do so, by engaging in triple-loop learning, individuals, groups, and facilitators can operate from a more open mind, open heart, and open will in an effort to connect with the emerging future of presencing rather than absencing through the Theory U process.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the literature providing the conceptual foundation supporting the research topic of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education. The literature review explored the scholarly and professional literature in three areas: (1) civility in higher education, (2) appreciative inquiry (AI), and (3) Theory U. The overarching issue that guided the current inquiry related to understanding how faculty members and administrators could co-inquire into creating and sustaining a culture of civility within the context of higher education especially during times of rapid organizational change combined with ambiguity and uncertainty. By surveying the literature from these three research areas, the following conclusions were drawn which the current study seeks to address.

The literature on civility in higher education has typically focused on examining the problem of incivility in higher education among teachers and students and its effects on teaching

and learning within the specific context of the classroom. The current study attempted to address the gap in the literature by moving beyond the classroom to explore how faculty members and administrators in higher education could collaboratively address the problem by refocusing their attention toward creating and sustaining cultures of civility from a more systemic perspective rather than that of the individual instructor grappling with how to deal with incivility in the classroom.

In doing so, the current study also contributes to our understanding of how to navigate the complexity of organizational change by addressing how administrators and faculty members can communicate more clearly, timely, and transparently in an effort to reduce the ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in the change process. By reviewing the research literature on using appreciative inquiry as a method by which to engage stakeholders in talking about organizational change, the current study addresses the positive bias often associated with the method and how such a focus can contribute to perceptions of a lack of critical thinking and group think (Janis, 1982). However, a review of the literature underscores how a focus on the positive contributes not only to generativity, but can also be useful for organizational change characterized by negativity. As evident in the current study, in order to discover the positive, groups must sometimes first work their way through the negative. Therefore, a key takeaway for facilitators of organizational change is until groups can get past the negativity, they run the risk of getting stuck one phase of appreciative inquiry and not being able to move forward.

The current study also contributes to our understanding of applying Theory U as a method by which to navigate the complexity of organizational change. While much of the research on Theory U has examined the role of presencing, few studies have explored “the dark side” of the inverted U involving absencing. Scharmer (2009) conceptualized absencing as the

organizational pathology of anti-emergence and getting stuck in the process of downloading the past rather than being open to the emerging future. The current study illustrates how absencing in the context of higher education involves an inability or unwillingness on the part of administrators to recognize new ideas challenging existing ways of thinking, operating from an "us versus them" perspective, and engaging in perspective taking. Furthermore, the literature underscores how facilitators of organizational change can more effectively apply Theory U by understanding the way single, double, and triple-loop learning combine with developmental capacity in helping groups discover their blind spots and moving down the U toward presencing. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology that guided this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this action research study was to explore how college and university faculty can co-inquire into the process of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change. The inquiry was originally guided by three research questions, which were: (1) How can faculty and administrators establish holding spaces for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change? (2) How can faculty and administrators apply appreciative inquiry as a method for facilitating co-inquiry into the process of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education during times of rapid change? and (3) What organizational or systems conditions support or inhibit faculty and administrators in creating a culture of civility in a rapidly changing institution of higher education?

However, partly due to the limitations of my own facilitation skills, the lack of empowerment of my action research team, and what I describe as an unsafe systemic culture of fear and intimidation pervading the institution, I did not engage my AR team through all four phases of appreciative inquiry as originally espoused. In fact, we did not move past the first phase of discovery. Reason (2006) explains how "action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process, as individuals learn skills of inquiry, as communities of inquiry develop, as understanding of issues deepens, and as practice grows and shifts over time" (p. 197). As the study began to emerge, in an effort to engage in deeper reflective practice around my development as a facilitator of organizational change and to address the limitations

that hampered my study, I shifted away from appreciative inquiry toward a first-person action research approach. Embracing first-person action research provided me with a way to make meaning around my attempts to facilitate conversations with my team around the research topic. In addition, by adopting a first-person action research perspective, I was able to consider what it means to attempt facilitating organizational change in an unsafe system of higher education undergoing rapid change due to consolidation and characterized by uncertainty, insecurity, and trepidation. Consequently, I revised my research questions as follows: (1) How can faculty and administrators establish holding spaces for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change? and (2) What organizational or systems conditions support or inhibit faculty and administrators in creating and sustaining a culture of civility in a rapidly changing institution of higher education?

Design of the Study

The methodology of the study was first-person action research. The study also used qualitative research methods such as observations of meetings, researcher memos, and interviews for data collection and analysis. In order to ensure the reliability and validity of qualitative case study research, Yin (2012) encourages the use of multiple sources of evidence such as direct observations, interviews, and participant observation.

Action Research Methodology

According to Stringer (2007), while research in general "enables people to understand the nature of problematic events or phenomena" (p. 4), action research in particular "is based on the proposition that generalized solutions may not fit particular contexts or groups of people and that the purpose of inquiry is to find an appropriate solution for the particular dynamics at work in a local situation" (p. 5). Scharmer (2009) explains "the starting point for action research is the

knowledge that in order to really understand the social process, researchers must not just study but also work and participate in practical and real settings" (pp. 55-56). Coghlan and Brannick (2010) argue action research comprises research *in* as well as *on* action and describe action research as "an approach to problem solving, it is an application of the scientific method of fact-finding and experimentation to practical problems requiring action solutions and involving the collaboration and cooperation of the action researchers and members of the organizational system" (p. 5). Furthermore, in citing Reason and Torbert (2001), Coghlan and Brannick (2010) contend, "Action researchers work on the epistemological assumption that the purpose of academic research and discourse is not just to describe, understand and explain the world but also to change it" (p. 6). Unlike what we might think of as "traditional" research models where data is collected after the occurrence of an event or intervention, the uniqueness of action research is that it takes place concurrently along with the action taking place. Hence, action research encourages participants to reflect not only on action, but in action as it is taking place around them.

In referencing the work of Shani and Pasmore (1985, p. 439), Coghlan and Brannick (2010) note,

> Action research may be defined as an emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioural science knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge and applied to solve real organizational problems. It is simultaneously concerned with bringing about change in organizations, in developing self-help competences in organizational members and adding to scientific knowledge. Finally, it is an evolving process that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry. (p. 4)

Moreover, the emphasis on collaboration, co-inquiry, emergence, and reflection in action means researchers and stakeholders can actively work together and participate in the research process as organizational change agents while also creating actionable knowledge (Coghlan, 2007). Stringer (2007) explains "by working collaboratively, participants develop collective visions of their situation that provide the basis for effective action" (p. 67). Rather than the researcher driving decisions as in traditional research models, action research involves the researcher forming imperative, vital, essential, collaborative relationships with stakeholders. Perhaps then, the most unique characteristic of action research when compared to traditional research methodologies is the emphasis action research places on the importance of collaboration and co-inquiry between those involved in the research process.

Origins of Action Research

Bradbury, Mirvis, Neilsen, and Pasmore (2013) discuss the origins of action research in Lewin's (1951) field theory. Lewin (1951) asserted human behavior is highly influenced by the context or environment rather than personality. Lewin's position served as a major challenge to the then dominant view of Freudian psychology arguing human behavior was essentially influenced by personality. Through action research, Lewin (1951) demonstrated the variability across time of human behavior due to the influence of environmental forces. Hence, rather than changing the *personalities* of people in the workplace to create behavioral change, behavioral change could come about as a result of changing aspects the workplace *environment*.

Lewin (1951) argued change involves moving from a present level to a desired level. However, Lewin also thought increases in group performance are relatively short lived and that over time, group behavior tends to return to previous levels. Since change involves moving from the status quo to a more desired state, in order to create successful, long-term change in group

performance, Lewin proposed three steps needed for change involving (1) unfreezing the current behavior, (2) moving toward the desired behavior, change, or objective, and (3) refreezing the desired behavior so as to make it permanent. Lewin also emphasized, through force field analysis, the importance of maintaining the permanence of change by increasing the forces driving drive change while minimizing the forces resisting change.

Iterative Cycles of Action Research

According to Coghlan and Brannick (2010), action research is a cyclical process comprised of a pre-step examining context and purpose along with four additional steps making up the core action research cycle involving constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action. The *pre-step* cycle, involves diagnosing and determining why the project is necessary, considering what internal and external forces are driving the need for change, how the organization is responding to those forces, and establishing connections for collaboration with key stakeholders. The *constructing* cycle involves working directly with stakeholders to co-construct the issues being explored and what action is to be taken. The *planning action* cycle follows the pre-step and constructing cycles and involves continued collaboration with stakeholders to define the desired future combined with the work needed to achieve the desired future. The *taking action* cycle involves actually implementing interventions while the *evaluating action* cycle examines the intended and unintended outcomes of action while also determining collaboratively what needs to take place in the next action research cycles of constructing, planning, and taking action.

In addition to the constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating steps comprised in the core action research cycle described above, action research also includes the thesis action research cycle involving meta-learning or learning about learning. According to

Coghlan and Brannick (2010), besides engaging in the core action research cycles, the researcher must also be constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating not only the action research project, but what is being learned from each cycle as a result. The inquiry into the iterative cycles of the action research process involves engaging in reflection on reflection or learning about learning that generates actionable knowledge and also makes action research so much more involved than just being about solving organizational problems.

The emphasis on reflection and meta-learning in action research is illustrated by examining Mezirow's (1991) three forms of reflection consisting of content (what is taking place), process (how is it taking place), and premise (what does it all mean). Coghlan and Brannick (2010) discuss how Mezirow's (1991) three forms of reflection are closely aligned with Torbert's (2004) four territories of experience examining intentions (purposes or goals), planning (plans or strategies), action (implementation), and outcomes (results, consequences, or effects). Action researchers can develop greater understanding and awareness of the interconnectedness between their intentions, actions, and outcomes by engaging in both first-person inquiry as well as second-person inquiry.

Insider Action Research

As a member of the organization in which the current study took place, I acted as an insider action researcher. In terms of my own learning about action research, I completed several action research courses in my graduate studies and also participated in an action research workshop at the University of Georgia where I, with the help and encouragement of my major professor, Dr. Aliki Nicolaides, and graduate faculty, was fortunate to meet firsthand with Dr. David Coghlan over lunch and obtain feedback from him regarding questions I had about approaching my dissertation topic. I also worked directly with Dr. Nicolaides in terms of

framing my research topic and moving forward with my study in an organizational setting that seemed reluctant to embrace inquiry into the topic of civility in higher education. In retrospect, it now seems ironic and also sheds light on the difficulties I had in not only attempting to engage change in an institution of higher education experiencing such rapid change and uncertainty, but also initiating conversations with others about creating and sustaining a culture of civility in such an unsafe context.

First-Person Inquiry

Besides the numerous interpersonal issues involved with conducting insider action research, there may also be potential ethical and political dilemmas inherent in conducting research within one's own organization. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) explain,

> As an insider action researcher, you are an actor in the setting of the organization. In contrast with traditional research approaches, you are not neutral but an active intervener making and helping things happen. Accordingly, a critical feature of action research is how you learn about yourself in action as you engage in first, second, and third person inquiry (p. 18)

Since first-person inquiry involves researchers inquiring directly into their own intentions, assumptions, experiences, and behaviors, I understood all too well the political and social environment of the organization I was studying. Once again, the focus of first-person inquiry is reflecting *in* rather than *on* action. Moreover, I engage here in first-person inquiry as a means by which to reflect upon the contributions I, my action research team, and the institution itself played that resulted in the failure of this study to bring about change. In describing the self-reflective nature of first-person inquiry, Marshall (2001) discusses three frameworks around which to structure such practice. First, inquiry requires that researchers *move between the inner*

and outer arcs of attention. By being mindful of their inner arcs, researchers become more aware of how they frame issues, make meaning, and choose to speak out. Pursuing their outer arcs of attention requires moving outside themselves and actively engaging in second-person inquiry with others in an effort to raise questions, test assumptions, and learn through collaboration. The second framework involves the classic action research format of *engaging in cycling between action and reflection* consisting of planning, acting, and reflecting while also maintaining the inner and outer tracking of attention; which Marshall (2001) contends are key aspects of self-reflective first-person inquiry. The third framework involves *being both active and receptive* of one's behavior and being. In referring to the work of David Bakan (1966), Marshall (2001) describes the dual notions of *agency* or independence and self-control within one's environment and *communion* or interdependence and connection with others or the context and how these approaches influence how researchers act, speak, and make meaning.

Marshall (2004) also examines how the practice of action research involves first, second, and third-person inquiry. Through the process of engaging collaboratively in second-person inquiry, individuals must also exercise self-reflective first-person inquiry which, as their understanding increases, encourages them to engage further in third-person inquiry so as to influence wider systems. Reason and Marshall (1987) describe first-person, second-person, and third-person inquiry as integrating three audiences of research. They state,

> All good research is for *me*, for *us*, and for *them*. It speaks to three audiences…It is *for them* to the extent that it produces some kind of generalizable ideas and outcomes…It is *for us* to the extent that it responds to concerns for our praxis, is relevant and timely…[for] those who are struggling with problems in their field of action. It is *for me*

> to the extent that the process and outcomes respond directly to the individual researcher's being-in-the-world. (pp. 112-113)

Torbert (2004) explains first-person inquiry occurs when "we seek the attentiveness—the presence of mind—to begin noticing the relationships among our intuitive sense of purpose, thoughts, behaviors, and effects. In this way we gradually generate increasing integrity within ourselves" (p. 38). In addition, Reason and Bradbury (2001) describe first person action research as "the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting" (p. xxv). Reason (1991) explains "the origins of first-person inquiry lie in the work of Argyris and Schon and their descriptions of action science to explore the fit and misfit between theories-in-use and espouse theories (Argyris et al., 1985) and the 'reflective practitioner' (Schon, 1983)" (p. 187). Therefore, in my own process of first-person inquiry, I engage in reflective practice to explore my espoused theory of what I had hoped would happen as the study evolved compared to what actually took place based on my theories in use. While my inquiry is focused inward to examine what was going on within me as the study unfolded, I also focus outward to observe what was taking place within my team as well as systemically within the organization of which I was a part.

When engaging in first-person inquiry, Marshall (1999, 2001) points out how researchers often choose topics of inquiry that reflect their own lives and experiences. Taylor (2004) argues

> One starting point for first person research is to reflect on moments in which you felt stuck, frustrated, sad, angry, or had unsatisfactory outcomes. These should be moments that have a sense of familiarity about them, a sense that they represent a familiar dynamic in which you repeatedly find yourself, a sense that they represent an aspect of a

> ‘behavioral footprint’ (thus making the time invested in analyzing and reflecting on a brief moment in time worthwhile). (p.75)

In retrospect, it was, after all, my own encounters with instances of bullying or incivility with colleagues and administrators that influenced my decision to pursue the research topic of civility within the context of higher education. The unsafety of the institution in which the study took place was very “top-down” in the way communication flowed and independent mindedness among faculty members exploring changing the system discouraged. Upon reflection, it was this unsafe culture of fear and intimidation that contributed to the reluctance the AR team had with being audio-recorded for much of the action research process.

The unsafe systemic culture also contributed to the team’s sense of learned helplessness and “paralysis” that prevented them from feeling empowered to take action. Being an insider, I was simultaneously constrained and also rewarded by the institutional culture. On one hand, the system permitted me to conduct my research while, on the other hand, also reinforced my tendencies toward inaction and avoiding confrontation. Understanding the organizational culture meant operating within what I and my team recognized as acceptable boundaries imposed on us by the system. As a result, I did not push myself or my team beyond those boundaries, which contributed to my failure at fully applying appreciative inquiry. My questions were enough to spark interest but not controversy; and discussion without action. While I espoused a willingness to become uncomfortable for the sake of learning and critical thinking, in actuality, my theories in use went nowhere near causing discomfort to me, my team, or the system. In fact, I did just the opposite and played it incredibly safe throughout the action research process.

As Torbert (2004) points out, in our conversations with others using second-person inquiry, we can more effectively seek to establish a sense of mutuality or mutual commitment to

the conclusions we draw by interweaving the four parts of speech consisting of framing, advocating, illustrating, and inquiring. Since action research is a collaborative approach to research and inquiry, through the process of co-inquiry with others and applying the four parts of speech, I discovered that I was not alone in my experiences with incivility in this unsafe institutional culture. Torbert (2004) argues that since speaking influences action, then the four parts of speech serve to "represent the very atoms of human action" (p. 26). Through the process of second person inquiry where, in my conversations with others, I began hearing similar stories of personal experiences with incivility over and over again. By engaging simultaneously in the process of first-person inquiry, I came to realize that my assumptions about the unsafe culture of the organization were shared by others and not just something limited to my experiences.

As time went on, my research findings began to suggest the existence of an unsafe organizational culture where fear and intimidation seemed to be an acceptable norm and how a lack of civility served as a barrier to creating more generative spaces for connection, collaboration, and change. Through the processes of first-person and second-person inquiry, I was able to understand how an unsafe organizational culture of incivility rather than a culture of civility could be nurtured and sustained as an acceptable means of organizational culture and communication. As I discuss in Chapter 6, the unsafety of the system presented interesting implications for extending our understanding and application of Theory U, especially in terms of "the dark side" of the inverted U, as a theory and method of organizational change.

Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative methods were used to answer the research questions guiding this study. In describing the theory and principles of action research, Stringer (2007) explains how action research "is grounded in a qualitative research paradigm whose purpose is to gain greater clarity

and understanding of a question, problem, or issue" (p. 19). In essence, action research begins with an inquiry into a problem or issue and examines how participants not only define their experience with the issue, but also how they are affected. Hence, rather than focusing solely on *what* is happening as is the case in quantitative or positivist research, action research seeks to understand and explore *how* something is happening. Moreover, action research attempts to understand the perceptions and interpretations of the stakeholders investigated.

In the current study, qualitative research methods were appropriate for capturing how research participants made meaning of the changes taking place within the particular context under investigation. Maxwell (2005) points out how in qualitative research, the researcher is "interested not only in the physical events and behaviors that are taking place, but also in how the participants in your study make sense of these, and how their understanding influences their behavior" (p. 22). In addition, such an interpretive approach in qualitative research can allow for more flexibility by allowing researchers to identify unexpected occurrences (such as the emergence of the inverted U in this study) or phenomena which can lead to the generation of grounded theory. Furthermore, qualitative methods work well in action research when collaborating with participants as researchers can gain greater insight into the processes by which outcomes of events and actions occur. Such understanding can allow researchers to draw conclusions and develop causal explanations.

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative or interpretive research is "interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). While qualitative research has been influenced by various disciplinary and philosophical perspectives, it is situated in interpretive research with the assumption reality is socially constructed. Qualitative research thus gives way

to multiple realities and interpretations of events rather than one single, observable reality as in quantitative or positivist research. Therefore, a major philosophical assumption of qualitative research is people come to know based on how they describe and interpret experiences through their senses. Through the process of symbolic interactionism, they can create verbal, nonverbal, and written symbols by which to share their experiences and interpretations with others.

Merriam (2009) describes four characteristics of qualitative research: (1) the emphasis is on process, meaning, and understanding, (2) the primary instrument of data gathering and analysis is the researcher, (3) the process is inductive rather than deductive, and (4) the product of the inquiry generates rich description. The focus on process, meaning, and understanding, draws on philosophical orientations as constructivism, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism. As was the case for the current study, qualitative researchers attempt to understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and how they attribute meaning to their experiences. Accordingly, the key concern of qualitative research is gaining understanding from the perspective of the participant rather than the researcher. Another way to distinguish this concern is to think about it in terms of gaining understanding from the "emic" perspective of the insider rather than that of the "etic" perspective of the outsider.

Qualitative research also has to do with the researcher being the primary instrument for data gathering and analysis. Advantages include gaining greater understanding through verbal and nonverbal communication, processing data quickly, and seeking clarification from participants as to the accuracy of the data as well as the researcher's summary and interpretations. Of course, the researcher as a human instrument also has disadvantages related to shortcomings and biases. However, rather than attempting to eliminate all of their

subjectivities, researchers can become more aware or reflexive of their biases and monitor how their subjectivity may potentially influence their data collection and interpretation. In my own experience, I sought to understand rather than remove the subjectivity I brought to my research. Through the process of deep reflection and journaling, I recorded my thoughts after team meetings and interviews in an attempt to reflect on what I had observed and how my own experiences reflected those of the action research team. By engaging in first-person inquiry, I have attempted to explore the limitations of the self as a human instrument by examining the choices I made as an insider throughout the research process, how my choices impacted my AR team, and how the unsafety of the system influenced my efforts between what I espoused initially compared to what I actually carried out in the end.

The third characteristic of qualitative research examines how the process is inductive rather than deductive. Qualitative research is often embarked upon because there is either a lack of theory or existing theory is inadequate to explain the phenomenon under investigation. As a result, Merriam (2009) posits how qualitative researchers must inductively "gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in positivist research" (p. 15). Through the process of interviewing, observing, and gaining intuitive understandings from conducting research in the field, qualitative researchers can inductively build theory based on the themes they see emerging from the data. While qualitative researchers may be operating from a discipline specific theoretical framework, the framework is further informed and developed by what is learned inductively in the field rather than deductively through experiments and hypothesis testing. In this study, I took an inductive data-driven approach to analyzing the data gathered over a two-year period from observations, meeting notes, researcher memos, and interviews.

Lastly, qualitative research generates rich description. Rather than using numbers to convey meaning, the researcher uses words and pictures to convey what was learned from studying of the phenomenon. In order to provide rich description, data collected in the current study included observations, meeting notes, and transcripts and audio-recordings of interviews. Merriam (2009) explains rich description also involves describing the context in which the research took place, the participants involved, and the activities that occurred. Similarly, Marshall (2004) points out when engaging in first-person inquiry, the challenge researchers face involves knowing how much to share when writing accounts "that are alive, rich, and multi-faceted but also succinct [so as to]…bring experience to the reader sufficiently well and not draw them into too much detail" (p. 310). In the current study, I have attempted to explore the context by describing and illustrating the unsafety of the system and its impact on the individual and collective efforts of my AR team toward taking action. In this manner, strategies for first-person inquiry that add to the richness of qualitative data and connect the reader to what was taking place include direct quotes from documents, field notes, and participant interviews along with audio, video, and electronic communication excerpts that further support and add a descriptive nature to the findings. As was also my experience in this study, Merriam (2009) discusses how qualitative designs tend to be more emergent and flexible in adapting to the changing conditions of the study, lend themselves to purposeful sampling rather than random sampling as in quantitative research, and provide researchers with greater opportunities to work more directly with participants in the field or in natural settings.

Case Study

Marsick and Watkins (1997) explain case studies are prevalent in both qualitative and quantitative research where investigators "seek answers to simple, short-term questions…or they

may focus on complex, longer-term concerns" when building theory or describing experiences (pp. 138-139). Case studies may use a variety of data collection methods "to triangulate sources and strategies in order to corroborate findings and to offset the shortcomings of any given method" (p. 144). In addition, case studies "are often used to describe or explain phenomenon and to generate theory, not just test it" (p. 147). Yin (2009) discusses how the case study method is used in numerous situations when investigators seek to understand complex issues or events and points out that case study research "includes procedures central to all types of research methods, such as protecting against threats to validity, maintaining a 'chain of evidence,' and investigating and testing 'rival explanations'" (p. 3).

Furthermore, Yin (2009) maintains "how" and "why" type research questions tend to be more explanatory and lend themselves to the use of research methods such as case studies, histories, and experiments. Rather than describing frequencies or incidences, explanatory questions examine phenomena as they take place over time such as how a community adapts to the closing of its largest employer. Thus, the type of question asked provides information about the type of research method to be used. Since the purpose of this study was to explore how college and university faculty can co-inquire into the process of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change, its focus, based on Yin's (2009) distinction, was explanatory and concentrated on a single case rather than a series of multiple cases.

Data Collection

This study took place over a two-year period at a large regional state university located in the Southeastern portion of the United States. Participants in the study were twelve faculty members representing each of the university's (then) four campuses. Of the twelve participants,

eight were female and four were male and all were Caucasian. The ages of the participants ranged from 30 to 71, with the average or mean age being 54.25. The sample for this study was a purposeful, convenience sample. This particular research site was selected for the study due to my personal encounters with having experienced firsthand the unsafe phenomenon of incivility among faculty members as well as administrators. By examining the literature on the topic of civility in higher education, I noted a gap indicating a significant amount of research had examined the problem of incivility in higher education among teachers and students and its effects on teaching and learning in the classroom (Boice, 2000; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Feldmann, 2001; Frey-Knepp, 2012; Plax & Kearney, 1990). Upon reflection, I concluded if incivility had been identified as a problem in higher education, could the present study examining civility redirect our attention toward discovering solutions that benefit not only individuals, but the very systems within which the problem takes place.

According to Merriam (2009), purposeful sampling "is based on the assumption the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). Thus, when beginning purposeful sampling, the researcher must first establish criteria essential in selecting the people or sites to be studied which also reflects the purpose of the study. As an example from the current study, participants were familiar with the context and had insights regarding creating and sustaining the type of change effort the inquiry sought to explore. Merriam (2009) also explains probability sampling may consist of convenience sampling whereby a sample is selected "based on time, money, location, [and] availability of sites or respondents" (p. 79). Given the time constraints of this action research project, the research site was selected as because it provided a convenience sample. In addition, as an insider conducting research in my own organization, the research site

was purposeful and convenient in providing me the opportunity to study the phenomenon under investigation with a team of stakeholders who were also interested in the research topic. Moreover, working directly with stakeholders provided me with referrals to other like-minded participants Merriam (2009) refers to as snowball, chain, or network sampling. This process of networking was especially helpful in building connections with colleagues from across the institution's different campuses.

As Merriam (2009) points out, qualitative data is derived from interviews, observations, and documents. Triangulation of data refers to using multiple sources of data to ensure validity and reliability by comparing and cross-checking data. In the current study, data was collected in the form of observations, meeting notes, researcher memos, and interview audio-recordings and transcripts. As I discuss in Chapter 4, due to the lack of safety within the system, there was a tremendous reluctance on the part of the action research team to have our meetings audio-recorded for much of the action research process. To compensate for the lack of audio-recording, I took careful notes during meetings. After each meeting, I reviewed my notes and added additional details to clarify and expound on what had transpired. I also made it a practice to compose researcher memos where I jotted down any other ideas, reflections, and questions about the meeting that I could use in future meetings. During the final team focus group meeting that brought closure to the study and in individual interviews, the team agreed to audio-recording. Nonetheless, I continued the practice of note-taking, memoing, and deep reflection over the course of the study.

Observation

Merriam (2009) describes how the participant observer is able to gain firsthand knowledge and expertise not only from documenting and chronicling behavior as it takes place,

but from also directly interpreting their observations rather than relying on the accounts of others as in interview data. In addition, the benefit derived from observation is gaining knowledge of the context, specific incidents, and behaviors that can be used as reference points for subsequent interviews. Thus, observation becomes a useful strategy when the researcher is trying to understand critical thinking or when examining sensitive topics people may feel uncomfortable talking about such as what it feels like when civility is present in an organization as opposed to when it is not.

Depending on the research topic, the research questions, the theoretical framework of the study, and the researcher's academic discipline, Merriam (2009) suggests what is observed consists of elements such as the physical setting, the participants, activities and interactions, verbal conversations, nonverbal communication such as dress and physical space, and also the researcher's own behaviors and reflections. By observing my own action research participants, I paid attention not only to what was being said, but also how it was said. Were people comfortable sharing their thoughts or did they speak cautiously or hesitantly? Did each team member contribute to the conversation or were there some members who dominated interactions? Did participants engage in the very civility behaviors the study was exploring? In addition, I also reflected on my own communication and leadership abilities as a facilitator. As a participant observer engaging in first-person inquiry, I considered my own positionality and was mindful about what and how I said things so as not to bias or "lead" discussions in a particular direction. Furthermore, in doing my field work, I was constantly worried about obtaining enough information in order to capture the essence of the study.

Action Research Team Meeting Notes

According to Merriam (2009), capturing the essence involves researchers recording their observations by taking descriptive field notes and by reflecting afterward on their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of what transpired. Merriam (2009) advises, "What is written down or mechanically recorded from a period of observation becomes the raw data from which a study's findings eventually emerge" (p. 128). As was the case early on in the current study, I did not use audio-recording to capture the events of the action research meetings due to reluctance on the part of participants to have their conversations recorded. As a result, I had to balance my role as participant and facilitator so that I could write down and capture the essence of what was being discussed, who made interesting comments, ideas for follow-up questions and sessions, and my own reflections as they occurred to me.

Researcher Memos

What became especially important was to reflect afterward on the details of what had taken place and on what I had observed. I had to recall what specific ideas were discussed and by whom. Were there any pithy quotes, expressions, examples, or references made during the observation that stood out and just made for rich data? In addition to writing good field notes, Miles and Huberman (1994) point out writing researcher memos or insight journals is essential during field work and are especially useful for jotting down ideas and musings, making connections and considering implications, and capturing ideas for potential next steps the study can take. Throughout the study, my use of researcher memos has helped tremendously in providing me with a means by which to capture my reflections and observations on the research process of data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Interviews

While participant observation, meeting notes, and researcher memos were all means by which data was collected in the current study, interviews were also a rich source of data collection. Discussing how to conduct effective interviews, Merriam (2009) explains, "In all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews" (p. 87). Interviews are systematic conversations typically conducted in face-to-face, person-to-person situations either individually or in group formats as well as through mediated channels such as telephone and email. The goal of interviewing is to obtain information when we cannot observe behaviors, feelings, interpretations or replicate past events.

Merriam (2009) describes three types of interview structures: highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. In order to more fully examine how participants define the world, much interviewing in qualitative research is semi-structured where the researcher is guided by a list of questions based on the research questions. The semi-structured format also permits considerable flexibility for the researcher to respond to, and probe more deeply, the narrative and worldview articulated by the participant as it emerges.

In the current study, I used a semi-structured interview format which allowed me the flexibility of conducting engaging conversations with my action research participants while also providing opportunities to ask further questions, clarify comments, engage in perception checking, and inquire more deeply into the behaviors, feelings, and interpretations we took away from our individual and collective experiences of engaging in the research topic. Patton (2002) suggests six types or categories of interview questions exploring (1) experiences and behaviors, (2) opinions and values, (3) feelings, (4) knowledge, (5) sensory data, and (6) background and demographic data. Merriam (2009) also adds four additional types of interview questions

consisting of (1) hypothetical, (2) devil's advocate, (3) ideal position, and (4) interpretive. In the current study, the interview questions and corresponding demographic information included each of Patton's (2002) six categories as well as examples of Merriam's (2009) hypothetical, ideal position, and interpretive type questions.

The duration of each interview was approximately ninety minutes. I was also careful in my wording so as to avoid leading questions that could potentially bias participants in their responses. Furthermore, in order to preserve and ensure the accuracy of what was discussed, each interview was audio-recorded and fully transcribed verbatim by me not only for later analysis, but for me to also gain familiarity with the data as it unfolded. In addition to audio-recording, I also took notes during each interview to capture my reflections and observations on participants' verbal and nonverbal communication. Examining not only *what* was said, but *how* it was said provided additional layers of rich meaning into the behaviors, feelings, and interpretations we were exploring.

Data Analysis

According to Merriam (2009) qualitative data analysis is an interactive, inductive, and comparative process that begins when the researcher conducts the first interview, engages in the first observation, or reads the first document. In addition, qualitative data analysis is an interactive process that permits the researcher to produce trustworthy conclusions. Since data analysis begins with data collection, the insights gained from those initial attempts at data gathering will influence how the researcher approaches subsequent stages of the research process in terms of refining research questions and discovering emerging themes. Ruona (2005) points out the "primary charge during qualitative research is to capture, understand, and represent participants' perceptions and meanings *through and in* their own words" (p. 234). Because

qualitative data involves meanings communicated through language and action, the meanings derived from observations, interviews, and documents consist of words representing the social reality of the participants being studied and illustrate the manner in which they make meaning. Moreover, how researchers understand the words of those they study is influenced by their own interpretive lenses.

Ruona (2005) explains the purpose of qualitative data analysis involves the researcher taking into consideration what she or he has heard and seen in the data and then searching for the important meanings, patterns, and themes that emerge. Therefore, a key takeaway for the qualitative researcher when making sense out of the data is to recognize the "codable moment" when it occurs as themes emerge from the data. Furthermore, making sense out of the data in order to more fully understand participants' meaning-making involves organizing the data into categories and constantly comparing incidents from interviews, observations, and documents in order to either confirm categories, develop new categories or sub-categories, or formulate theory. In discerning what happened in the current study, data were analyzed using analytic memos, deep reflection, and the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which involved comparing one set of interview data with another in order to determine similarities. Once similarities were found between data sets, the data were grouped together and named under a category with the goal of identifying specific patterns or themes emerging.

As Miles and Huberman (1994), Merriam (2009), and Ruona (2005) recommend, codes were not pre-assigned to the data. As a result, rather than fitting the data into pre-existing codes, I attempted to be open to not only the codable moment as it occurred, but also to what the data were revealing. All interviews were transcribed, coded for themes, and merged together. In conducting my data analysis, I relied on Ruona's (2005) method for analyzing qualitative data

using Microsoft Word consisting of (1) data preparation, (2) familiarization, (3) coding, and (4) generating meaning. As a predominantly visual learner, the method was especially intuitive not only in how it provided me with an effective system by which to manage a significantly large amount of data, but also in how it offered me a tangible way to actually "see" what the participants were saying as they answered each interview question and then compare their responses so as to generate themes.

Data Preparation

According to Ruona (2005), the data preparation stage involves transforming the data to make it easier to work with. Typically, this process comprises transcribing, protecting the identity of participants, and establishing a filing system to backup and store the transcripts. In the current study, I engaged in data preparation by transcribing each of the individual interviews along with meeting notes and researcher memos in Microsoft Word. In addition, the anonymity of each participant was insured by removing their identifiable information and assigning them pseudonyms along with code numbers ranging from 001 to 012. Each transcribed file was saved as a separate Word document in a folder I created named "Civility Data Analysis." To ensure security and prevent the potential loss of data, I backed up each file on an external flash drive and printed a hardcopy which I could read, highlight, and make additional notations on as needed. Saving each document also ensured I would always have a "clean" electronic copy. The next step of data preparation involved converting each document of text into a six-column landscape view table in Microsoft Word with a header row containing the following headings: Code, ID, Q#, Turn#, Data, and Notes.

Familiarization

The process of familiarization involves further immersion into the data on a deeper level by listening to audio recordings, watching video material, reading and re-reading transcripts, and writing notes and memos regarding what the data are saying. Ruona (2005) explains the "purpose of this stage of analysis is to actively engage with the data, begin your analysis, and record your insights about what you 'see' in the data" (p. 254). Thus, the researcher is able to gain a greater sense of what is happening and also reflect on its meaning. During this stage of data analysis, I continued the process of creating a data table in Microsoft Word by adding additional information based on the row heading such as "ID" for each participant and "Q#" for the research question being analyzed. Ruona (2005) describes the next column, the "Data" column, as being most important for analysis because the researcher is looking for the emergence of patterns. In the current study, I reviewed each document at least twice and began identifying meaningful segments of data such as phrases, sentences, and passages I found being repeated by participants. I then added new rows to the table and began moving data into those rows. In the last column, the "Notes" column, I added my own comments and observations gained from reading through the data.

Coding

According to Ruona (2005), the coding process "involves further segmenting your data into categories/themes and tagging those themes with a code number. Your objective during this stage is to continue your analysis—segmenting data and coding it thematically" (p. 255). In the current study, I read each transcript along with my notes and researcher memos and reduced the data into general categorizes. At that point, I then assigned codes or themes based on what was emerging. Ruona (2005) points out the codes created inductively from what is emerging in the

data are data driven codes based on (1) what the researcher deems important based on the frequency with which the theme is discussed, (2) what the audience the study is aimed at finds important, (3) the uniqueness of the category, or (4) the category revealing some area of inquiry or problem not otherwise recognized. In addition, the categories should (1) reflect the purpose of the research, (2) be exhaustive, (3) be mutually exclusive, (4) be sensitizing to what is in the data, and (5) be conceptually congruent. Once I identified my categories, I then assigned a numerical five-digit code to each category beginning with the number 10000, which enabled me to create additional categories and sub-categories useful for later sorting and merging of data.

Generating Meaning

Ruona (2005) explains "once your coding is complete and your data have been categorized, you need to move more fully into the interpretive mode. This is the stage in which you…attempt to offer your own interpretation of what is going on" (p. 244). Thus, generating meaning involves considering how the themes that have emerged from the data are connected in some way. In other words, what is the whole picture emerging here and what additional questions need to be asked? Furthermore, how do the emerging themes fit into your own ideas, the literature, and previous research? This stage means thinking with your data in order to generate meaning.

Using Microsoft Word to assist in data analysis involves merging your data and creating a master document allowing you to perform a group-level analysis useful for generating meaning and building theory. In the current study, once coded information from all documents was merged into a master document, I continued reading and reflecting on the codes I had created. This process also led to making further revisions and refinements of codes along with my adding

additional comments in the "Notes" column. See Table 3.1 for a sample of the Master File Data Table showing merged data.

Table 3.1: Master File Data Table

Code	ID#	RQ#	Turn#	Data	Notes
10100	006	1	10	It was more the people instead of the topic. I mean I certainly thought the topic was relevant and necessary because we were in such a transformation period between juxtaposing two institutions that had very different cultures. But I saw it as an opportunity to be part of a collegial exchange.	More about the people instead of the topic. Searching for social connections.
10100	007	1	13	I think part of it was one academic or scholarly interest that I'm interested in is people's work…what we get out of work….what work takes out of us. I think what work takes out of us may not be only a physical thing, but it may be an emotional or psychological thing. Relationships with my colleagues and co-workers are important aspects of my job…how I get along with people…how they treat me. So this idea of civility is a big part of that…just trying to understand how people do or do not treat each other well.	Searching for both scholarly and social connections.
10100	002	1	21	Civility was an issue that I had been dealing with. I had taken a workshop at one of our state professional conferences trying to gather together academic affairs and student affairs leadership to talk about the whole issue of civility on college and university campuses. One of the things we talked about was the issue on why there is so much incivility…and then we decided to change it to focus on what are the conditions we can utilize to bring about civility…rather than talk about the negatives to be more positive.	Interested in the topic of civility and focusing on the positive aspects of civility rather than incivility. Searching for scholarly and informational connections.

10100	004	1	15	I was thinking in terms of the consolidation, so I was interested in exploring how we could navigate perceptions of hostility or perceptions of being taken over…and work together…get to know one another.	Searching for informational and social connections.

Quality in First-Person Action Research

Reason (2006) describes four characteristics or dimensions of action research consisting of (1) addressing worthwhile practical purposes, (2) encompassing many ways of knowing, (3) participative and democratic, and (4) an emergent process. In discussing his rationale for establishing these criteria, Reason (2006) argues the four dimensions are not absolute, but instead reflect choices action researchers make and the consequences resulting from those choices that determine what constitutes quality or validity in their work. In essence, quality (or validity) in action research arises from awareness of and transparency about the choices researchers make at each stage of inquiry. Moreover, others may choose different characteristics of action research better suited for their perspectives and choices.

Reason (2006) raises the question of what constitutes quality in action research. He notes how the practice of quality inquiry requires researchers "to be aware of the choices open to them; to make these choices clear and transparent to themselves and to their inquiry partners; and, in writing and presenting, to articulate them to a wider audience" (pp. 189-190). My interpretation of what Reason (2006) explains here is that quality in action research requires researchers to engage in first, second, and third-person inquiry. In this sense, quality in action research exists not only internally in a researcher's capacity to recognize their choices and understand the ensuing consequences, but also externally in their ability to transparently articulate their choices to a wider audience. Hence, the process of creative discourse in making choices available for the

scrutiny of a wider public audience also contributes to the quality of action research by establishing its scholarship and practice and moving criteria away from that used in empiricist research.

Reason (2006) also argues against taking an outcomes based, agentic orientation to action research that raises the question of "does it work?" and instead advocates for a more communion, participative approach to inquiry emphasizing conversation, empowerment, openness, and self-determination. Hence, quality in action research "must include whether we have helped the development of an effective community of inquiry among participants, whether questions of power have been addressed, whether the inquiry has been emancipatory and deepened the experiential basis of understanding, and so on" (p. 193). In considering how to conduct action research and to what ends, we can move away from a heroic agentic notion focusing specifically on problem-solving and instead engage more collaboratively in inquiry on a broader level by creating spaces for democratic dialogue and participation.

By engaging in the process of first-person inquiry, I actively reflected on the nature of the research topic, my personal and professional connection to the topic, how I was approaching the topic and with whom, and what I hoped to achieve from conducting the study. I also actively reflected on my notes and observations from meetings as a way to make meaning and collect data. Moreover, through the process of second-person inquiry, I spent months talking with my professors, classmates, and work colleagues. Marshall (2016) describes working with feedback from others as "an inherent quality process" (p. 62) of first-person inquiry. By engaging collaboratively with my colleagues and actively obtaining feedback from them, I discovered how reluctant people were to talk about sensitive issues such as incivility and how much more willing they were to discuss the topics of civility and how to create and sustain cultures of civility in

higher education. After all, no one likes to admit that incivility exists within their departments or that they are or have been the victims or perpetrators of acts of incivility. Torbert (2004) explains framing an issue as communicating your purpose and putting "your perspective as well as your understanding of the others' perspectives on the table for examination" (p. 28). Thus, my first-person and second-person inquiry began by obtaining feedback around how best to frame my research approach as well as how to overcome the obstacles involved with getting people to talk about a sensitive topic.

Reason (2006) explains how the formation of communicative spaces "is in itself a form of action. It may we be that the most important thing we can choose to do in certain situations is to help open, develop, maintain, and encourage new and better forums of communication and dialogue" (p. 193). In the current study, while there was an individual and collective readiness to discuss the rapid institutional change taking place, there was a lack of readiness on the part of the system to provide spaces for such dialogue to occur. Through their participation in this research, AR team members found a space within which they could engage and connect with their colleagues. In an unsafe system, the risky and subversive act of participating in this type of dialogue was in itself a type of change from the status-quo.

In addressing quality in action research, Marshall and Reason (2007) explore the notion of researchers adopting "an attitude of inquiry" as a quality process when engaging in self-reflective first-person action research. Marshall and Reason (2007) contend "it is taken as axiomatic that the inquirer is connected to, embedded in, the issues and the field they are studying" (p. 368). Likewise, to be self-reflective means that all researchers benefit from by examining how they are connected to their research topics and methodological approaches. Moreover, while it is not always easy to talk about, reflection is a key indicator of quality in

action research. Consequently, this simultaneous process of awareness of meaning-making and action in the world is described by the authors as self-reflective practice or first-person action research (Marshall, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2016; Reason & Torbert, 2001). As Marshall (2004) explains, "First-person action research is both an approach to inquiry in itself—as I research my own practice—and, in my view, foundational to overtly collaborative forms of action research" (p. 306). Therefore, through the process of first-person inquiry, researchers must reflect on what they hope to achieve by engaging in the research project along with the processes they will have to exercise in order to realize their research objectives.

Marshall and Reason (2007) define quality as "having, or seeking, a capacity for self-reflection, so that we engage in full vitality of the inquiry and attend to the perspectives and assumptions we are carrying" (p. 369). In describing her approach to first-person action research as living life as inquiry, Marshall (2004) points out, "As a self-reflective researcher I apply and test ideas and practices back and forth between my research and what might be termed the rest of my life, although often there is little sense of boundary between these" (p. 308). Through the practice of my own first-person inquiry and attempting to ensure the quality of my research by adopting an attitude of inquiry, or in the process of living life as inquiry, I was especially curious to explore my connection to the phenomenon of civility (or a lack thereof) not only for academic reasons, but for personal reasons as well. After further reflection, it occurred to me that I was making an effort to more intentionally and purposefully gain greater self-awareness in order to comprehend the issue and come to terms with the very organizational phenomenon I had experienced firsthand.

However, if adopting an attitude of inquiry also means exercising humility and recognizing the limits of knowing, then I must confess that neither I nor my team felt empowered

to go beyond merely talking about how to create and sustain a culture of civility. Within the context of an unsafe system, we never took steps to push the boundaries of the system and actually put into place the very culture of civility we embraced outside of our research team. While my study of civility afforded me opportunities to connect with other like-minded colleagues and engage them in second-person inquiry on a problem that was of mutual concern, we could not get past just talking about the issue. Of course, as Reason (2006) argues, establishing a space for dialogue, especially in an unsafe system like the one within which we found ourselves, might in and of itself be considered a step toward taking some type of action amidst the rapid change and uncertainty we were experiencing.

Creating spaces for connection and experiencing seeing one's self as involved rather than removed from systemic relationships reflects Marshall's (2004) concept of living systemic thinking as a focus for first-person inquiry. In this sense, thinking systemically informs not only our behavior as researchers, but also the approaches we take to inquiry as we find ourselves participating and acting interconnectedly within a system. As I discovered in the process of attempting to engage my colleagues in conversations around change at a time when rapid change and uncertainty was taking place, it becomes essential for facilitators to understand how the qualities and dynamics of the system impact our change efforts. Marshall (2004) points out the connection between systemic thinking and acting with integrity in first-person action research. Furthermore, she provides several criteria reflecting action research practice for assessing quality such as examining our intent for inquiry, providing readers with rich yet succinct accounts, determining our research approaches and their appropriateness, making sense of events through punctuation and attribution, engaging in self-reflection, theorizing, knowing when we have inquired enough, working with feedback obtained from others, and determining our level of

vulnerability when presenting data. In essence, how we engage with the data is in and of itself data. Moreover, living systemic thinking involves systemic engagement as well as self-reflection.

Researcher Positionality or Reflexivity

Marshall and Reason (2007) describe reflection as a key indicator of quality in first-person action research. Marshall (2016) maintains, "Developing our capacities for reflectiveness and dialogue seems especially necessary now…given the global and local challenges of environmental un-sustainability and social inequality we face, and the dynamics of difference and power we engage if we seek to address them" (p. xvi). According to Merriam (2009), researcher positionality or reflexivity involves critical reflection on the self as a human instrument in order to take into consideration "biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken" (p. 219). In an effort to illustrate my own capacity for reflective practice as a first-person action researcher, I have attempted to reflect on how my own experiences influenced my choice of the research topic, how I approached the study, how I interacted with participants, and how I interpreted the data. I have also come to examine the limitations of the self as an instrument in terms of how my initial espoused theories in use changed over the course of the study due to errors in my facilitation and application of methods. Moreover, I have also considered how the unsafety of the system influenced the choices I made along with the actions I did and did not take. Maxwell (2005) explains "the researcher is part of the world he or she studies" (p. 109) while Coghlan and Brannick (2010) discuss how reflexivity explores "the relationship between the researcher and the object of research" (p. 41). Hence, as the study unfolded, and as I have attempted to illustrate in this chapter, it became more and more apparent how the researcher not only affects but is affected by the research process.

Merriam (2009) explains, "Rather than trying to eliminate these biases and 'subjectivities,' it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data" (p. 15). Throughout the research process, I engaged in journaling and deep reflection as ways to explore my positionality as an insider action researcher through first-person inquiry. If, as Coghlan and Brannick (2010) contend, we change something by measuring it, then what role was I playing in influencing that change? What were the reasons behind my wanting to study how to create and sustain a culture of civility within the context of higher education in the first place? Why did I find value in this area of research? Was this culture of civility I was attempting to co-create with others something that I needed to first create within myself? Moreover, what individual, collective, and systemic factors got in the way of facilitating my team more effectively toward taking action? Why did I espouse change but then not carry it out? In describing the questioning of one's intent for conducting research on a particular topic, especially in terms of assessing the quality of first-person inquiry, Marshall (2004) advises,

> Having identified a potential territory or topic of first-person inquiry such as this, it is valuable to be questioning about its intent. Where has it come from? How is it held? Is it shallow or robustly grounded? Does it persist and grow when considered? Can I sense a strong learning edge here? Does that pull potential defense as well as engagement? How can I keep aware of and work with that? Typically, I partly test out my intent, and its framing, by speaking to others, paying attention to how I articulate it, learning from their feedback and challenges. (p. 310)

In a sense, the largest site for change during the research process has been within me as an instrument of change. Ultimately, the interpretation of the results of this research is a

combination of my attempt to make sense of what happened combined with how the reader chooses to make meaning.

Through the process of critical reflection undertaken over the course of my doctoral journey, I discovered more and more how my personal connection to the topic of civility and wanting to engage in change efforts that render incivility less pervasive relate to both personal and professional reasons. On a personal level, my experience with the topic of incivility goes back to the verbal aggression I experienced from family and teachers in my childhood. My initial research on the subject (Infante & Rancer, 1982, 1996; Infante & Wigley, 1986; Rancer & Avtgis, 2006) provided me with a concrete vocabulary to more accurately identify that I had experienced instances of swearing, ridicule, teasing, and maledictions along with attacks on my competence and physical appearance. Whoever came up with the expression "words do not hurt" could not have been more wrong. Words have tremendous power and long-lasting effects. There are still times when I replay in my head the "mental tapes" I learned early in life and become my own worst critic. During those times I have to seek out positivity either from myself or others and carry on.

I also experienced incivility in the workplace within the specific context of higher education. For example, I had colleagues berate and embarrass me in front of others, dismiss my ideas in conversations and meetings, undervalue my contributions, and treat me as if I were subordinate to them based how they interacted with me and the assignments I was given. In many ways my experience reinforced the notion that the theories in use by individuals who comprised the institution were clearly out of step with the values espoused by the institution. The process of actively engaging in this research study was cathartic in that I realized I was not alone in my experiences with incivility. Also, by organizing and facilitating my action research

team, I discovered I could apply what I learned in my doctoral studies and actually have a voice in the process of attempting to enact organizational change. Marshall (2004) refers to developing one's voice in first-person inquiry and points out, "I have to develop my own crafts of first-person action research, as the reader does, making this inherently self-referencing activity also continually critical, challenging, and developmental rather than self-satisfied" (p. 307). As a scholar and practitioner, my focus has moved beyond examining the problem of incivility toward discovering ways to address the issue not only on an individual and collective level, but also within the very systems where such issues take place. While realistically we cannot totally rid organizations of incivility, we can collaboratively work together to create conditions for civility to exist that render incivility less of a potent force.

Researcher's Subjectivity

The impetus for this study began as a result of my own attempts to make meaning of the experiences I encountered first-hand with incivility in the context of higher education. The last seven years since I began my doctoral journey have been a tremendous process of personal growth and discovery. One of the biggest goals I set for myself throughout my coursework and dissertation research was to find and more assertively and confidently express my voice as a scholar. At first glance, this might seem ironic because of my background and experience in teaching communication. However, I also heard it said we tend to study and perhaps are subconsciously drawn to the very areas with which we find ourselves lacking. When I began facilitating my action research team, I was terrified I would not have the "right" answers and that I would be regarded as an imposter.

Through the support and encouragement of my major professor, graduate faculty, and classmates, I learned facilitating groups is not a spectator sport and, if I may use a swimming

metaphor, you have to "jump in the water" if you want to learn how to do it effectively. Of course, facilitation requires practice, and I still do not think of myself as an expert by any stretch of the imagination. Nonetheless, through this action research process, I discovered I did not need to have all the answers and that by confronting my fears and "jumping in," I could find and express my voice much more confidently and assertively than I had ever done before. I also learned I could listen and respond effectively to the people and situations emerging around me. As the study unfolded, it became more and more apparent to me that a researcher not only affects but is also affected by the research process. We cannot engage in change with others while not experiencing some type of change within ourselves. Through the process of first-person inquiry, I have attempted to illustrate how the choices I ultimately made, regardless of what I initially espoused, were heavily influenced by the system. While some people may say anyone can do action research in any system, this study clearly illustrates how difficult it is to change the system.

Despite the fact that instances of negativity and incivility influenced me to pursue this line of research on civility in higher education in the first place, the significant number of positive outcomes I have gained as a result far outweigh the negative. In fact, confronting those negative experiences through my doctoral journey in general and this research in particular has not only strengthened my resolve and has made me even more persistent in achieving my goals, but has also increased my confidence, enhanced my self-concept and self-esteem as a human being worthy of respect, and has provided me with opportunities to demonstrate my competence as a scholar and practitioner with voice and definite place at the table. In the chapter that follows, I let the story unfold.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY REPORT

The purpose of this action research case study was to explore how college and university faculty can co-inquire into the process of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change. The study was guided by two research questions, which were: (1) How can faculty and administrators establish holding spaces for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change? and (2) What organizational or systems conditions support or inhibit faculty and administrators in creating and sustaining a culture of civility in a rapidly changing institution of higher education?

While there are many stories to tell from this study, I chose to focus my narrative on the unsafety of the system and its influence on constraining the individual and collective efforts of my AR team at effecting organizational change. By sharing this case, I hope to convey the story of two institutions with different levels of prestige merged together with the expectation from administrators that those impacted could find their own way with minimal conversations and little support. This expectation for "finding their own way" inflicted the worst possible impact on people's feelings of safety, sense of engagement and empowerment, and views of worthiness in the sense of having to prove themselves to their colleagues and students. Accordingly, this case study serves as an oral history chronicling my own first-person inquiry in making meaning around attempting to engage my AR team in an unsafe context under these most difficult circumstances.

Yin (2009) explains how through the process of engaging in case study, not only can we gain insight into the phenomenon under investigation, but also the lived experience of the researcher facilitating the inquiry. By considering the challenges I encountered over the course of the study, I refer to my own observations, meeting notes, researcher memos, audio-recordings, and interviews. Through my experience, I hope to offer insights to others attempting the arduous process of organizational change. Therefore, my focus here is to examine, through first-person inquiry, the learning that took place for (1) me as the researcher working collaboratively with (2) the key stakeholders who made up my action research team within (3) the unsafe system in which we operated that rewarded maintaining the status-quo and discouraged attempts at effecting change.

If, as Lewin noted, we come to understand an organization by trying to change it, then my own realization as an insider of the unsafety characterizing the system is also a story of emergence. Even though numerous obstacles were presented over the course of the study and errors were made in my facilitation of the research team, the results of this research contribute to our understanding of the difficulties involved with facilitating insider action research in an unsafe system undergoing rapid change combined with uncertainty and ambiguity.

My story begins by describing the context and the formation of my action research team which I present as my first attempt at engaging the action research process. I then discuss my second attempt to involve the team by examining the meetings that took place regularly in the process of data collection. Thirdly, I share my attempt to bring closure to the study by examining the outcomes of a focus group designed to capture the team's collective reflections on participating in action research within an unsafe system. Lastly, I provide conclusions for facilitating the difficult process of organizational change in an unsafe system.

Context of the Case Study

The setting for this action research study was a large, multi-campus regional state university located in the Southeastern part of the United States where I am employed. As part of a plan developed by the chancellor and the Board of Regents of the state in which the university is located to reduce the number of existing colleges and universities, several state institutions were combined through a process of consolidation. The university in which this study was conducted was formed in January 2013 through the act of merging two already existing state institutions of higher education. Of the two previous institutions, one was a less prestigious state college in the midst of transitioning from a community college to a four-year college, while the other was a more prestigious state university steeped in the history and traditions of academic success and military leadership. Hence, not only were both institutions different in their levels of prestige, but also in their missions, values, students, and faculty.

At the time the consolidation was announced, many students, faculty, and alumni of both institutions expressed their concerns about the plan. Regardless of these misgivings, the decision had been made and was carried through without much input from those affected. In retrospect, the lack of interest by administrators to the concerns of those impacted by the consolidation was the first indication of the unsafety of the system as related to collaboration and transparency in decision-making. By combining these two institutions, the Board of Regents created a new university that, four years later, now has over 18,000 students, making it the sixth largest university in the state. Even after four years, what was once the more prestigious institution remains the more prestigious campus since it is residential and the location for most of the university's administrators. On the other hand, what was once the less prestigious institution is

still thought of as the less prestigious campus characterized by commuter students along with a continued "community college" atmosphere.

The Impetus for the Study

Since this research began shortly after its implementation, the consolidation served as a major reason for why faculty members wanted to join the civility study. As I discuss in Chapter 5, the uncertainty created by the consolidation led people to seek out opportunities for connection with others with whom they could attempt to make meaning around the event. The consolidation was a significant disruptor in the lives it affected and even now, there are still those who continue to look disdainfully at the changes imposed on both institutions and across different campuses. My idea for the current study actually began prior to the consolidation and was based on personal experiences I had with acts of incivility that could be also be characterized as examples of verbal aggression (Infante & Wigley, 1986) and workplace aggression or bullying (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994; Infante & Rancer, 1996; Williams, 2011) from colleagues. The actual framing of the research topic evolved considerably as I originally wanted to examine faculty incivility in higher education. However, as the reader can probably guess, when dealing with topics of a personal, sensitive, or negative nature, I found it was extremely difficult to get people to talk openly and honestly about their experiences. After all, who really wants to admit they or their departmental colleagues are on the sending or receiving ends of uncivil behavior?

In retrospect, the reluctance of faculty members not wanting to discuss the problem did not indicate its absence; it just meant they did not want to talk about it. Nevertheless, there was a time during the early stages of my research when I doubted if anyone would want to participate and if my study would ever get off the ground. After talking to my major professor about my

dilemma, she suggested reframing the research topic to focus on *civility* in higher education rather than *incivility*. Of course, I could hear her saying those things, and in the back of my mind I knew she was right. However, at the time I was not ready to listen. To concede her point would have meant giving up my stubborn resolve to examine workplace aggression and incivility. To re-frame the issue along and re-orient my approach to exploring it was something I was not ready to face. In fact, I remember foolishly thinking I had all the answers; I just needed people who would admit to having the problem! If only I could just find those people, my study would automatically and magically fall into place. Needless to say, those people and problems never did materialize.

After spinning my wheels for what seemed an eternity, my major professor pointed out there was already agreement in the literature (Boice, 2000; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Feldmann, 2001; Frey-Knepp, 2012; Plax & Kearney, 1990) on incivility being recognized as a problem in higher education research. Since the problem was already established, my study could make a contribution by examining *how to address the problem*. While realistically my research would not entirely eliminate the existence of incivility, by co-inquiring into creating and sustaining cultures of civility in higher education, it could attempt to render incivility less potent. Furthermore, in an institution undergoing rapid growth and uncertainty brought about by consolidation, it would be interesting to explore what place a culture of civility might have in the midst of such change. Therefore, I could attempt to effect change in an institution already undergoing change.

In my discussions with work colleagues and classmates, I came to understand how the topic of civility in higher education is perceived as less threatening when it is framed from a more positive than negative approach when trying to get people to discuss their experiences. It

also occurred to me that by beginning the conversation with a focus on civility, people would hopefully begin to open up and eventually start talking about their negative experiences with incivility. In an article addressing many of my own lived experiences with incivility in higher education, Keashly and Neuman (2010) pose the question of how such negative interpersonal communication could occur in the very place where intellectual inquiry, debate, and reasoned discussion were supposed to be valued and encouraged. Interestingly, these authors shed light on how the very characteristics defining academia such as autonomy, tenure, collegiality, and academic freedom also contribute to what can be thought of as an implicit contract of silence within the institutional culture. Of course, the idea of incivility existing in higher education as a culturally sanctioned "contract of silence" both intrigued and troubled me at the same time. As I discovered from actually conducting my study, the contract of silence reinforces an unsafe systemic culture that resists and pushes back attempts at change while at the same time rewarding maintaining the status-quo.

Formation of the Action Research Team

According to Coghlan and Brannick (2010), the action research process is comprised of a pre-step followed by the three core activities of planning, action, and evaluating what was learned during the first cycle so as to plan the second iterative cycle of research (p. 7). The pre-step involves determining the general objective of the study and also developing the group that will be working on the study. In February 2013, I first met with the director of the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Leadership (CTLL) who agreed to sponsor my research. As an insider action researcher with an understanding of the institution's culture, the support I received from the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Leadership provided an additional layer of legitimacy to my study and increased faculty perceptions of its (and my own) credibility.

Of course, looking back on it now, I realize being an insider in the very organization I was studying also served to constrain both me and my team. We were, after all, products of the very institutional culture we were studying and certainly felt compelled to operate within the confines and expectations of an unsafe bureaucratic, top-down organization that did not encourage the very type of inquiry we were pursuing. In retrospect, it was (and remains) an unsafe organizational culture that rewarded loyalty, punished dissent, and fostered a sense of learned helplessness or paralysis among its members to the extent that people could discuss change, but not feel empowered to do anything about it. However, at that point in time, none of these things mattered as I was much too happy to even consider how the unsafety of the system could (and ultimately would) constrain our efforts. After so much initial difficulty with my study gaining traction, the interest and support it was now receiving left me feeling tremendously excited and naively optimistic.

The CTLL director and I met several times that semester to discuss my research and the progress I was making on my doctoral studies. I also informed her that I was ready to schedule my first informational workshop with faculty members to gain their participation in my research. The CTLL director requested I provide her with some possible dates and times for the workshop and indicated her office would assist me in scheduling and getting the word out to faculty via email and listserv options. I indicated I would also personally seek out faculty participation through face-to-face communication, email, and posting flyers in work areas where faculty members were most likely to congregate and take notice. As a result of our mutual efforts at getting the word out, the first workshop and my first real attempt at engaging the action research process directly with key stakeholders began on Tuesday April 9, 2013 from noon to 1:00 p.m. on the campus where my office and the CTLL office were based.

In preparing for the hour-long workshop, the agenda revolved around my intention to create a holding space welcoming to my colleagues for discussing a potentially sensitive topic and to encourage their participation. According to Scharmer (2009), the holding space provides a context allowing for a shift toward deeper understanding on both individual and collective levels. Drago-Severson (2009) explains the holding space "supports a person where he or she is in terms of making meaning of life experiences and challenges the person to grow beyond that" (pp. 12-13). In addition to providing a context for my own meaning-making, my intent was to create a holding space offering participants a place where they could have a voice around an issue I wanted to investigate. Based on what I was learning about carefully framing the issue from the perspective of civility rather than incivility, it was also important to establish a holding space for developing trust and feeling comfortable sharing personal experiences. Therefore, I attempted to keep the agenda "light" and informational in a non-threatening environment with no high pressure tactics for participation given the potentially sensitive nature of the topic.

The agenda consisted of me beginning the meeting by welcoming participants and introducing myself and the nature of the workshop. I then asked each participant to sign-in, take a copy of the PowerPoint handout I had prepared, provide a short self-introduction, and tell us one key takeaway they wanted to learn or have discussed on the topic of civility. The main topics involved asking participants to talk about their understanding of and personal experiences with civility in higher education. In addition, I asked those present for their participation in my action research study and indicated I would be following up with them by email with additional details. Overall, the workshop went well with seven faculty members and three administrators engaging in a robust discussion on the topic of civility as related to interactions between faculty and students, faculty and faculty, and faculty and administrators.

The level of interest and interaction during the first workshop exceeded my expectations and reduced my concerns that we would not have enough to talk about to "fill-up" an hour-long session. In fact, I was very encouraged the group talked for the entire hour. The first session also began a process of personal learning and growth for me in terms of gaining confidence not only in my skills as a group facilitator, but also in terms of listening, asking questions, following up, and asserting my voice as a facilitator of organizational change. The outcome of first meeting was also very reassuring in the sense participants understood the iterative collaborative nature of action research and its application to the study. Based on these initial observations, my perception was participants seemed excited by the opportunities the study offered them in terms of working collaboratively with their colleagues and for professional development.

One of the predominant themes emerging from the first workshop was the concern about what implications the consolidation would have on civility at the newly formed university. This issue resurfaced a number of times during my meetings with the AR team. However, at that time I did not comprehend what a major role the consolidation would play in our subsequent discussions. In the first meeting, the administrators who attended voiced their concerns about how such rapid growth and change could impact civility in the classroom especially in the wake of adding new undergraduate and graduate degree programs. One administrator expressed trepidation about how the changing institutional culture would influence the different campuses of the university and if the existing campus micro-cultures would be preserved under the developing macro-culture of the new institution. This same administrator also wondered how the consolidation would impact the civility of faculty communication in the sense of being able to disagree with each other without becoming disagreeable. Another administrator questioned the

relationship between civility in the classroom and academic integrity. Interestingly, the AR team would also revisit many of these issues in our meetings over the course of the study.

In my reflections afterward, I felt encouraged the discussion considered not just the civility of communication between faculty and students in the classroom, but also systemically to consider faculty communicating with other faculty as well as faculty communicating with administrators and so forth. One faculty member, who continued his participation throughout the study, admitted in the first meeting he had experienced incivility from his colleagues rather than from students. Not only did his disclosure resonate with me as it confirmed someone else had experienced incivility as I had, but I could tell from the nods and facial expressions of others they could also relate to what he was saying. Perhaps the others would have liked to admit having similar experiences, but held back either out of politeness, shame, or fear of disclosing something so personal with people they did not know very well. Nevertheless, it was an excellent way to bring to the table the idea incivility happens outside the classroom between faculty members.

Even though I did not recognize it then, the disclosure also illustrated the lack of safety pervading the institution. I reminded those present that acknowledging the existence of incivility in our institution, along with recognizing where it takes place and with whom, were all important first steps we could take in achieving a major goal of the study. In essence, if we were to engage in first-person and second-person inquiry as an action research team on how to create and sustain a culture of civility within the context of higher education, then our efforts would have to address civility systemically at the department, college, and institutional levels of the university. Upon further reflection, I also noted if the first meeting was any indication of things to come, then the topic of civility in higher education and its implications for an institution undergoing tremendous

change clearly resonated with those dealing with incivility from their colleagues in addition to the uncertainty and ambiguity brought about by the consolidation.

Bringing the Team Together

My second attempt at engaging the action research process began in September 2013. Over the course of the semester, the AR team met five times from September through November. The team was comprised of six faculty members representing the academic disciplines of English and communication. In addition, these six participants represented only one of the then four campuses that comprised the university. Earlier in this chapter, I used the term "prestige" to describe the differences between the two consolidated institutions. Employing the same language here, all faculty members who participated in the first series of meetings in 2013 were from the less prestigious institution. As time would tell, the lack of participants from the other campuses quickly became an issue we eventually recognized and sought to correct.

The Team Attempts to Make Meaning

While I did not recognize it then, the team's trepidation and reluctance to go on record was one of the first indications of the unsafety of the system. Talking in hushed tones behind closed doors and fearful of reprisal reflected our individual and collective efforts to navigate the boundaries of an unsafe system where saying the wrong thing could literally get you fired. However, after approximately two meetings, the team began a noticeable shift away from polite conversation and instead began moving toward debating. One team member engaged in what Scharmer (2009) describes as "talking tough" by arguing the new institution actually had no identifiable positive core and blamed administrators for "a lack of transparency" along with a much more "closed door, hierarchical, top-down management structure" where "rank has privilege." She also pointed toward what she perceived as a lack of community in the new

institution along with disrespect for faculty members from upper-administration by not involving them in decision-making.

In retrospect, I now realize this was one of the first times the team began addressing the lack of civility and safety at the institution. This discussion also marked one of the first references to issues that would continue to be discussed in subsequent meetings involving (1) the lack of communication transparency between administrators and faculty, (2) faculty members feeling they did not have a voice in decision-making, (3) rule-driven "soulless bureaucratization," and (4) an uneven application of privilege based on rank and position. Moreover, the lack of safety and uncertainty brought about by the consolidation was exacerbated by the failure of administrators to lead effectively, to communicate in a clear and timely manner, and to provide the institution with a sense of identity.

The Unsafety of the System

In an attempt to explore the constraints imposed on faculty members by the unsafety of the system, the team discussed how the top-down management style of administrators and lack of communication transparency illustrated an unsafe culture of fear and intimidation operating unchallenged within the institution. The team developed some noteworthy metaphors to designate the prestige differences they saw existing between campuses. For example, team members referred to the main campus as "the mountain" or "Mount Olympus" to describe the "us versus them" disconnect they perceived as existing on the main campus. If administrators "up on the mountain" of the more prestigious main campus had a vision, no one knew about it because they were not articulating their plan to others not on the mountain. Thus, the more prestigious main campus became a euphemism associated with the administration. Furthermore, the gap between what the team perceived as the institution's espoused theories versus theories in

use (Argyris, Putnam, and McLain-Smith, 1985) continued to be a topic of discussion in many of our later action research team meetings. Likewise, the team also expressed similar "us versus them" frustrations during our interview conversations.

As they wrestled with defining the term "civility," the AR team generated ideas focusing on such notions as respect, listening, recognizing privilege, sensitivity to diversity, open mindedness, due process, treating others as we want to be treated, and living what we teach. In essence, many of the attributes the team associated with civility were those they found lacking in the system and in their communication with administrators. Regardless of how strongly they identified with the topic, it was also apparent the team only wanted to talk about issues related to civility rather than to take action. Upon reflection, this seeming lack of empowerment could be attributed to a number of factors related to my facilitation and playing it too safe combined with the culture of the institution. Whatever the reason, as long as we found ourselves within the context of an unsafe system, we remained within the boundaries and chose not to push the system in ways that could have encouraged us to take action.

Of course, even if I had pushed the team harder, they might have still felt reluctant to disrupt the status-quo. After all, they were also insiders to the institution and very much aware of the lack of safety. Perhaps we might have realized different outcomes had we not been insiders or if we had found ourselves in a different context. As I think about it, my own reluctance and fear to disrupt the status-quo provided a convenient excuse to avoid pushing the team too far outside of our respective comfort zones. The team certainly picked up on my hesitancy which, in turn, influenced them to play it safe as well. Hence, in many ways, we were feeding each other's tendencies toward inaction and avoiding confrontation. In retrospect, we were operating within the confines of a larger, powerful, unsafe system that did not encourage

change and acted accordingly. Perhaps we thought, as Reason (2006) argues, just creating a space for talking about change was in and of itself a defiant attempt at engaging in action.

Whatever our reasons, the lack of safety from the system was never more apparent than in the way it manifested itself in the reluctance the team to be recorded and go on record with their discussions. While it was satisfying to observe team members getting more comfortable in their ownership of the research topic and expressing their thoughts more openly as a group, they did so only behind the security of closed doors while insisting I not record what was being said. In fact, the presence of video or audio-recording equipment had such a chilling effect I was immediately asked to turn it off. If I even did something like place my phone on the table to monitor time, I had to reassure the team I was not secretly recording them. The AR team's reluctance to be recorded had me rushing to take thorough notes during our meetings and then reviewing and revising what I had written afterward.

Upon reflection, I noted how even though it seemed like we had created a holding space for open and transparent communication, the influence of the system and its unsafety was deeply pervasive. As a result, perhaps the holding space was not so safe after all. There continued to exist among the team a fear someone in authority would overhear our conversations and use the information against us in some punitive way. From my own experience as an insider along with what I gathered from the team in my interviews with them, the unsafe culture of the institution did not encourage faculty input. However, their participation on the AR team required and encouraged them to do just that. Since our conversations around the topic of civility also shed light on the lack of safety within the system, it is understandable why team members were fearful their words could be used against them. If anything, it was difficult to feel empowered in such an unsafe culture of fear and intimidation where they had so little voice. Regardless, their

reluctance to be recorded presented a significant challenge to my research. In hindsight, the experience taught me as a facilitator of change working with key stakeholders, I needed to adapt to situational constraints. Facilitating my team also meant developing a greater degree of confidence in my own voice and learning to assert myself more. If I had not been an insider working with my colleagues in my own organization, would I have pushed harder and asserted myself more convincingly to have meetings recorded? Was my reluctance a reflection of my own insecurities around taking on a sensitive research topic within such an unsafe environment? Would I have been more likely to challenge a system I was not part of? I can speculate on these questions now, but at the time this was happening, I chose to play it safe.

Overall, the first five meetings provided an early glimpse into the dominant themes emerging around such issues as the need for connection, the lack of transparent and timely communication, faculty members feeling disrespected, and the uneven application of privilege by administrators. Each of these themes also illustrated the unsafety of the system and the ambiguity and uncertainty people were feeling as a result of the consolidation. In addition, these initial meetings served to provide me with enriching opportunities to work collaboratively with my AR team and gain greater confidence as a facilitator. As I describe in the next section, the subsequent series of AR team meetings included more faculty members from different campuses joining the study and bringing their voices and experiences to the table. By doing so, they addressed the limitation of a lack of representation from all campuses and continued to draw attention to the lack of safety within the system.

Bringing More Voices to the Table

The next eight AR team meetings continued my second attempt to engage in action research and took place from February through May 2014. Unlike the first five meetings in late

2013, the meetings happening in 2014 involved nine faculty members from all four campuses. Participants also represented a wider range of academic disciplines comprising English, communication, journalism, library science, political science, history, and business. In addition, the greater representation of participants also meant there was now a mix of people from the more and less prestigious institutions that existed prior to the consolidation. In a manner similar to the first series of meetings from 2013, the AR team continued to express their frustration over what they perceived as a "hostile takeover" of their respective former institutions. Furthermore, team members continued to convey their perceptions that since the consolidation, the faculty had much less of a "voice" in providing input into decision-making. However, despite their negativity, they did express optimism that conversations such as the ones we were having on the topic of civility were "hammering away" toward achieving a more transparent and democratic institution. Be as it may, team members continued to view their purpose as limited only to talking about issues rather than about taking action.

Because they continued to perceive our discussions as being highly sensitive in nature and taking place within an unsafe system, the AR team, even with new members from different campuses, remained reluctant to have our meetings audio-recorded. Much like the example provided in the previous section, whenever I attempted to record our meetings, the team immediately asked me to shut off the recorder. Even though it seemed like we had created a safe space for discussion within the confines of an unsafe system, the influence of the system remained apparent. Once again, when they were assured the recorder was shut off and the doors to our meeting room were closed, the team seemed much more willing to speak candidly. What I found particularly compelling and illustrative of the lack of safety people were feeling was how even with the recorder shut off and the doors to the meeting room closed, many team members

still spoke softly as if they were afraid their voices would carry out to the hallway. Before speaking, they would pause, look at the doors, and actually ask, "Is the door closed?" "You never know who might be walking by." These comments were typically and consistently met with nervous yet approving laughter from the rest of the team.

As the facilitator, I found the team's reluctance to be recorded incredibly frustrating because it required me to take thorough notes during meetings. Immediately afterward, I had to review and reflect upon what took place in an effort to capture key quotes and insights. In addition, the discomfort the team felt about the possibility their comments could be overheard by administrators "walking by" underscored the far-reaching impact an unsafe culture of fear and intimidation had on their lack of empowerment. The absence of safety continued to have a tremendous chilling effect on the team's willingness to discuss sensitive issues for fear what they said might be used against them in some punitive way. The chilling effect of the system clearly undermined my efforts at facilitation and paralyzed the team from taking action. While serving as a source of frustration, the team's reluctance to be recorded was also a rich piece of data providing further insight into the unsafe culture of the institution and the uneasiness with which the faculty discussed sensitive topics.

Some of the predominate themes emerging during the second series of meetings surrounded the AR team's negative perceptions of the consolidation which they thought resulted in increased bureaucracy, a lack of transparency in decision-making, feeling voiceless and disrespected, a "screw you" condescending attitude by the administration, a lack of solidarity across the different campuses, and a loss of community and connection. Accordingly, some of our team discussions provided not only a space to vent frustrations, but also depicted the anger many team members were feeling. For example, illustrations of unsafety were reflected in the

comments made by one AR team member who wished he could bring the culture of his former institution to the new institution while another team member expressed disdain for his academic dean by referring to the dean as "a prick." As a facilitator, I was surprised by the straightforwardness and uncivil tone of this participant's comment and found myself searching for an appropriate response. When I found myself at a loss for words, and after approximately twenty seconds of silence, another team member began talking again and the discussion got back on track. Still, I felt embarrassed not so much by the comment, but by my reaction to it.

Looking back on the incident, this AR team member's remark, regardless of its level of appropriateness or effectiveness, provides a telling example of the hostility, incivility, and dysfunction the team witnessed going on in the institution. If anything, from a facilitator's perspective, the team member's statement taught me how to more assertively respond in the moment. Hopefully, novice facilitators can learn something from this example about handling difficult situations or individuals and responding in the moment. Rather than reacting by surprise and not knowing what to say, I could have employed Torbert's (2004) four parts of speech consisting of framing, advocating, illustrating, and inquiring. Employing this technique could have provided me with a means by which to acknowledge the comment and inquire more deeply into what led this team member to express such an extreme level of dissatisfaction toward his dean. For example, I could have asked if he had similar experiences with other administrators, if he could provide examples, and if others had also experienced something similar they would be willing to share. As a side note, during my interview with this team member, I was able to gain greater insight into the conflict he was experiencing with the dean at the time and how that conflict influenced his comment.

Bringing Closure to the Study

In the process of meeting with my dissertation committee in late November 2014, it became apparent that, due to the fact the first and second series of AR team meetings had not been recorded; additional collective and individual data would be required. The committee suggested I conduct an additional focus group meeting with my team that would encourage them to reconnect and reflect on their accomplishments and learning. As a result, I organized the focus group to take place in the spring of 2015. The group was made up of six AR team members team representing all campuses and served as my third attempt to engage in action research. The timing of the focus group coincided with recent events that had taken place in the university community and provided further examples of the culture of fear and intimidation existing in the institution. Accordingly, the lack of safety in the system dominated our discussion.

To provide some perspective, earlier that semester, a tenured faculty member had been placed on administrative suspension after being accused of engaging in incivility by speaking rudely to a visiting guest speaker by asking the speaker to "speak up." The faculty member made this statement either because the speaker was not talking loudly enough to be heard or because the speaker's remarks were considered by the faculty member to be too indirect. Whatever her reason, the faculty member's "speak up" comment offended the speaker. As a result, the speaker filed a complaint to the faculty member's department chair who then reported the incident to administration. Subsequently, the faculty member received notice she was being fired for unruliness, insubordination, and disruptive behavior.

What troubled the AR team about the incident, and what would also come out in greater detail in my interviews with individual team members, was not only the lack of due process

extended to the faculty member, but also the lack of transparency and timeliness in how administrators handled the issue. The team raised the important question of who makes the determination of what behavior is considered "rude," "discourteous," or "disruptive" in such a context. In addition, where is the line drawn for upholding a faculty member's rights to academic freedom? If anything, the incident once again illustrated the unsafe systemic environment of fear and intimidation taking place. Moreover, the faculty member's dismissal demonstrated how speaking up could literally result in someone getting fired regardless of their tenure or seniority. Upon reflection, I once again considered how the incident served as a chilling effect in people's lack of empowerment to take action. As an insider action researcher, I questioned what effect the lack of systemic safety had on inhibiting my own empowerment in pushing my team beyond the boundaries of what was safe.

As the team gathered for the focus group, we engaged in second-person inquiry around how the incident reinforced the faculty's perception that an unsafe culture of incivility characterized by fear and intimidation existed at the university rather than civility. We also considered the implications such a culture had on academic freedom, due process, and shared governance. Furthermore, because of the lack of transparency and timeliness by the administration in communicating the incident, faculty members, staff, and students within the university community had to learn about the event from the media. It was only after the media began reporting the story that the university president sent out an email to the faculty and staff addressing the incident. As one might suspect, the dismissal and the handling of it by the administration prompted one AR team member to state,

> *I want to have some comments about the recent email by the president about the person who has been put on administrative leave…and I know that there has been some…the*

> *rumor mill I guess about this…about this particular case…and I just wonder…there must be some legal aspects about this…so I just wonder even as we try to make a civil…a civil workplace…and civility…the idea that in fact we are…there are legal things going on here too that we need to be aware of that can work against civility. So, frankly, I did not read her* [the president's] *email closely, but I understand that someone has been put on leave*.

One of the AR team members responded by referring to an article she read which provided more information about the incident. Since I had hoped to discuss the faculty member's dismissal and the same article during the meeting, I brought a copy with me and shared it with the team. I also thanked the team member for bringing up the issue and reminded everyone how learning requires a willingness to be made uncomfortable. Ironically, even as I said this, I was the one who probably felt the most uncomfortable about discussing such a controversial subject due to my dislike of confrontation. Nevertheless, the faculty member's dismissal provided a vivid illustration of not only the lack of safety we all were feeling, but also how not to create a culture of civility in higher education. I reminded the team of the research (Leach, 2011; Leskes 2013) we examined during one of our earlier meetings in the spring of 2014 arguing civility is not necessarily about manners and politeness, but rather about argumentation that generates debate for social good. I also asked the team to reflect on a question raised by Jenkins (2015) regarding who actually decides what type of discourse is rude or offensive in higher education and if a faculty member should be terminated on those grounds. Furthermore, what does it say about how the system supports or inhibits creating a culture of civility?

By pointing out how the university could act in a rather "knee-jerk" manner whenever something contentious or provocative took place, one participant provided an example of an

incident that occurred prior to the consolidation where an art exhibit was shut down on one of the campuses because someone, who also happened to be a wealthy donor, thought it was too controversial. Much like the current incident involving the faculty member, the art exhibit event also raised questions about freedom of expression, civil discourse, and privilege in the sense of who decides what is and is not controversial. Moreover, the art exhibit example illustrated how an uneven application of privilege and lack of systemic safety existed even prior to the consolidation.

The discussion prompted another team member to worry about the impact the faculty member's dismissal, combined with the administration's insensitivity would have on faculty morale. She also talked about how "*the communication thing is really a problem*" when describing the manner in which administrators shared information with the university community. Her other concern was "*the silencing effect*" the incident could have on new faculty members. More specifically, would new faculty be fearful the unsafe institutional culture was such "*that someone was going to come after them*" if they said the wrong thing to the wrong person? From my own experiences with incivility as a new faculty member, I remember agreeing this was a legitimate issue to consider as we talked about civility.

Another AR team member questioned if it was possible for the institution to encourage the existence of a culture of civility without having some sort of punishment in place for incivility. She pointed out how the controversy involving the dismissed faculty member illustrated just how "clumsy" and "botched" such enforcement can be. Still another team member observed how various faculty members interviewed by the media described their perceptions of the dismissal. What was especially thought-provoking in terms of our engagement in first-person and second-person inquiry was the team member's realization that

how people perceive civility or incivility is highly individualized and based on their unique experiences and interpretations. Thus, deciding what is or is not civil behavior and in what context can be a very subjective judgment call. Their comments to the media illustrated how some faculty members who sided with their dismissed colleague recognized the existence of an unsafe culture of fear, intimidation, absence of due process, and lack of shared governance at the university. On the other hand, another faculty member, perhaps due to his own bias and level of privilege, saw just the opposite and sided in favor of the administration. I return to discussing the implications of privilege and its uneven application as related to such issues as civility and diversity in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

Through the process of first-person inquiry, I have attempted in this chapter to illustrate for the reader how the unsafety of the system influenced and constrained our individual and collective efforts as an action research team in attempting to effect change. As a result, the case study described in this chapter demonstrates the many challenges involved in facilitating insider action research in an unsafe context of higher education, especially during a time of rapid change and uncertainty. For those attempting to engage in the difficult process of organizational change, the study provides insight into framing the issue under investigation, scheduling meetings over multiple campuses, securing the participation and trust of the research team, collecting data when there is a reluctance from participants to be recorded, developing as a facilitator, reflecting on successes and failures, and keeping a team of faculty members motivated to continue their interest and involvement in the study when they also have a number of obligations, responsibilities, and commitments to teaching and service competing for their time. The case

also examines the implications for consolidations and mergers when different levels of organizational prestige are present.

This research contributes to our understanding of organizational change by exploring the complexity involved with conducting insider action research and attempting to engage in change within the context of higher education. Furthermore, this chapter also examines the challenges and opportunities for learning that come with facilitating change while also negotiating the constraints imposed on organizational members by the system. This case illustrates what can be characterized as an unsafe system exemplified by fear and intimidation that resisted change by rewarding those who maintained the status-quo and literally punishing those who spoke up and challenged the system.

As I discussed in this chapter, within such an unsafe system, engaging in what some might consider academic freedom by speaking up could lead to major consequences resulting in dismissal. When that happens, a chilling effect occurs. As was evident in this study, an unsafe environment results in everyone (including the insider action researcher) becoming afraid to do anything and organizational paralysis setting in. While I initially espoused the intent to engage my team in the process of organizational change, as an insider, I was also constrained in my efforts. Due to my own tendencies toward inaction and avoiding confrontation combined with the boundaries imposed by an unsafe system, I was unwilling and afraid to push against the system. Perhaps the metaphor of the Trojan horse is most appropriate here. Hidden within the intended gift of talking about civility that could have benefited the system in reality became a weapon because no one (including me) felt safe enough to do anything to engage in change.

In addition, the case study illustrates Coghlan and Brannick's (2010) discussion of how adults learn in action by engaging in first-person and second-person inquiry. The study

demonstrates how the process of reflection in action focuses not only outward in examining the changes taking place in the organization, but inward as well in terms of exploring the changes taking place among those engaged in process of inquiry. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) explain how reflection in action "occurs when you are in the middle of an action and you ask questions about what you are doing and what is happening around you" (p. 19). Reflection in action involves engaging in first-person inquiry and taking into consideration your own assumptions, ways of thinking, values, and behaviors not only as a researcher, scholar, and practitioner, but also as an actor and director playing a significant role in trying to initiate some type of change effort in the organization. As this chapter points out, while organizational change can be tremendously rewarding, it is also extremely difficult. In spite of everything, the successes and failures described here have provided me with numerous opportunities for learning about myself and my development as a facilitator, change agent, adult learner, and action researcher. Even now, my journey continues.

By actively engaging in insider action research within my own organization, I have learned how the process of facilitating groups requires patience, the ability to listen, recognizing individual, group, and systemic constraints, reacting to that which is emerging in the context around you, and adapting accordingly. This is not always easy as facilitating groups also means understanding where you are developmentally and becoming comfortable with not having all the answers. Engaging in this research has also made me much more aware of the tremendous influence of the system on organizational members. My conclusion for those attempting organizational change is that it is extremely difficult to subsume a system you are a part of. As I reflect on my own experience, the very act of creating a space that made the group able to trust each other also made it difficult for me to lead them as I was part of the same organization.

Thus, the implications for insider action research relate to understanding the limitations of self as an instrument based on what I set out to do compared what actually happened.

If becoming an effective facilitator involves gaining insight into one's limitations as well as strengths, then this experience has taught me how to recognize my own tendency towards reticence around taking action. By engaging in this study as insider action researcher, I permitted the system to feed my pull toward inaction. As a result, I gave into the influence of the system and resisted disrupting myself, my team, and, of course, the system. In addition, since one of the AR team members continued the action research process by leading workshops of his own examining civility in the workplace, perhaps there were indications of greater systemic readiness to engage in the topic than I realized or was able to achieve. Thus, it is possible the system was more permeable to change than I suspected. Maybe under the direction of a more experienced and skilled facilitator, some type of change is still feasible even within the context of an unsafe system.

Consequently, as I continue my journey as well as my development as a facilitator of organizational change, I have come to realize I must persist in developing my confidence and in asserting my voice. I have discovered how to share more openly in discussions, to listen more deeply, and to ask more questions without needing to be recognized as the expert with all the answers. I have also learned to think about how the questions I ask influence the decision-making capabilities of those who must answer—and the outcomes that result as a consequence. This realization is not only new and satisfying for me, but also incredibly liberating. The experience of conducting this study has taught me the process of becoming a change agent means making plenty of mistakes while also learning from your mistakes. As a result, reflecting on and in action is a skill I have come to embrace. In my role as an action researcher and group

facilitator, I have also learned the difficulty and importance of creating a holding space that encourages participants to feel safe (or safer) within the all-encompassing confines of an unsafe system. In the next chapter, I discuss the key findings that emerged from the data.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this action research study was to explore how college and university faculty can co-inquire into the process of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change. The action research team in this study was comprised of twelve faculty members who, over a period of two years, investigated the two research questions that guided this inquiry. This chapter presents findings from my action research team meeting notes, researcher memos, observations, and interviews with the action research team.

The research questions guiding this study were: (1) How can faculty and administrators establish holding spaces for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change? and (2) What organizational or systems conditions support or inhibit faculty and administrators in creating and sustaining a culture of civility in a rapidly changing institution of higher education?

The key findings of the study, as summarized in Table 5.1, are presented in terms of significant themes that emerged for each research question regarding (1) faculty members searching for holding spaces in order to foster a sense of connection, and (2) faculty members searching for feedback in order to foster a sense of consideration. I begin by exploring the first finding on the importance of faculty intentionally creating holding spaces within their departments that foster connection.

Table 5.1: Summary of Research Questions and Key Themes

Research Questions:	**Themes:**
RQ1: How can faculty and administrators establish holding spaces for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change?	1. Department As Neighborhood 2. Intentionality 3. Social Connections 4. Informational Connections 5. Scholarly Connections
RQ2: What organizational or systems conditions support or inhibit faculty and administrators in creating and sustaining a culture of civility in a rapidly changing institution of higher education?	1. Communicating Transparency 2. Recognizing Privilege 3. Sensitivity to Diversity 4. Supervision Through Intimidation

Research Question One: Searching for Holding Spaces to Foster a Sense of Connection

In examining the data that emerged for the first research question regarding how faculty and administrators can establish holding spaces for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change, five major themes developed speaking to the search for connection consisting of "department as neighborhood," "intentionality," "social connections," "informational connections," and "scholarly connections." I will explore each of these themes and provide illustrations from the data that support the themes and connect them to the research focus of the study.

Perhaps this need for connection was fueled by the onset of the university consolidation taking place at the time the study began resulting in a tremendous amount of uncertainty and ambiguity. The experience of ambiguity has the potential to generate the capacity for learning

and meaning-making through reflection by also intentionally connecting with others who are also encountering the experience in question. In this manner, the consolidation of the university resulted in considerable ambiguity and uncertainty and a need for establishing connections with others as a way to reduce and manage uncertainty. From what participants reiterated time and time again in their discussions over the course of the study, the place most likely for establishing connections with other colleagues takes place in their departments.

Department as Neighborhood

The ambiguity brought about by the consolidation resulted in a significant need for faculty collaboration, meaning-making, and learning to take place. The faculty members participating in this study described the importance of intentionally creating holding spaces for interacting and connecting with their colleagues. Based on their comments, if a culture of civility is to occur in the context of higher education, and if the holding space allows for individual and collective meaning-making, then the data from this study suggest such a space is more likely to occur on the department level rather than systemically on either the college or institutional levels. Accordingly, the participants in this study often described their respective departments as holding spaces within which a sense of community and connection characterizing a culture of civility could be created and sustained through intentional and regular collaboration with their colleagues.

The importance placed on establishing connections with colleagues was a theme that resonated with the team throughout the course of the study. Participants often expressed the desire to collaborate with their colleagues on the different campuses, but at the same time felt frustrated by such constraints as geographical distance and scheduling that made establishing connections across campuses so difficult and challenging. The conclusion drawn by the team

was that if faculty members were going to interact with their colleagues, they were much more likely to do so with others on their own campuses and within their own departments. Hence, proximity or physical closeness appeared to be a factor the participants took into consideration when determining where and with whom they should establish connections. Even from my own experience of working within the context of the university, I could relate to the likelihood of establishing closer connections with departmental colleagues than those outside. If I did connect with colleagues outside my academic department, it would be a result of the proximity of running into them on a regular basis because their offices were on the same floor or because we shared a workroom. It is always interesting to observe at college level or university functions, how faculty members tend to gravitate toward and interact with colleagues from within their immediate academic departmental "neighborhoods."

In my one-on-one conversations with individual AR team members, one participant used the metaphors of "neighborhood" and "community" to describe her department and the interactions she had with her departmental colleagues in the sense of "*these are the people I live with every day*." By referring to creating a culture of civility, especially on the department level, she pointed out how, in the aspect of living with others "*you are more likely to be civil if you build relationships and build community…even a department is a community, right? So, what kinds of community are you building…and if you think about it on that level…of our neighborhood…well what kind of neighborhood are we building or creating?*" Another participant commented on the sense of community that had formed within the AR team itself over time from interacting face-to-face in meetings with her colleagues as well as through the use of video-conferencing technology that fostered interactions between people from different campuses. She remarked how what we were doing as a team was "*a good model for how we*

should operate as a university…you know…sort of combining those elements" to maintain a sense of connection among faculty even though the university was growing at a rapid pace. This participant also compared living in the university to residing in a vast metropolis such as New York. More specifically, even though we inhabit this huge university metropolis, our closer connections tend to exist within the department or neighborhood (or microcosm) in which we live and form relationships.

Furthermore, just as one might take pride in one's actual neighborhood, there was also a sense of pride communicated in describing one's metaphorical departmental neighborhood. One AR team participant explained how in her department, "*we have a very strong culture of civility…we have a culture where civility is important and the ability to get along and cooperate is important…it is very much expected to be civil*." The expectation for civility to occur within this context suggested the department took on a rather self-regulating function. Much like any community where cooperation is the norm, departmental members were expected to take on a very "*pitch in mentality*" where "*there is no 'this is my job' and 'this is your job'*" attitude toward working together. In my notes, I reflected on how egalitarian this particular department seemed in terms of its members sharing responsibilities and how a sense of equality among members contributed to their perceptions of creating and sustaining a civil workplace environment. Interestingly, an example of incivility in this department would entail something like failing to help out when asked or getting territorial about one's duties. Therefore, it would seem within this particular department, the perception of equity among members was very important and necessary in order to create and sustain a culture of civility within their respective "neighborhood."

From our very first AR team meeting to my interviews with each of the team members, an important issue for the group was the need to have a voice and to be heard. For example, in my notes from the team's second meeting, one participant expressed her frustration that since the consolidation had taken place, there seemed to be less of an "open door" policy among college and institutional-level administrators which contributed to her perception that decision-making had become too hierarchical and top heavy. Prior to the consolidation that was, as she described it, "*a situation no one asked for and no one saw coming,*" the administration and especially the former president were much more collaborative and the faculty seemed to have more opportunities for providing their input and obtaining feedback from their superiors.

However, if there was a place where faculty felt they could have a voice, it was as the data suggest, on the department level. Hence, participants felt they had much more of a voice within their respective departmental "neighborhoods." In a conversation I had with another team member, she expressed feeling respected and empowered by being encouraged to provide input into her department. To further illustrate this idea, she explained, "*When people speak, people are listened to and are free to share opposing viewpoints. You are not censored for it. Rather, you are free to bring up challenging subjects…in fact sometimes encouraged to do so*." She went on to offer "*I mean…it is really a good expression of academic freedom. I think we have what I would call high civility in the department because everybody treats everyone else with respect…personally and professionally*." In my conversations with this particular AR team member, I found out the dean of her academic department often encouraged team building activities and off campus retreats as a means of creating additional holding spaces within which faculty members could connect and build a greater sense of community. What seemed to make this particular department distinctive and civil was the awareness among its members they had a

voice and were often encouraged to speak up. Furthermore, from my conversations with other AR team members, I found that while the departmental neighborhood was a space offering connections necessary for creating and sustaining a culture of civility, some intentional effort was still required nonetheless on their parts to nurture and sustain those connections.

Intentionality

The second major theme to emerge under the category of searching for spaces that foster a sense of connection was the idea of intentionality. Based on the data obtained over the course of the study, I discovered that if civility is to occur within the departmental neighborhood, it requires intentionality or active awareness and initiative on the parts of those individuals and groups who want to nurture it and make it happen on a very grassroots level. As I discussed in Chapter 4, during my second attempt to engage the team in action research, more faculty members from each of the different campuses making up the institution joined the study.

It was also during this time the team began talking about intentionality in terms of "grassroots movements" taking place on the departmental level that could potentially "open pathways to communication" and serve as a possible starting point for creating a culture of civility at the university. They reasoned if civility were to start somewhere within the hierarchy of the institution or system, much like a social movement, it would most likely begin through the efforts of individual faculty members on the lower levels of the university. For example, the team began talking about how individual faculty members could begin taking small steps toward creating spaces for encouraging and sustaining a culture of civility within their departments by initiating interactions and establishing connections with their colleagues on a regular basis.

In one of my follow up conversations with a team member, she described the AR team itself as a grassroots endeavor people intentionally and voluntarily participated in by noting,

> *I came in and felt like I was sort of part of this kind of grassroots effort…it felt a little like that…but it was a very strong group…these are thoughts and ideas that are going to matter…the way we think about how the university can be and how to be with one another on a small scale and on a big scale…and I like that.*

Hence, her perception of the AR team was it served not only as the source of a potential movement toward creating and sustaining culture of civility, but for also establishing strong connections among like-minded people who, if anything, were at least *talking* about issues of importance that were challenging the new institution. However, as I discussed in Chapter 4, one of the issues I faced as a facilitator in this study was people participated because they were more interested in *talking* about civility rather than in actually *doing* something about it. From the very onset of our meetings, there seemed to be a predisposition among the team toward inaction rather than action. While they talked about taking action, they did not feel empowered to actually engage in efforts that resulted in action. Because of their lack of empowerment, they seemed to be of the mindset that if change were to occur, it would be because of someone else's actions rather than their own. Of course, from my perspective as an insider action researcher being familiar with the unsafety of the system, the very act of our talking about the issue of creating and sustaining a culture of civility was perceived as being "gutsy" and taking some type of action in and of itself. Within an unsafe system such as ours, just talking about certain issues had a taboo subversive quality that could get you in trouble.

In the current study, the term "grass roots" was used often by AR team members to refer to intentional efforts by individual faculty members to connect with their departmental colleagues. In this sense, establishing interconnectedness requires intentionality on the part of those involved in leading change efforts in their organizations. Intentionality serves to

underscore the importance of creating cultures of civility in higher education by actively creating conditions for getting together, for getting to know one another, and for getting to know what other people are doing—even if that means something simple as just having lunch with colleagues on a regular basis.

As a further illustration of this finding, one participant described how she and her departmental colleagues intentionally created a space for interconnectedness every Wednesday afternoon for tea and conversation. She pointed out the importance of setting aside time to chat with colleagues and how these conversations led not only to scholarly collaboration and mentoring, but also for socializing, sharing stories on a personal level, and gaining information about the university through informal gossip. This team member also described how, through the exchange of personal narratives, "*gossip is an important form of informal means of news exchange…that's always been true…um…so…not mean…just…I heard that this is happening over there…you know…that's a kind of gossip…so we do that every Wednesday…we mentor each other those days*." Furthermore, this example illustrates how gossip can also serve as an informal grapevine for communication to take place in organizations enabling members to discuss issues that might not be communicated thorough more formal organizational communication channels. In addition, communication through the grapevine may serve to bridge the gap created by a lack of transparency in other channels of communication in the organization.

While the data from this study suggest civility was more likely to take place on the department level in this particular institution, it also highlights the importance of intentionality on the part of faculty members for creating and sustaining a sense of interconnectedness on the grassroots level. These informal interactions create spaces for sharing personal as well as workplace related narratives that reinforce departmental connections and build a sense of

community. With this idea in mind, I now move on to exploring the reasons why the study participants indicated they were attracted to joining their colleagues in co-inquiring about creating a culture of civility in this particular context of higher education. I begin by examining the need for faculty to establish social connections in an institution undergoing rapid change.

Social Connections

Adult learners are often motivated to seek out different opportunities for learning for many different reasons. Since our motivation for learning may change over time, I was especially curious to discover what attracted participants to this research in the first place and to remain involved over its duration. When describing why he thought this particular core group of faculty members maintained their involvement in the study, one participant talked about the importance of honoring commitments by noting "*it may also be those individuals sense of commitment…that is if you are going to do this…and you tell the researcher you are going to do it…then stick with it…you know…I mean that is also an act of civility isn't it?*" Undeniably, the AR team was made up of highly motivated individuals who intentionally volunteered to participate in this study in addition to their other teaching and service commitments to the university. Moreover, the data suggest the reasons why participants were drawn to the study in the first place relate to the social, informational, and scholarly connections their involvement provided them.

In an effort to more fully illustrate her motivation to join the AR team in order to build greater social connections, one participant stated, "*At the beginning of the consolidation…I wanted to join any group…especially with people who are talking about cultural issues because I wanted to meet fellow faculty members*." Another participant declared,

Well…it was more the people instead of the topic…I mean I certainly thought the topic was relevant and necessary because we were in such a transformation period between…you know…two institutions that had very different cultures…but I saw it as an opportunity to be part of a collegial exchange…and in my entire college experience I've never not enjoyed a free exchange of information and a level of collegial civility in that free exchange of information…and so…I saw this as an opportunity to get to know some people.

Both of these examples demonstrate how the consolidation created a need for people to develop "collegial" social connections with others not only on their own campuses, but on other campuses as well. As a result, participating in the civility study provided participants with opportunities to meet new people with different perspectives and from a variety of backgrounds.

During the first series of AR team meetings I described in Chapter 4, the group came to the realization of how limiting it was to not include faculty members representing each of the different campuses. This particular limitation was addressed in subsequent meetings by including participants from all campuses and thereby increasing opportunities for social interaction. Furthermore, even during the first series of AR meetings that included only one campus, each team member interviewed a colleague from a different campus and reported their findings back to the group. Not only did interviewing other faculty members get the team more actively involved in the AR process, but it also served as evidence of their need to establish social connections. Many participants who had been part of the more prestigious university prior to consolidation often talked about how much they missed the university sponsored faculty and staff social events that used to take place off-campus each semester. One AR team member recalled,

You really did meet people you otherwise didn't come across. It was a very worthwhile thing. We had some pretty good crowds sometimes. I'm not sure why it has gone away. It was a real nice fun way to drop by and chat with people.

The "socials," as they were referred to, provided faculty and staff members with opportunities to intentionally interact and get to know their colleagues from across the university over cheese, wine, and other adult beverages in an informal, after-hours, off-campus environment. However, once the consolidation took place and a new president was appointed, the faculty and staff socials were discontinued. One AR team member speculated the socials were possibly discontinued due to budgetary reasons or because the number of campuses and people now making up the new university made such events difficult to coordinate. Nonetheless, the faculty and staff social events were a popular means by which to establish social connections with colleagues and were clearly missed by those who participated in them.

In one of my interview conversations with the AR team, one participant attempted to make meaning around the interactions resulting from the consolidation by using the metaphor of "marriage" to describe how the merger served as a catalyst for people to form social connections, get to know each other, and get along as best as they could. She stated,

When we were in the middle of this consolidation effort…we were sort of like teenagers whose parents decided to get married…like a second marriage…so we don't have any choice about it and the spouses…who are now married because they were dating for a while…are telling us teenage kids this is our new family and we all have to love each other and get along.

By examining this quote, it is first of all thought-provoking this AR team member uses the metaphor of "marriage" to describe the joining together of two distinct institutions. Thus, the

process of consolidation, much like the marriage between two individuals from different backgrounds and with different means, created a fresh entity which was the new university. As I pointed out to the team member when she used this particular example, much like the fictional characters in a television show such as *The Brady Bunch*, it was interesting to note the role of the faculty in this merger of two institutions. They are described as "teenagers" who really do not have a choice in the matter, but instead, must go along with the plan in order to get along in the long run. Based on the forced nature of the consolidation and the opposition among those affected, the ensuing "marriage" seemed more like a shotgun wedding between two institutions with different levels of prestige and expectations. As I reflected further on the marriage metaphor and after having lived through the experience of consolidation, I could not help but wonder if our attempts at establishing social connections were truly genuine, or if they were taking place out of our due diligence to systemic expectations. Much like the teenagers described by this AR team member's comment, was this yet another example of an unsafe system imposing its "shotgun" will on us? Were we just going along to get along because that was what was expected by our systemic "parents"?

In another interview conversation, an AR team member indicated he joined the study in an effort to build social connections with others because he felt the consolidation was characterized by an initial lack of civility regarding the future direction of the new university. He described how "*people were really at each other's throats because of the total disagreement of the type of institution we should put together and…the make-up of that institution…so the opportunity to get together with folks from both campuses appealed to me*." On a similar vein, another AR team member pointed out she joined the study because she felt "*our diverse campuses were somewhat fragmented and discombobulated after the consolidation, and I wanted*

to pursue building some bridges and becoming truly consolidated." Both of these examples illustrate how each of these faculty members attempted to make meaning around the consolidation while at the same time, tried to contribute what they could to help reduce conflict and establish social connections with their colleagues.

The use of the "building bridges" metaphor amidst all that was perceived as "fragmented and discombobulated" as a result of the consolidation is gripping in how it conveys the uncertainty and disruption people were feeling. The statement illustrates a definite willingness by the faculty to establish connections and regain some sense of purpose and direction in an unsafe system where they felt little control. In addition, "building bridges" can also imply an attempt to link and merge the differences that remained and reduce the uncertainty threatening the success of the consolidation. As was quite common around this time, many people expressed their doubts as to whether or not the consolidation could be sustained over the long term. Accordingly, the "building bridges" metaphor can also refer to attempts to cross over from the past and move onward toward an emerging future. Building bridges also refers to connection which, as this study suggests, is a necessary component for creating and sustaining a culture of civility. While many of the AR team members indicated they joined the civility study in an effort to form social connections with their colleagues, they also revealed how the study served as a means by which they could establish informational connections with other faculty members from different campuses and academic disciplines.

Informational Connections

In addition to joining the civility study in order to establish social connections with colleagues from different campuses, the consolidation also brought about the need for gaining information during a time of rapid institutional change and uncertainty. Wanting to build on or

add to what they thought they knew also characterized why some of the AR team participants joined the study and remained committed in their involvement. Some indicated they joined the study in light of the consolidation and wanted to hear what others had to say about "the merger." From one of our earliest meetings, the team expressed how they wanted to learn more about the different campuses and campus traditions with which they were unfamiliar. For example, the more prestigious campus was heavily steeped in military traditions and practices not carried out on the other campuses. In an effort to gain greater understanding, one team member said, "*I was interested in hearing other perspectives…and I was interested in hearing what others had to say about the topic…especially from other campuses*." Another participant commented, "*Well…I was thinking in terms of the consolidation particularly…so I thought the AR team meetings were going to be about exploring how we could navigate perceptions of hostility or perceptions of being taken over…and work together…get to know one another*." Additionally, one other participant indicated,

> *When I saw the purpose of this study…I thought this is perfect because it will really help me understand what's happening at this institution…because it felt like you were walking into all these long standing resentments and already simmering underlying politics…so…it felt like a civility study or action research group would be extremely helpful at that time…so that's pretty much what brought me to the group.*

Another team member was looking for information because, as she noted,

> *I was kind of new to this position…and figured there might be a tie-in with that. I had gone through several meetings…and was basically looking around for things that policy administration might fit in with or at least maybe learn something from that.*

By reflecting on what the AR team members were saying about their need for information on the consolidation, I discovered the recurring theme in each of these examples was that of people needing information not being provided to them systemically. Through their participation on the AR team, team members could create a space satisfying not only their need for socializing with colleagues, but also for reducing their uncertainty and gaining information through the "grapevine" on a grassroots level helping them make sense of the consolidation.

Additionally, the need for establishing social and informational connections during a time of ambiguity as a result of the consolidation is illustrated by one team member's reason for joining the study. She commented, "*My interest in the civility group was to learn what I could from others who were also interested in civility, and to see if I could begin to establish some cross-campus relationships that might ease some of the consolidation-related tension*." Likewise, another team member summed up the need for establishing social and informational connections by stating, "*I was happy to be part of a study with the purpose of learning how to help our institution function as a team with the success of our students and mutual respect for all members…as our working theme*." As these examples illustrate, although many participants revealed they joined the civility study in an effort to form social and informational connections with their colleagues, the tension they were experiencing reflects the ambiguity, uncertainty, and lack of safety going on within the system. In their search for connection, they also indicated how their participation in the study served as a means by which they could establish scholarly connections with other faculty members from different campuses and academic disciplines.

Scholarly Connections

In addition to joining the study for social and informational connections, the data suggest that some AR team members participated in this research to establish and satisfy the need to

build scholarly connections with their colleagues as well. As a result, participating on the AR team satisfied their need for learning and scholarship. Certainly in the academic context of higher education, this type of learning is not only personally rewarding, but professionally rewarding as well in terms of teaching, research, and publication. To describe why he joined the civility study as a link to his own scholarship, one team member pointed out,

> *I think part of it was one academic or scholarly interest that I'm interested in is people's work…and I draw from Studs Terkel* [an American author who wrote about how people make meaning from their work] *and some other folks who think about this and the idea of what we get out of work….what work takes out of us may not be a physical thing…but it may be an emotional or psychological thing…so relationships with colleagues and co-workers for me is an important aspect of my job…how I get along with people…how they treat me…so this idea of civility I think is a big part of that…so I think that's probably why I was drawn to it…just trying to understand how people do or do not treat each other well.*

Consequently, the consolidation process along with working on the AR team and discussing the role of civility within that process, provided this particular team member with opportunities to reflect on not only his need to make meaning around the event, but to also connect what was taking place in the university to his own research on workplace relationships. Another team member also discussed how her participation in the civility study correlated with her research, scholarly interests, and experiences by pointing out,

> *I'm interested in civility because of the work I've done at the Center for the Study of Citizenship at Wayne State and my encounter with Jim Leach at the Civility Tour that he did a couple of years ago. So in the wake of consolidation, I thought…I'm just curious. I*

wanted to see what this was about. What are we doing? So that's pretty much why I started coming to the meetings.

With her combined interest and previous research on civility, this team member contributed significantly to meetings by increasing the knowledge of team members on research related specifically to exploring the role of civility and civil discourse in the contexts of politics as well as higher education. As a way to shed further light on the connection between participation in the civility study and gaining increased opportunities for teaching, learning, and faculty development, another team member remarked,

I was interested initially just because I'd thought about it [participation in the civility study] in terms of faculty development and the way faculty members help to create the educational environments with our students and that civility is really the foundation of a healthy learning environment for everybody. The deeper we got into this, the more that I really thought about it on an institutional level. So for me, it's just been a very interesting path. The attraction was really to the topic of the study and then to the breadth of what that might mean.

Still another participant explained,

Civility was an issue that I had been dealing with. I had done a workshop at one of our state professional conferences trying to gather together academic affairs and student affairs leadership to talk about the whole issue of civility on college and university campuses. One of the things that we talked about was focusing on why there is so much incivility. Then we decided to change it to focus on what conditions we can utilize to bring about civility rather than talk about the negatives to be more positive. So, really, it was professional interest at that time.

Even after his participation in the civility study, this particular team member continued to engage in the action research process by conducting faculty workshops of his own on the topic of civility in the workplace. The workshops, which I attended, served to continue the conversation with faculty and staff members in the campus community about creating a culture of civility on campus, how to create and sustain civility across multiple campuses, and how faculty and staff can identify and address instances of incivility in the workplace. In addition, as I discussed in Chapter 4, the workshops also suggested that even within the context of an unsafe system, there was some degree of readiness to engage in the topic of civility.

Summary of Findings for Research Question One

The first research question examined how faculty and administrators can establish holding spaces for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change. Data obtained from meeting notes, observations, researcher memos, and interviews over the course of the study indicate creating a culture of civility in higher education requires intentionality on the part of faculty and administrators to actively and collaboratively engage with their colleagues in creating holding spaces that foster a sense of connection. Five "connection" related themes emerged regarding "department as neighborhood," "intentionality," "social connections," "informational connections," and "scholarly connections."

The data point out civility is more likely to take place on the department level rather than systemically on the college or institutional levels in this particular institution. Moreover, the findings emphasize the importance of intentionality on the part of faculty members for actively creating holding spaces on the department level that foster a sense of community and interconnectedness. Therefore, in order to begin creating and sustaining a culture of civility in

higher education, faculty and administrators must intentionally create opportunities for people to establish and maintain social, informational, and scholarly connections that nurture and reinforce civility.

Since participants indicated they joined the study because they wanted to establish connections with others, creating and sustaining a culture of civility requires intentionally creating spaces within the departmental "neighborhood" for connections to occur. The need to establish connections seemed particularly salient due to the ambiguity, uncertainty, and lack of safety resulting from the consolidation taking place at the time the study began. As the data suggest, not only does the shared experience of ambiguity during times of rapid change have the potential to generate the need for connection, but also the capacity for learning and meaning-making through first-person and second-person inquiry. Three types of interrelated connections emerged illustrating participants' interests in forming social, informational, and scholarly connections with their colleagues. The rapid changes brought about by the consolidation also contributed to the second finding of individuals searching for a sense of consideration, which I explore next in examining the data for research question two.

Research Question Two: Searching for Feedback to Foster a Sense of Consideration

The second research question examined the organizational and systems conditions that either support or constrain efforts for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in the context of higher education. More specifically, the question asked: What organizational or systems conditions support or inhibit faculty and administrators in creating and sustaining a culture of civility in a rapidly changing institution of higher education? By examining the data from my meeting notes, observations, researcher memos, and interviews, the following four "consideration" related themes emerged speaking to "communicating transparency,"

"recognizing privilege," "sensitivity to diversity," and "supervision through intimidation." In this section, I will explore each of these themes, provide illustrations from the data to support my claims, and attempt to make connections to the research focus of the study. I begin by examining the theme of "communicating transparency."

Communicating Transparency

As conceptualized in this study, information transparency in organizational contexts focuses specifically on the content of the message sent by leaders and the outcomes occurring as result. Moreover, if today's information driven organizations are to be successful, and if leaders strive to create transparency, then they must communicate necessary and timely information their subordinates can use in order to adapt accordingly. As was the case in this study, the lack of communication transparency in organizations has the potential for creating a sense of disconnect between those who make decisions and those who must carry out those decisions. Furthermore, those who make decisions are often unaffected by the consequences of their actions. Sadly, this pronounced sense of disconnect often results in very little organizational learning taking place and little to no real efforts at engaging organizational change by decision-makers who tend to be immune from the impacts of their actions.

In the current study, this systemic disconnect was illustrated by many of the AR team members pointing out how the communication they received from administrators on the college and institutional levels of the institution was often lacking in that it did not provide them with the timely information they needed in order to feel included and updated on important issues. This disconnect was especially troublesome to faculty during a time of rapid change and uncertainty brought about by the consolidation. If anything, the lack of timely and transparent communication by administrators contributed to and exacerbated the uncertainty and lack of

safety people were already feeling. Upon reviewing my notes from our very first AR team meeting, team members had already begun making distinctions for how much more difficult it was to communicate with administrators on the college and institutional levels compared to the department level. Participants discussed their frustrations with the lack of "open door policies," having to go through administrative assistants, not feeling valued for their input, and an absence of information from "higher ups" keeping them in the loop. This inability or unwillingness on the part of administrators to communicate clearly and in a timely manner was annoying to the faculty and was an issue they returned to a number of times over the course of the study—especially when illustrating their perceptions of what a lack of civility looked at the institution.

In one of my conversations with the AR team, one participant described what he perceived as a lack of personal contact on the college and institutional levels. This team member pointed out that if civility does exist on the college level, it comes about as a result of working collaboratively on projects with colleagues from different departments. Once again, if faculty members hoped to create conditions for a culture of civility to exist, they had to be intentional in their efforts. He illustrated this example by explaining,

> *This past year I won a teaching grant and worked with a sociologist and a historian…and we devised a way to do an oral history project in each of our separate courses…but we worked together to teach students oral history…and we had a larger goal in mind to present our work and findings…so that for me was a great sense of civility…that we were working toward one goal…creating educational opportunity for students and preserving sort of Georgia history through the projects. That to me is great…we can work across disciplines.*

This particular instance of collaboration demonstrates a key point argued previously in this study, that if civility occurs on the college level, it happens when faculty members actively create conditions, opportunities, and spaces for connections to take place. In addition, the example shows faculty members intentionally developing social and scholarly connections with colleagues while at the same time, actively creating conditions for a culture of civility to occur. As was often the case, the next example illustrates the contrast in this AR team member's perception of the level of civility he received from his academic dean on the college level compared with the level of civility he received from his colleagues. The distinction was especially apparent in terms of the dean's willingness to communicate information to faculty and how that unwillingness to communicate resulted perceptions of faculty not feeling valued. The AR team member explained this difference by noting,

> *Where I think there are some problems with civility is…as much as I like what our dean is doing for our campus…I don't ever hear from him. If we had occasional email dispatches just to give us some highlights of what's happening, I'd feel like I'd be more connected with the college…but I don't have a sense of that at all…and I don't know if it's being uncivil…but it can lead to a sense of…well…does he really care about what's going on? Maybe it's just he doesn't care enough about us to let us know what's going on. Wouldn't it be nice…you know…if we knew what direction the dean would like to go? Without communicating it…it's hard to feel valued.*

Since leadership communication involves developing and maintaining trust in those they serve across different organizational levels, one way leaders can damage faith and trust and add to perceptions of uncertainty and unsafety is through a lack of transparency in their communication. When leadership transparency exists in organizations, people within the organization tend to be

more likely to perceive their leaders as honest, trustworthy, and credible. On the other hand, when leadership transparency is low, people within the organization tend lose trust and are more likely to perceive their leaders with doubt and suspicion. The comments of this particular AR team member as well as similar remarks made numerous times by other study participants reflect the overall perception by faculty members of not feeling valued as a result of the lack of transparent and timely communication from their administrators. Furthermore, the absence of such communication, as in the example of this particular academic dean, also reflected what the team considered to be a lack of civility in an unsafe system.

The example provided by the AR team member illustrates how the relatively simple act of keeping people informed has the potential to not only convey information, which as the results of this study indicate, is a type of connection people are looking for, and to also build positive relationships and morale in an organization. This is especially important during times of rapid organizational change and ambiguity. A key takeaway from this research is that by taking the time to connect with their subordinates through regular and timely communication, administrators can establish informational connections while also building perceptions of trust and value in those they manage. Such communication also conveys a leading by example commitment on the part of administrators to reduce uncertainty, increase perceptions of safety, and create and sustain a culture of civility on the college and institutional levels of the university while also creating greater consistency between their (and the institution's) espoused values and theories in use.

Over the course of our team meetings, participants often expressed their frustrations with the lack of openness in the communication of administrators. For example, many team members thought administrators seemed "siloed" at times and out of touch with the faculty who actually

"worked in the trenches" every day. In reflecting on how her participation on the AR team allowed her to recognize the "insulation that takes place in the administration," one participant recounted an experience where she attempted to talk to her academic dean to better understand his thoughts on the idea of civility in higher education only to feel somewhat "stonewalled" in her attempts to communicate openly with him. She pointed out,

> *It was a learning process because we got to see how the dean worked and how he set up barriers and how we weren't supposed to talk directly to the dean…how we were supposed to talk to his administrative assistant…and even so…it wasn't what we were expecting and it had never been anything that I had experienced before. But at least I learned from that…what I learned wasn't necessarily positive though.*

Interestingly, this team member also observed that when civility *did* exist on the college level, it was more likely to be communicated by administrative staff than directly from the dean himself. This AR team member's remarks illustrate her perception of how the dean created extra layers of complexity rather than transparency in the communication process taking place between himself and those wishing to talk to him. The dean created a physical and perhaps even symbolic barrier to open and transparent communication with faculty members by inserting his administrative assistant into the process by asking her to serve as a gatekeeper in determining who could or could not have access to his time and attention.

In addition to the importance of transparency in communication as well as consistency between espoused theories and theories in use, the significance of open and timely communication channels as a component of creating a culture of civility at the institution was discussed by another AR team member who stated,

> *One of the things that came out of the strategic plan was this issue of communication…feeling that communication needs to go all the way up the pipeline and then it needs to truly come all the way back down. If you're not…you know…acknowledging and rewarding people for their work at a real fundamental level, then civility is not going to be best practiced within an environment that's really attentive to putting in place the structures and processes that allow for good communication. So, taking time for that I think helps to build a culture of civility.*

While this AR team member's comment describes a plan for building a culture of civility through the process of upward and downward organizational communication where there is also accountability and recognition of individual efforts, such was not always the case in practice at this institution. As I discussed in Chapter 4, during the semester in which the team participated in the focus group to bring closure to the study, there was a controversy at the university that made news headlines. The controversy concerned the dismissal of a tenured professor based on comments she made to a guest speaker at an event on campus considered by some of her colleagues as well as some administrators to be rude and perhaps an example of incivility on her part. If anything, this faculty member's dismissal clearly reflected the extreme level of unsafety within the system where saying what others arbitrarily thought was the wrong thing could literally get you fired. As I have also argued, it was the unsafety of the system that contributed to not only the fear the AR team had about being recorded, but also the lack of empowerment they had about taking action. Being an insider action researcher, the influence of the unsafe system played a conscious and perhaps subconscious role in my own reluctance to push the group beyond the safety of the system's boundaries.

Of course, the dismissal incident weighed heavily on the minds of the AR team. In discussing their collective and individual thoughts about what had happened, many team members commented not only on what they perceived as a blatant lack of due process surrounding the faculty member's abrupt dismissal, but also an absence of transparency in the communication from top administrators regarding the incident. During our final focus group meeting, the team wrestled with the event in terms of the lack of transparency in which the dismissal was handled by top administrators such the president. They were also angered at how the university community had to learn about the dismissal by essentially reading about it in the newspaper prior to the president talking about it. The team also expressed concerns about the impact on due process and the potentially "chilling effect" the incident had on creating a culture of civility at the institution. As one team member remarked, "*Is there a way for us to encourage a culture of civility without having some sort of punishment for incivility?*" By commenting on the different reactions the university community had about the dismissal based on their own positionality, one team member stated, "*How we feel about how civil an organization is…is often highly individualized as well as based on our own experiences and our interpretation of what goes on…and this incident kind of points that out*."

In my later interview conversations with the AR team, people often spoke more openly about the faculty dismissal incident in particular and communication transparency in general. One team member expressed concern over the lack of transparency he perceived by noting,

> *What's still a little non-transparent is what goes on behind the scenes that I'm just a little suspicious about sometimes. I think about some of the recent firings or people leaving…there seems to be some things happening behind the scenes that I'm just not*

aware of…and they may be carefully orchestrated…some things where faculty are getting let go or leaving…and it concerns me.

When asked what civility looks like when we have it and when we do not on an institutional level, another team member brought up the issue of the dismissal and talked about the incident as being an example of a lack of due process as well as a lack of respect. He pointed out,

One of the big things that came out recently is the due process when it came to the disposition of a couple of faculty members and how they were treated. There's been more information that has come to light about one of them that maybe it was more ongoing than we had thought. I do think that they [administration] *jumped the gun…and I think that was a lack of respect and a lack of civility…the way they handled things.*

Based on these comments regarding the need for transparency in communication, a key takeaway is if faculty and administrators are to create and sustain a culture of civility in higher education, then communication transparency on the part of administrators is essential to foster faculty perceptions of safety, trust, respect, as well as a sense of due process. However, based on what participants discussed over the course of the study indicates they often felt administrators did not communicate their expectations clearly or at all for that matter.

Furthermore, many AR team members perceived the institution's top administrators as often lacking in self-awareness for how they communicated to their subordinates, which I will explore in the next section on recognizing privilege. Participants often described the communication of administrators as evidence of the disconnect existing between espousing one thing and doing something else. In my notes, I reflected on how the perception of "disconnect" was exacerbated by "talking the talk, but not walking the walk." Essentially, the espoused theories of what individuals say they do must be aligned with their theories in use or what they

actually do in practice. Moreover, communication transparency is also a key component necessary for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education. The idea of saying one thing and doing another also applied to the communication by administrators in terms of examining the emerging theme of recognizing privilege.

Recognizing Privilege

Based on the conversations I had with the AR team over the course of the study regarding the concept of privilege, I found those who enjoy privilege are often oblivious to it and do not recognize the advantages they receive as a result of their privilege. Likewise, those who are privileged often assume that others enjoy the same privileges as they do. In the current study, the lack of awareness by administrators to the privileges they enjoyed beyond those of others characterized how participants described their experiences in communicating with their superiors. Some team members also expressed a hesitancy to engage in upward communication with their superiors for fear of reprisal, which once again illustrated the unsafety of the system where saying the wrong thing could have serious repercussions.

Participants expressed their perception of an "unevenness" or lack of equity in privilege existing between administrators and faculty. The idea that "rank has privilege" surfaced as early as our second team meeting in 2013. In one of my conversations with team members, one participant, by describing her perceptions of civility at the institutional level, reflected on the unsafety of the system by explaining, "*I do not feel free to express my perspectives and I am never asked to…and if I were to express my perspectives…I would fear direct or indirect repercussions*." Not only did this AR team member's comment reveal the lack of safety she felt about speaking out, but also what she perceived as a sense of detachment on the part of the

president of the institution to participate in university functions and to get to know faculty members. She pointed out,

> *It has been my observation that the president comes to only necessary functions and, in at least two of those functions within the last year, she came…she announced… and then said, 'I've got to go,' and left.* [The Provost] *had to take over the honors…you know…and it's like she* [the president] *can't stay. She doesn't know our names. I mean she's even mispronounced* [the associate dean's] *last name which indicates to me that she has absolutely no personal knowledge of…much less a relationship with…I understand it's a big campus…I understand we have a lot of faculty…but when you don't know administrator's names…that to me is not civil. I mean, how can she be civil when there's no relationship? I think that goes from civility to a dictatorial relationship and I don't think civility is part of a dictatorial relationship.*

Hence, creating a culture of civility involves building relationships. However, creating and sustaining a culture of civility is even more difficult when the systemic culture is characterized by fear and unsafety. Furthermore, in making the connection to the concept of privilege, this team member pointed out a key takeaway she learned from her participation in the civility study was she observed an uneven application of civility on different levels of the institution. She illustrated this idea by noting,

> *What I think it comes down to…I learned that there's an uneven application of civility. I think that we all understand, know, and appreciate what civility is. But the application of civility, not unlike white privilege, seems to reside at different levels. It seems that high administrative privilege rules and high administrative privilege eclipses those powers…those people in those powerful positions need for civility as we discuss it at the*

lower levels. In other words, we all understand it. We all respect it. And we all espouse that we practice it. But it's like white privilege in that those of us who are not experiencing it from others can see that. But those we're not experiencing it from think they are being extremely civil. So, it's like…and with a fear of going against administration is like the emperor has no clothes…but nobody's going to point that out because the basic free exchange of information doesn't go up the ladder. Those who I perceive as not practicing civility are very unaware that they're not practicing it. And we can't call that to their attention…which I think might make it a better institution…for professional reasons.

While I thought it was interesting this participant was fearful to engage in upward communication with her superiors, her comment also reflected my experience of conducting research as an insider at the university. The unsafety of the system was reflected time and time again with the reluctance of the team to go on record and by our collective lack of empowerment to engage in change. In addition, this team member's remarks illustrated a vivid example of a culture of fear and intimidation being created and sustained rather than a culture of civility. Was it any wonder the AR team was having so much difficulty making a difference?

Furthermore, the uneven application of civility was related not only to privilege, but also to power that protected those reinforcing the unsafety of the system from recognizing how their actions impacted others. In addition to shielding those in control from self-awareness, their rank, privilege, and power, also protected them from accountability. Therefore, power can be thought of as an inherent component of privilege. The uneven application of privilege and power also supports the claim made earlier in this chapter that faculty members perceived a lack of equity existing between themselves and administrators. As a consequence, creating and sustaining a

culture of civility in higher education means first confronting power and privilege so as to level the playing field for perceptions of equity to exist.

The AR team member who perceived this privilege and power dynamic as occurring on the upper-administrative level of the institution also pointed out how, because of their power, higher-level administrators

> *Don't communicate with people below them and it's hard to be civil when you're not communicating…and they're perceived as…maybe not civil…and that doesn't bother them or their power protects them…or they put intermediate barriers in between them like administrative personnel or form a committee…and if they form a committee it's usually of people on levels lower than them who may be more inclined to discuss freely and be civil with each other.*

When I asked this team member what it looks like when we have civility as opposed to when we do not, she commented,

> *The most would be acknowledgement of you as a person personally and professionally…that you have feelings and that you have a name…and that you have a position…but I don't feel that I am listened to…there's no request for information or feedback from me…so there's no box that I can write suggestions to…and I probably wouldn't anyway because I would feel that if they were identified back to me there would be some negative ramifications…I mean…so civility is, I think, respect, acknowledgement,* [and] *cordiality.*

In the process of reflecting on this participant's remarks, the most striking idea was how important it was for her to be acknowledged by her superiors and to be made to feel her input mattered. As noted previously in this analysis, a key component of civility is respect. What

concerned team members the most about the lack of timely and transparent communication from their superiors was their perception being excluded in communication was also a lack of respect for their contributions and ideas. From my conversations with team members, I found not only was there a perception among the faculty of an uneven application of privilege in terms of what administrators said versus what they did, but also an uneven application of, and a lack of sensitivity to, diversity which I will explore next.

Sensitivity to Diversity

During the semester in which we held our focus group and also in which I conducted interviews with my team members, there were two controversial incidents that took place at the university that called into question the safety of the system, the institution's commitment to due process, and its sensitivity to issues related to diversity. As I discussed earlier, the first incident involved the controversy over the dismissal of a tenured professor for her alleged incivility to a guest speaker. The second incident involved the cover of the university's Continuing Education catalogue which used a generic photo depicting two Caucasian men crossing the finish line of what appeared to be a track meet while a Latina woman and an African American man stumbled behind them. The catalogue's cover received quite a bit of negative media attention locally as well as nationally when even comedian and political commentator Bill Maher ridiculed its racial insensitivity on his HBO program. The catalogue cover also generated a great of discussion among faculty and students about the value of and respect for diversity at the university and prompted a response from the president declaring the university would place a greater emphasis on the understanding and practice of diversity across all campuses in the future.

The dispute over diversity as related to issues of respect and civility came up a number of times over the course of the study in our meetings and in my interviews with team members.

During our team meetings, discussion surrounding diversity focused on such topics as age variances of the students who represented different campuses as well as the diversity of the campuses themselves in terms of histories, traditions, and purposes. In addition, the team also reflected on the makeup of their own diversity in terms of academic backgrounds and interests. As one team member noted, "*This is why I want to be part of the conversation and lend my efforts to take diversity into account*." Since the publication of the Continuing Education catalogue during spring semester 2015 occurred after our final focus group meeting, the team felt the urgency to talk about the cover when we met individually during our interviews.

Just as she had described when talking about the uneven application of privilege, one team member also extended the "uneven application" expression to discuss the unevenness she believed existed between the university's espoused theories versus theories in use as related to diversity on a systemic level. She noted,

> *Just recently there was an issue of diversity…and once again the same behavior. We verbalize diversity and say all the right things…but could there be…obviously there's a deficit in the practical application of diversity. So you see a parallel with what I'm talking about with civility…you know…there's an uneven application of diversity even though all the 'I's' are dotted and all the 'T's' are crossed. So, once again we have…they are saying the right things…but there is an uneven application of what is being said when it comes down to actually applying what they're talking about…be it diversity…be it this institution can have its own unique culture…I mean…there is a disconnect somewhere that seems consistent in a lot of diverse areas*.

Once again, this team member's comments reflected the unsafety of the system surrounding her perception a significant disconnect existed between what institutional leaders espoused as

opposed to what they (and as a result, the institution) actually practiced. Her comments also revealed the perception of an uneven playing field, so to speak, existing between faculty members and administrators in terms of their communication. In commenting on the Continuing Education catalogue cover faux pas and its implications for diversity and civility at the institution, perhaps even calling into question the university's commitment to respecting diversity, another team member commented,

> *I think certainly that cover on the Continuing Ed was unconscionable…that never should have occurred. The level of scrutiny was really lacking on that and luckily they're* [the administration] *addressing it head on and trying to deal with it properly. I think it shows that diversity and civility…which I don't think can really be separated that much…is at least on the rise if it wasn't already in place. I'm glad they're addressing it the way they're addressing it…and it shows that level of civility is there and we do recognize diversity…and I don't think it was intentional…at least I hope it wasn't. But it wasn't the first time…there were several other occasions where that has occurred in the past…and someone missed it.*

Still another team member expressed her anger over the lack of safety communicated by the cover of the Continuing Education catalogue and questioned the sensitivity to diversity of those who were responsible. She observed,

> *You know, I'm much more attentive to the word 'civility' and the way that I conceive professional interactions and personal interactions at this university. I see it in part through this idea of civility…you know…creating classroom environments…it's all about creating a civil environment. The ruckus that we've had this year…the huge embarrassment…the huge insensitivity that came out with the cover of the Continuing*

Education catalogue…that was uncivil…it was just an embarrassment and it should be an embarrassment…that kind of incivility…that kind of lack of awareness…you know…it starts with listening…it starts with being attentive to others…and if someone had been attentive to that…I mean…I looked at the cover and I was horrified…and I think that for those of us who have been trained…or raised to be attentive to that…we could see it. I suspect that the people who put the cover on…they hadn't had an experience in their lives or training or something to help them realize that that would be read in a particular kind of way…you know…and that it conveyed those kinds of ideas.

This same team member was also annoyed by what she perceived as a lack of sensitivity to the issue of diversity by the president of the university, who while at a faculty meeting, dismissed the negative reactions generated by the cover of the Continuing Education catalogue. The team member described how the president

Actually said something like, 'we need to know how to have a conversation about diversity where people don't roll their eyes.' And I thought…I don't have those conversations where anybody rolls their eyes when we're talking about diversity. Who rolls their eyes? And this is the president talking to the faculty…and why would she think that people are rolling their eyes unless in her universe people really roll their eyes…or she rolled her own eyes. So…the way that she talked about that…I was offended because to me…I read it as the president was living in a universe and may herself have felt…oh…this is just blown way out of proportion…and I'm just rolling my eyes…oh my god…diversity…whatever. And I just think…how can you possibly not take that seriously?" When you were talking about civil discourse…that was a moment in which

she was making an effort at it…and to my mind…and to the minds I know of other people who were there…she really fell short.

Taken as a whole, these comments by the team illustrate what can be thought of as a significant disconnect between what key institutional administrators, even as high up the institutional hierarchy as the president of the university, espoused as opposed to what they actually practiced. Such a seemingly blatant disregard by administrators, at least based on the perceptions of the faculty who participated in this research, for clear and consistent communication and practice conveys to faculty as well as the university community, a message of unsafety characterized by double-standards, perceptions of insensitivity to diversity, a lack of awareness and accountability, and an uneven application of executive privilege. Furthermore, these misbehaviors by administrators also fail to communicate a commitment on their part to create and sustain a culture of civility. This lack of commitment to encouraging and practicing civility combined with the unsafety of the system seemed to manifest itself in the next theme that emerged involving supervision through intimidation.

Supervision through Intimidation

The lack of due process extended to the tenured faculty member dismissed based on allegations of incivility seemed to provide further evidence of the existence of an unsafe systemic culture of fear and intimidation pervading the institution rather than a culture of civility. As I have argued throughout, this unsafe culture of fear and intimidation first manifested itself during our AR team meetings when there was tremendous trepidation by the group to have our meetings audio-recorded. By reflecting on these instances, I am reminded of how often I had to reassure the team something as simple as laying my cell phone on the table was not a sneaky way on my part to record them. In addition, during our meetings, there was always an insistence by

team members to check if the doors to our meeting rooms were closed because of the fear of "*you never know who might be walking by*." Once the team members were sure the doors were shut and that they were not being recorded, they began to open up. However, it was not until my individual conversations with the AR team that they began talking about what they perceived as an unsafe culture of fear and intimidation existing at the institution. Even more alarming was how the unsafety of the system seemed to be more pronounced since the consolidation. As an illustration of this perception of unsafety, one AR team member commented

> *I've been somewhat surprised by the times where I've heard about…you know…and I used to call it 'bullying'…I used to use the term 'bullying'…but it has been suggested to me that supervisors don't bully…they just supervise inappropriately…and what I came to the conclusion was that there's a tendency at some places at the institution for people to supervise through intimidation. And I was surprised to see that…and it kind of bothered me. I've seen it in some departments and not in others. I've seen it in some isolated cases. There is just more of it than I thought. It just surprised me…the amount I saw*.

When I asked this team member if supervision through intimidation or bullying reflects the culture of the institution, he replied, "*I'm afraid it does…a little bit…in some cases*." In addition, the expression "*supervision through intimidation*" surely resonated with me because, as I pointed out in Chapter 4, the impetus for this study came about based on my own experiences and the feelings of fear and unsafety I had as a result. This team member also pointed out that some tenured faculty members were bullied by administrators to teach classes on different campuses at times not conducive to their schedules. If the faculty members refused the assignment, they were told by their administrators they would be engaging in insubordination. Ultimately, some faculty members chose to resign as a result. There were also examples of non-tenured adjunct faculty

whose contracts were not renewed despite the fact they had positive teaching evaluations from students.

The practice of supervision through intimidation was also communicated by superiors to subordinates through negative recognition or a lack of respect for that person's years of service and their contributions to the institution. One team member described instances where faculty left the institution based on what they perceived as incivility or lack of respect shown to them by their supervisors. She noted how these faculty members

> *Found jobs elsewhere because they felt like there was some kind of incivility…and that that lack of respect for them and their work caused them to feel like…if that's the attitude of…you know…people who are in some kind of way a boss…whether or not they are a direct boss or someone farther up the chain and in the sort of…you know… 'boss universe' here…if that's the attitude toward me and my work…I don't feel like I'm ever going to get the kind of respectful civil relationship that acknowledges all I've contributed over these years…and so I'm done. So all of that knowledge…all of that experience…all of the institutional knowledge we've lost on both sides…on both former institutions…we've lost a lot of that with people stepping out of their roles to a different role…or simply leaving the university as a whole.*

This team member's narrative illustrates not only the unsafety of the system, but also demonstrates the disregard the institution had for some of its key stakeholders who brought with them considerable knowledge capital and organizational capabilities. Adopting a strategy of not rewarding and nurturing top talent seems detrimental to any 21st century organization, especially an institution of higher education whose strength should be in attracting and retaining talented faculty and staff and creating conditions for their growth and professional development.

Extending such a commitment to faculty and staff members would also help to increase their morale and dedication to the institution. Moreover, it would also communicate a systemic commitment to creating and sustaining a culture of civility.

In questioning another team member if he thought a greater sense of unity in existed in the university community since the onset of the consolidation, he alluded to the problems of "supervision by intimidation" and faculty being fearful of engaging in upward communication. He shared his perception there was still much work to be done in achieving greater shared governance between faculty and administration and pointed out,

> *In a lot of different ways we're still a long way apart in terms of shared governance. But I think that's because of the fear of a lot of faculty and the way they were treated by administration for a long time…and are continued to be treated. They'd* [the administration] *been very much a part of trying to prevent shared governance. There are…I've found personally through my discussions with faculty up there* [at the main campus] *that they are intimidated by administration and we down here have been less so because we've been very actively engaged in an attempt to get shared governance. But I do see that as beginning to change as more and more information comes to light and the recognition that we can effectively had open discussions as long as we work together. As long as there's competition and distrust between the departments…there can't be a whole bunch of trust between the faculty. But I see that some of that is changing. There is a lot more interdisciplinary stuff that's being explored…and I think that's vital for this institution to be successful*.

By reflecting on this team member's remarks on the concept of shared governance, I could not help but notice the number of references he made related to "fear" by faculty and "intimidation"

by administrators. Sadly, these comments reflect the unsafety of the system and the effects such a culture of incivility had and continues to have on its members. What was especially eye-opening was the pervasiveness of how the unsafe systemic practice of fear and intimidation included even the more prestigious campus before and after the consolidation. Unfortunately, from what I learned over the course of the study from my conversations with the AR team, it became more and more evident many administrators were keen on maintaining the status-quo of an unsafe culture of fear and intimidation rather than embracing a culture of civility as the future emerged around the new institution. I explore this idea further in Chapter 6 in my discussion of "the dark side" of the inverted U and its implications for organizational change.

Summary of Findings for Research Question Two

The second research question examined the organizational and systems conditions that either support or constrain efforts for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in the context of higher education. More specifically, the question asked: What organizational or systems conditions support or inhibit faculty and administrators in creating and sustaining a culture of civility in a rapidly changing institution of higher education? Based on the data from my meeting notes, observations, researcher memos, and interviews with my AR team, four "consideration" related themes emerged regarding "communicating transparency," "recognizing privilege," "sensitivity to diversity," and "supervision through intimidation."

The data suggest in order for faculty and administrators to create and sustain a culture of civility in higher education, especially during times of rapid change and uncertainty, transparency in communication by administrators is essential for faculty to perceive they are recognized and respected. The lack of transparency in downward communication by administrators resulted in a sense of disconnect between themselves and the faculty. Moreover,

decision-makers enacted policies that, while affecting their subordinates, created no real efforts at organizational change. Instead, such policies maintained the status-quo of an unsafe system from which they were immune from the effects of their decisions. The data also suggest in order to feel respected and valued for their contributions and input, opportunities should exist for faculty members to engage in upward communication with administrators providing them with a voice as well as a sense of agency at having a place at the table for decision-making and shared governance.

In the current study, many AR team members pointed out communication by administrators on the college and institutional levels was often lacking and did not provide them with the timely information they needed in order to feel included and updated on important issues. Within the confines of an unsafe system, AR team members also perceived an uneven application by administrators of such issues as privilege and diversity and a blatant disconnect between what administrators said in terms of their espoused theories as opposed to what they actually did reflecting their theories in use.

Such an uneven application of privilege and diversity by administrators was related not only to their communicating a lack of civility, but also to power that protected and shielded them from accountability and recognizing how their actions impacted others. Moreover, such misbehavior and disconnect by administrators contributed to the lack of safety faculty members felt and resulted in their perceptions of supervision by fear and intimidation. Consequently, this also formed a barrier for creating more generative spaces within which a culture of civility could be created and sustained systemically. Based on the results of research question two, if administrators aspire to communicate to faculty their commitment for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education, especially during times of rapid change and uncertainty,

they would be wise to seek opportunities for creating safe conditions for timely, transparent, and upward communication while also being sensitive to issues of diversity and mindful of their own privilege. In the last chapter, I examine the implications this research has for our understanding of facilitating organizational change in higher education and the systemic influences impacting our individual and collective efforts.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this action research study was to explore how college and university faculty can co-inquire into the process of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change along with ambiguity and uncertainty. The action research team in this study was comprised of twelve faculty members who, over a period of two years, investigated the following research questions: (1) How can faculty and administrators establish holding spaces for creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education undergoing rapid change? and (2) What organizational or systems conditions support or inhibit faculty and administrators in creating and sustaining a culture of civility in a rapidly changing institution of higher education?

This research contributes to the study and practice of adult education and organizational change by applying first-person inquiry to enhance our understanding what it means to be a change maker. The study also illustrates the challenges facilitators face when attempting to effect change in an unsafe system that pushes back and resists change by creating conditions for maintaining the status-quo and punishing those who speak up. However, the study also points out how we as facilitators often fall into the pattern of replicating the very systemic practices we espouse to change. Hence, a key takeaway from this research is while some may think anyone can do action research in any system, the reality is organizational change is difficult to attempt.

Coghlan and Brannick (2010) describe action research as collaborative and democratic in that organizational members actively engage in the research process. Through the iterative

Lewinian process of planning, action, and reflection, action research involves research *with* rather than simply *on* participants. As illustrated in the current study, organizational members serve as key stakeholders who become part of an action research team co-inquiring into problem-solving rather than serving only in the role of subjects. Being an insider action researcher engaging in first-person inquiry, I have attempted to examine how my own assumptions and ways of thinking impacted the research process and how my team and I replicated the pattern of absencing practiced by the system of which we were a part. In addition, Coghlan and Brannick (2010) and Scharmer (2009) maintain there must be a readiness within the system in order to engage in meaningful organizational change. As I have argued throughout, while there was some degree of individual and collective readiness between myself and my team to co-inquire into the process of change, such a level of readiness did not exist systemically; which certainly contributed to our failure to take action. According to Schein (1996), Lewin thought you cannot really understand a system until you attempt to change it. Through the process of facilitating this study, I have grown not only as a facilitator, but also in my understanding of the complexity involved with attempting organizational change and the tremendous impact the system has on influencing change. In Chapter 5, the key findings from the data collection and analysis were presented which shed light on these issues. In this final chapter, I will examine conclusions, discuss implications and future research, and provide my final reflections on this research journey.

Examining Conclusions

This first-person action research study involved the collaborative efforts of the researcher and action research team in exploring how college and university faculty could co-inquire into the process of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in an institution of higher education

undergoing rapid change. Qualitative analysis resulted in key themes speaking to the areas of (1) faculty members searching for holding spaces in order to foster a sense of connection and (2) faculty members searching for feedback in order to foster a sense of consideration. In addition to these findings, the results of this study point to two significant conclusions regarding our understanding and practice of organizational change. The first conclusion extends our understanding of the inverted U process. By examining the inverted U, or what I refer to as "the dark side" of the U, we can investigate the implications for organizational change from the perspective of absencing rather than presencing. The second conclusion examines the role of facilitation in terms of the developmental capacity of facilitators in the sense of having clarity of purpose, asking the right questions, and adapting to individual, group, and systemic challenges. I begin by examining "the dark side" of the inverted U process.

The Inverted U: Going to the Dark Side of the U

As discussed in Chapter 5, the multiple misbehaviors by college and institutional-level administrators at the university illustrates what Scharmer (2009) refers to as an example of organizational pathology characterized by institutional disinformation whereby "leaders become self-absorbed, putting their own egos at the center of the universe and then expecting everyone else to support that structure" (p. 319). Moreover, Scharmer (2009) argues those leaders "who have a low quality of intention take advantage and exploit the weaknesses of those they are supposed to serve" (p. 319). As the results of this study suggest, the blatant exploitation of weaknesses in subordinates can be thought of as a "disconnect" between what administrators espouse versus what they actually do. In addition, such a sense of disconnect can result in faculty perceptions of administrators' lack of communication transparency and timeliness,

uneven application of civility, privilege, and diversity, and supervision through fear and intimidation which contributed to an already unsafe systemic culture.

One of the key assumptions of Theory U is the concept of presencing which involves individuals and organizations being open to the emerging future rather than relying on the past as a quick fix source of inspiration for problem-solving. According to Scharmer (2009), when faced with the task of decision-making during times of rapid change and complexity, many individuals and organizations resort to downloading, or looking to the past in order to discover solutions for addressing contemporary challenges. The drawback to downloading is all too often, solutions that worked in the past are often inadequate to address the complexity of contemporary issues. However, leaders continue to mindlessly look to the past for answers rather than the future emerging around them.

Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) explain habitual downloading and looking to the past when coping with organizational change is an example of absencing, or operating from a blind spot. Absencing is the opposite of presencing and is also an inversion of the Theory U process. In describing how the practice of absencing contributes to organizational pathology, Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) argue "the space of absencing throws us into a trajectory of denial (not seeing what is going on), de-sensing (lacking empathy with the other), absencing (losing the connection to one's higher Self), delusion (being guided by illusions), and destruction (destroying others and ourselves)" (p. 32). Likewise, getting stuck in the pattern of absencing encourages fundamentalist thinking involving adopting a closed mind, heart, and will and embracing one truth or ideology, one "us versus them" way of thinking, and one rigid will in decision-making. Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) contend adopting such a rigid worldview can lead individuals and organizations to engage in "(1) unilateral, linear thinking, (2) low, exclusion-based transparency,

[and] (3) an intention to serve the well-being of the few" (p. 33). The results of this study suggest such a pattern of absencing and organizational pathology was taking place at the institution under investigation and contributed to the unsafe systemic culture obstructing meaningful change from occurring. In an effort to more fully explore the phenomenon of "the dark side" of the inverted U, I turn now to applying these three characteristics of absencing as a way to further examine the lack of systemic safety interfering with creating and sustaining a culture of civility in this particular context.

Unilateral, Linear Communication

The first indication of an organization moving toward absencing rather than presencing is characterized by the linear, non-collaborative, top-down style of communication by administrators toward faculty members within the institution where this insider action research study took place. If, as Scharmer (2009) explains, presencing involves the openness and willingness of individuals and organizations to move toward the emerging future, absencing involves a resistance or what we might think of as anti-emergence away from moving forward. Scharmer (2009) points out the process of absencing means "we shut down our capacity to relate to the future that wants to emerge through us. We are boxed into our current self and will, which no longer co-evolve and connect with the source of stillness and the deeper collective social field" (p. 248). As discussed previously, the results of this study suggest communication in the institution was extremely top-down and opportunities for faculty members to engage in upward communication was very limited. Since there were so few opportunities where their input was sought out, many faculty members perceived their superiors as being uninterested in what they had to say. More importantly, some faculty members thought even if opportunities were available for them to provide input, the unsafety of the system created conditions which made

them unwilling and fearful to do so. Thus, the potential repercussions for communicating openly and honestly with their superiors outweighed the benefits. As I discussed in Chapter 4, regardless of one's tenure, this was an unsafe institutional culture where speaking up could literally get you fired without due process.

In an organization undergoing rapid change and ambiguity, the perception by faculty members of what appeared a lack of interest by administrators in what they had to say often resulted in their feeling not only alienated and disconnected in terms of what was expected from them, but also uncertain as to the direction the new university was taking. The implications for organizational change, especially in terms of creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education, seem to suggest greater opportunities for upward communication and feeling as though their input was valued could have significantly reduced faculty uncertainty and provided them with a greater sense of commitment to the consolidation.

Instead of encouraging openness toward the emerging future, communication by administrators created conditions that fostered perceptions of unsafety, fear, and intimidation; all of which are the antithesis of civility. Had a greater emphasis been placed on openness, or as Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) point out, more multi-lateral cyclical communication, the interactions between administrators and faculty could have been more reciprocal than unilateral, and more transactional than linear. Such open communication could have also been more indicative of an organization moving toward presencing rather than absencing and committed to creating and sustaining a culture of civility rather than an unsafe culture of incivility. Greater inclusion and mindfulness could have also minimized the "us versus them" dichotomy that characterized communication between faculty and administrators across the more or less prestigious campuses of the university.

Low, Exclusion-Based Transparency

According to Scharmer and Kaufer (2013), the second indication an organization is moving toward absencing rather than presencing is depicted by low, exclusion-based transparency in its communication. The lack of transparency in organizations creates, as Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) explain, systemic disconnects whereby "decision-makers often affect large groups of people with their actions, but never see, feel, or become aware of their actions' consequences" (p. 8). By considering what organizational and systemic conditions support or inhibit faculty and administrators from creating and sustaining a culture of civility in higher education, especially in times of rapid change, this study suggests information transparency by administrators in their communication to faculty plays a significant role in reducing perceptions of disconnect.

In the current study, participants indicated their dissatisfaction with the level of communication they received from administrators on the college and institutional levels of the university. Many faculty members pointed out such communication was often lacking and did not provide them with the timely information they needed in order to feel included and updated on important issues. Interestingly, when civility was perceived as existing on the college level, it came about as a result of faculty members intentionally working collaboratively with colleagues on projects or from administrative assistants rather than administrators. Whether or not administrators intended to do so or not, the lack of transparency in their communication contributed to faculty perceptions that college and institutional level leaders seemed disconnected, uncaring, insulated, lacking in self-awareness, privileged, insensitive to diversity, and resorting to fear and intimidation in their management of subordinates. Rather than evidencing a commitment to creating and sustaining culture of civility, the communication by

administrators instead created and reinforced perceptions of an unsafe systemic culture made up of disconnect, disregard, and disrespect in the minds of the faculty. Had a greater emphasis been placed on, as Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) explain, more high inclusion-based transparency in communication encouraging openness in moving the institution and its members in the direction of presencing rather than absencing, the communication by administrators toward faculty could have encouraged a greater sense of interpersonal connection rather than disconnection. Such communication transparency could have also played a major role in reducing the uncertainty and lack of safety people were feeling about by the consolidation.

As I have argued throughout, the results of this study suggest during times of rapid change, organizational members often seek out opportunities to build social, informational, and scholarly connections. Unlike absencing, presencing connects a social system to its social field and deeper sources of emergence (Scharmer, 2009). The faculty who participated in this study did not feel like they were kept involved by administrators in what was taking place during the consolidation process. As a result, they had to intentionally create spaces for connection within their respective departments in order to build social, informational, and scholarly connections with their colleagues. By sharing personal narratives, faculty members were able to foster a sense of connection and community within their departments which in some way allowed them to make sense of a future imposed on them and over which they felt they had little control. Furthermore, engaging in communication such as gossip served as an informal grapevine (DeVito, 2013) for obtaining information not made available by more formal channels. Hence, casual conversations with colleagues provided faculty members with connections for creating and sustaining a culture of civility within their departments while also presenting them with

opportunities to discuss more systemic issues and events about which they might otherwise have not known.

An Intention to Serve the Well-Being of the Few

According to Scharmer and Kaufer (2013), the third indication an organization is moving toward absencing rather than presencing is distinguished by an intention to serve the well-being of the few rather than the well-being of all. In the current study, the perception by faculty members of what they thought was a lack of awareness by administrators to the privileges they enjoyed and seemed to be unaware of typified how many participants described their experiences in communicating with superiors. According to Merriam and Bierema (2014), privilege refers to "unearned power based on race, gender, class, or another positionality" (p. 240). One of the characteristics of privilege is those who enjoy privilege are often oblivious to it and do not recognize the advantages they receive as a result. Furthermore, those who are privileged often assume others enjoy the same privileges as they do (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). In the current study, an interesting term developed which very succinctly described what faculty members perceived as an inequity in the practice of civility, due process, and diversity by university administrators. The term "uneven application" of civility, privilege, and diversity reflected the perception of inequity and also seemed to support, as Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) point out, the well-being of the few rather than the well-being of all.

Likewise, the notion of an uneven application of civility was related not only to privilege, but also to power which protects and shields those engaging in incivility from accountability and recognizing how their actions impact others. Based on the data from this research, another disconnect existed between what administrators espoused as opposed to what they actually practiced in terms of civility, privilege, and diversity. While administrators may have been

unaware or perhaps uncaring about the disconnect existing between their espoused theories and theories in use (Argyris, Putnam, & McLain-Smith, 1985), those on the receiving end of such inequitable communication were not only very much aware of and frustrated by its existence, but also fearful due to the unsafety of the system to do anything to bring about change other than just talk about the issues they faced.

Scharmer (2009) points out how "the gap between the complexity a system faces and the ability to enter deeper sources and streams of emergence leads to a freeze reaction called fundamentalism, which is characterized by operating from the shallow space of anti-emergence" (pp. 248-249). As illustrated in the current study, the faculty's perception of an uneven application of civility, privilege, and diversity systemically by seemingly unaware or uncaring administrators supports Scharmer's (2009) description of fundamentalism and the inability of individuals and organizations to recognize when they are stuck in a rigid adherence to the "Truth" surrounding the beliefs they espouse. Additionally, the inability of these individuals and organizations to recognize the rigidity of their thinking results in a collective "us versus them" mindset characterized by intolerance and lack of empathy for different viewpoints.

This type of communication was clearly evident in the lack of opportunities for the faculty to provide their input and engage in upward communication with their superiors. The "us versus them" dichotomy often represented how faculty members perceived what was expected of them in terms of their communication while also implying something quite different for what was expected for administrators. The "us versus them" dichotomy also differentiated the levels of prestige between the two institutions, the campuses making up the university, and how faculty members had to overcome the negative perceptions that resulted. Hence, we begin to recognize how faculty perceptions of administrative privilege and double standards came into being while

also getting a clearer sense of the system's lack of safety. By creating the impression of not being aware of or caring about the uneven application of civility, privilege, and diversity the faculty perceived as existing at the institution, administrators seemed to be, as Scharmer (2009) argues, creating conditions that placed the new institution on a trajectory toward organizational pathology or absencing rather than presencing. In essence, by engaging in what faculty members perceived as an intention to serve the well-being of the few rather than the well-being of all, the communication by administrators seemed to shut down their capacity to recognize the future emerging if only given the opportunity to do so. Consequently, given the unsafety of the system, such disregard in the communication by administrators reinforced the perception of a lack of openness on their part for creating or sustaining a culture of civility.

Accordingly, a culture of civility cannot be created and sustained in higher education when an unsafe culture of supervision through fear and intimidation exists. The findings of this research shed light on the unsafety of the system and revealed the existence of a culture of incivility rather than a culture of civility characterized by openness, trust, and respect. Over the course of the study, faculty members often described instances of incivility consisting of bullying by supervisors, a lack of commitment by administrators to shared governance, and an apprehension by faculty to engage in upward communication for fear of reprisal. Taken as a whole, the results of this research serve to enhance and extend our understanding of Theory U (Scharmer, 2009) by examining absencing and "the dark side" of the inverted U process along with its consequences for inhibiting and preventing organizational change. In addition, what we have learned about the unsafety of the system and its negative influence on attempts at change also has significant implications for facilitators conducting insider action research within their own organizations, which I discuss next.

The Role of Facilitation in Action Research

In Chapter 3, I discussed how the impetus of this study came about as a result of my own life experiences with verbal aggression and bullying—both in the sense of growing up and in the workplace—which the latter is for me the context of higher education. Over the course of this inquiry, I was afforded multiple opportunities to learn and reflect both *in* and *on* action. As events emerged and the study evolved, I sought to frame the nature of the research topic, work collaboratively with my action research team, and make meaning of my own strengths and limitations as a facilitator of adult learning and organizational change; which I share through the process of first-person inquiry. As mentioned earlier in this work, one of the goals I set for myself through my doctoral journey overall and this study in particular was to gain confidence in finding my voice and having a place at the table for expressing my voice. Engaging in the civility study "threw me in the water" and forced me to swim in the sense of planning, leading, and facilitating my action research team. Furthermore, my research began at a significant time when the university where the study took place was undergoing tremendous change due to consolidation. This event provided an additional dimension to the study for examining the uncertainty and ambiguity of organizational change within an unsafe system.

Through the process of facilitating my study, I came to understand how the questions we ask as facilitators attempting to engage in organizational change determine the outcomes we experience. As I reflect on this statement, and as I have pointed out in previous chapters, through the reflective practice of first-person inquiry I have taken into consideration how the questions I asked or failed to ask conflated the focus of the study and interfered with my team's ability to take action. Moreover, I have also attempted to shed light on the lack of empowerment the team felt to do more than just talk about the issues they faced. Upon further reflection, I have

illustrated how the lack of safety within the system contributed to and constrained our individual and collective efforts to take action. In essence, my team and I replicated the very absencing patterns going on in the system. As I pointed out in Chapters 4 and 5, since one of my AR team members continued the action research process by leading workshops of his own examining civility in the workplace, perhaps there were indications of greater systemic readiness to engage in the topic than I realized or was able to achieve. Thus, it is possible the system was more permeable to change than I suspected. Maybe under the direction of a more experienced and skilled facilitator, some type of change is still feasible even within the context of an unsafe system. Therefore, a key takeaway for facilitators attempting the difficult process of insider action research and organizational change is to acknowledge and confront the tremendous barriers to change existing within ourselves, the stakeholders we whom we work, and most importantly, the system of which we are a part.

Engaging in the reflective practice of first-person inquiry has encouraged me to become more aware of how facilitators must first be clear about their purpose, the outcomes they want to achieve, and the questions they ask as a lack of clarity can lead to confusion and misdirection. The findings of this study suggest in times of rapid organizational change in institutions of higher education, faculty members are searching for answers and seeking holding spaces for fostering connections with others. In my own first-person inquiry, I have reflected throughout this study on the type of holding space I facilitated for my action research team along with my own developmental capacity as a facilitator. According to Nicolaides and McCallum (2014), "increased developmental capacity at the individual and collective levels allows for (though does not guarantee) greater ability to undertake the challenges of action research, and to engage a wider range of skillful, creative, and even transformational actions" (p. 55). Moreover,

Nicolaides (2015) explains the experience of ambiguity has the potential to generate the capacity for learning and meaning-making through reflection by intentionally connecting with others who are also encountering the experience in question.

I am not unmindful to the possibility my own lived experience with verbal aggression and bullying, combined with the unsafety of the system, in many ways shaped how I facilitated my study, interacted with stakeholders, and applied my methods for conducting action research. Furthermore, my own tenderness and vulnerability around the subject of incivility influenced my cautiousness and tentativeness for diving more deeply into the research topic. In many ways, I played it safe in terms of my own comfort level combined with operating safely within the boundaries imposed by the unsafety of the system. Describing my actions as "playing it safe" reflects my tendency to avoid controversy and confrontation. While not serving as an excuse for my inaction, if I have not yet reached the stage of development where I can confront and conquer my demons, how can I expect to effectively serve as an instrument for creating the conditions necessary to help facilitate others in confronting their issues?

Regardless of the method used for carrying out insider action research, what I learned as an insider working with my action research team is facilitators must be willing to listen deeply and react to what emerges in the moment. Going back to the personal goal I set for finding and expressing my voice, I discovered I did not have to possess all the answers and, for that matter, it was not my role to come into the situation providing the group with a neat package of ready-made solutions. Of course, I needed to help the group stay focused and on task in order to answer my research questions and move the study forward, but it was also the purpose of the group to actively engage in the research topic and risk "getting messy" as a result. In addition, I learned I had to be willing to "get messy" too and confront the scar tissue of my past along with

the shame and insecurities that came with it. Hence, the biggest discovery for me in terms of facilitation was coming to understand how facilitators must be at a certain place developmentally in order to gain the skills needed for creating safe spaces and fostering change in others.

In addition, as part of my own positionality as a researcher who affects and is affected by that which is studied, I have considered whether the holding space I created for my team was merely an attempt to establish a space for providing me with means to maintain my comfort level and control just how deeply I confronted the issue of incivility. By examining the results of this study along with engaging in deep reflection into my practice, I can conclude my level of development, lack of experience with using the methods I employed, tendency toward inaction, and insecurities as a facilitator impacted how I approached the study and influenced my interactions with the action research team in an unsafe context. Nonetheless, an important takeaway from this research reinforces the role developmental capacity plays, as argued by Nicolaides and McCallum (2014), in group facilitation and in more effectively applying complex methods like Theory U in organizational settings. In addition, the study provides tremendous insight into the role of facilitation in the action research process and how individual, collective, and systemic influences impact our efforts at creating and sustaining organizational change. I turn now to examining the implications the results of the study have for future research.

Implications and Future Research

The findings of this action research study provide implications for the scholarship and practice of adult education, action research, and organizational change in the following areas: (1) civility in higher education, (2) exploring the inverted U, (3) insider action research and (4) first-person inquiry. My hope here is to offer additional insights to facilitators of action research interested in examining civility in higher education through the lens of the inverted U and

engaging in first-person inquiry as insiders and change agents seeking to enhance their own research and practice.

Civility in Higher Education

Watkins and Marsick (1992) discuss intentionality as the process of people becoming more aware of their learning through reflection on their experience. Scharmer (2009) describes the power of intention as being related to a sense of empowerment individuals and groups realize that can motivate them to bring about change. The implications of this research emphasize the importance of intentionality on the part of faculty members for creating holding spaces within their departments establishing and maintaining a culture of civility while also fostering a sense of community and interconnectedness. Administrators might also attempt to create spaces for connection systemically on the college and institutional levels encouraging informational, social, and scholarly connections among faculty and staff. Some suggestions include hosting academic conferences supporting scholarship, professional development, and interactions among faculty from across the university. In addition, informal college and institutional level social gatherings held on or off campus could also create spaces for informational, social, and scholarly connections to take place.

Since civility is communicated through such practices as openness, transparency, and respect, those interested in creating and sustaining civility must first work to minimize unsafe systemic cultures of incivility characterized by fear and intimidation. As Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) point out, organizational communication consisting of high, inclusion-based transparency contributes to moving an organization and its members toward presencing rather than absencing and for creating a greater sense of connection rather than disconnection. Therefore, if faculty and administrators hope to create and sustain a culture of civility in higher education, especially

during times of rapid change, they would be wise to remember the importance of timely and transparent communication in reducing uncertainty and ambiguity. In addition to involving faculty members in civility research, future studies can also include administrators, staff, and even students in bringing more voices to the table to co-inquire into these issues.

Theory U: Exploring the Inverted U

The results of this study indicate in order for faculty and administrators to create and sustain a culture of civility in higher education, especially during times of rapid change and uncertainty, transparency in communication by administrators is essential for faculty to perceive they are recognized and respected. Moreover, administrators must also be mindful that how and what they communicate has the potential to be perceived by faculty members as an uneven application of civility, privilege, and diversity. Such communication practices contribute to creating and sustaining an unsafe culture of incivility characterized by fear and intimidation rather than a culture of civility.

The lack of transparency and openness in downward communication by administrators can also influence faculty members' perceptions of disconnect contributing to, as described by Scharmer and Kaufer (2013), organizational pathology involving decision-makers enacting policies affecting their subordinates rather than themselves while creating no real efforts at organizational change. In addition, Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) describe organizational pathology as an inversion of the Theory U process where organizations move toward absencing rather than presencing.

This study advances our understanding of Theory U as a theory and method of organizational change by illustrating how, despite our best efforts, organizational change is a difficult process. Furthermore, not all change results in moving toward the emerging future of

presencing. Instead, some organizations move in the direction toward absencing or what I refer to as "the dark side" of the inverted U. In addition, we as facilitators may also replicate those same patterns of absencing in our own practice. As Scharmer (2009) points out, and as we saw in the current study, when organizations and organizational leaders operate in absencing mode, they become stuck in rigid thinking characterized by a lack of openness and transparency and functioning as if there is only "One Truth" and "One Us Versus Them" perspective for communication and meaning-making.

Scharmer (2009) argues in order to change the system organizational leaders must first be willing to change themselves, their levels of awareness, and their actions within the system. Through the process of first-person inquiry, I have attempted to increase my own level of self-awareness by examining the strengths and limitations of the choices I made in facilitating this research. One of the current study's findings was the apparent lack of awareness among organizational leaders in this particular institution of higher education. This lack of awareness was especially evident in how the absence of timely and transparent communication by administrators contributed to the uncertainty and lack of safety faculty members experienced as a result of the consolidation. Furthermore, the uneven application of privilege and diversity as well as the unsafe systemic culture of fear and intimidation suggested the institution was moving toward greater levels of absencing rather than presencing. As Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) explain, the institution's trajectory toward absencing was illustrated by administrators' use of communication characterized by (1) unilateral, linear thinking rather than multilateral, cyclical communication, (2) low, exclusion-based transparency rather than high, inclusion-based transparency, and (3) an intention to serve the well-being of the few rather than the well-being of all.

According to Nicolaides and McCallum (2014), the Theory U-process challenges the developmental capacity of facilitators and participants by making "significant demands of individuals' capacity for perspective taking, for generating insight, and for engaging in adaptive change" (p. 55). As these authors contend, future research should continue examining how individual and collective developmental capacity can result in helping facilitators apply Theory U more effectively in generating learning as well as change. Future research should also explore how Theory U can be applied in other institutions of higher education navigating similar issues with consolidation in order to provide facilitators with the tools and insights they need to more effectively bring about and sustain meaningful change in this context.

Insider Action Research

Along with my hope the current study provides others with insights for bringing about change in their organizations, my experiences in conducting insider action research can also provide understanding of what to avoid. Thus, I offer two suggestions here. First of all, changing the system is not easy. Perhaps a misconception among organizational change agents is anyone can do action research in any system. My experience in conducting this research taught me this is not always true. I reiterate it is very difficult to change a system of which you are a part. This conclusion leads me to advise facilitators of change to recognize the importance of the self as an instrument. The methods we select will not be effective if we cannot take into account our own capability to bring about change. In essence, the energy and ability to engage collaboratively with others in the process of co-inquiry into organizational change must flow through us. Fundamentally, we must know what we can and cannot do in the sense of being intellectually, physically, spiritually, and emotionally present to be effective in helping bring

about the change we and others seek. If we cannot, then perhaps it is time to step back until which time we can be present.

The second suggestion I would like to offer facilitators of organizational change relates to the difficulty of subsuming the system of which you are a part. In the quest to understand the self as an instrument, one must honestly examine individual, collective, and systemic limitations as well as the readiness for change on each of these levels. Furthermore, facilitators must engage in reflective practice both on an in action so as to become aware of their own tendencies toward replicating systemic patterns. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) and Scharmer (2009) each point out organizational change will not come about until there is a readiness from the system. As I attempted to illustrate in the current study, even though there was an individual and collective readiness to discuss the changes brought about by the consolidation, a similar sense of readiness did not exist systemically. Rather than encourage spaces for inquiry, the system pushed back and created an unsafe culture of fear and intimidation that rewarded maintaining the status-quo and punished efforts at change. In my own efforts at facilitating this research, by seeking systemic rewards while at the same time minimizing potential costs, I failed to push the system and instead maintained the status quo.

The lack of safety in the system also presented tremendous barriers to conducting insider action research. For example, while my AR team wanted to talk about change, the unsafety of the system contributed to our collective lack of empowerment to actually effect change. This was, after all, an unsafe environment where people were literally fired for speaking up. As a result, we were all very much aware of how far we could push the system before it harshly pushed back. Therefore, in conducting future research, the takeaway for facilitators is they must not only consider the limitations of their own developmental capacity for engaging in insider

action research, but also the influence of the system on their individual and collective efforts to effect change or replicate systemic patterns. Hence, these suggestions underscore the importance of facilitators engaging in the process of reflective practice both on and in action.

First-Person Inquiry

Throughout this study, I have attempted to reflect on how the choices I made as a facilitator impacted the actions of my research team. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) point out learning or reflecting in action "occurs when you are in the middle of an action and you ask questions about what you are doing and what is happening around you" (p. (19). As a means of reflective practice, taking into consideration myself as an instrument also requires examining through first-person and second-person inquiry, my strengths and limitations. The outcomes of this research reflect not only my individual efforts, but also the collective work of my team combined with the unsafe system that influenced our actions over the course of the study. As a facilitator, I have come to recognize how this lack of safety constrained my efforts to push the team outside of our boundaries.

While the methods of action research I chose were valuable, at every point I absented myself from taking action and sabotaged my efforts based on my reluctance to push the system. What I have come to realize is how those systemic boundaries served to constrain as well as reinforce and reward my own tendency toward inaction. Thus, a key takeaway for facilitators of action research employing first-person inquiry is to confront the messiness of first knowing yourself. As Marshall (1999, 2001) and Coghlan and Brannick (2010) contend, living life as inquiry means understanding how you make meaning in action and how meaning-making is also distinct for each person. Therefore, each individual must develop their own practice, attend to

their inner and outer arcs of attention, and become mindful about how they enact cycles of action and reflection.

In coming to terms with understanding my own development as a facilitator and how I make meaning, I have also come to understand my tendency to shy away from confrontation, controversy, and taking action. As the results of my facilitating this study suggest, the very system of which I was a part of also fed and rewarded my pull toward inaction. Rather than fight it, I gave in just as I did many times over the course of the study. Returning to the idea of recognizing the limitations of the self as an instrument, I found myself in an unsafe, risky space with my team and gave in to the system by not disrupting myself or my team toward taking action. While I must concede my failure to take action, I must also acknowledge the influence of the system. In some sense, I actually appreciated the boundaries the system imposed because they provided me with a convenient excuse for not pushing myself or my team beyond my own self-imposed limits. Through the process of reflective first-person inquiry, I hope I have shed light on the individual, collective, and systemic influences that resulted in the outcomes I experienced. In doing so, I hope to help other facilitators of organizational change recognize their limitations and push beyond their boundaries.

Final Reflections

If the results of this action research study tell us anything, and if there is something I have learned to pass along from this journey, it is action research involves expecting the unexpected and adapting accordingly. In addition, I have certainly discovered organizational change is unpredictable and dependent on the unique systemic influences of the organization under investigation. There is no “one size fits all” magic formula for successfully implementing organizational change that works consistently every time in every organization. If anyone tells

you otherwise, you might want to ask them to think again. As an insider action researcher conducting a first-person action research study in my own organization, I have been given the opportunity to learn and come away with new insights I would not have gained without facilitating this study. Moreover, engaging in the reflective practice of first-person inquiry throughout this journey has provided me with a chance to better understand myself as a scholar, practitioner, facilitator, and instrument of organizational change. Through the process of first-person inquiry, I have also attempted to examine my limitations as a facilitator of insider action research in the hope of helping others navigate the action research process more effectively.

The purpose of this study was to co-inquire into how to create and sustain a culture of civility in higher education during times of rapid change accompanied by ambiguity and uncertainty. The particular context in which the study took place was experiencing these conditions due to a consolidation that merged together two institutions with very different missions, histories, and levels of prestige. Fortunately, the study began at a time when faculty members across the different campuses comprising the institution were looking for answers and seeking connections to help them make meaning of the changes taking place around them. They, as well as the institution of which they were a part, were searching for an identity that seemed stuck in the past and unable to clearly define what direction they should take in moving forward. As the results of this study illustrate, the faculty's inability to move toward the emerging future was exacerbated by a lack of clear, timely, and transparent communication by administrators who seemed unaware and unwilling to recognize how their own theories in use were at odds with those they espoused. As a result, the institution and its members were forced to find their own way through the complicated process of organizational change.

The lack of alignment between administrators "talking the talk and walking the walk" contributed to the disconnect faculty members perceived existing between themselves and their superiors. Schein (1990) points out to really get a sense of what is going on in an organization, and to get a better understanding of the culture of the organization, it is useful to interview organizational members and observe as they reveal inconsistencies between espoused values compared to what is actually taking place. What was interesting from the perspective of research on civility was how the sense of disconnect and lack of safety occurring in the institution also served to reinforce the faculty's perception the university was characterized by a culture of fear and intimidation rather than civility. The unsafety of the system manifested itself over the course of the study by contributing to the hesitation the action research team experienced in going on record and being recorded during meetings and to their lack of empowerment to bring about the type of change they talked about. Of course, my own missteps in facilitation contributed as well.

The unpredictability of engaging in insider action research taught me "put my arms down" and put aside what I thought I knew about civility, about learning, about communication in organizations, and about organizational change. The action research process taught me it was okay to walk into a group situation not knowing all the answers and not being afraid others would judge me negatively. I learned to allow myself to become more mindful and more vulnerable to what was happening and respond accordingly in action as it emerged. Engaging in first-person inquiry taught me to be more reflective in action—which I have attempted to illustrate throughout this work. I have come away understanding my own positionality toward the research topic as well as to those stakeholders with whom I engaged.

Most importantly, the action research process provided me with multiple opportunities to discover my voice as a scholar and practitioner and to gain greater confidence in influencing

others through my writing and speaking. From a developmental perspective, I realized how understanding myself as a learner could also improve how I teach and facilitate learning in others. Through the reflective practice of first-person inquiry combined with engaging with others in second-person and third-person inquiry, I have come to better understand how my own stage of development impacts how I facilitate learning and how I approach organizational change. Like most of us, what I have gathered about my development is I am still very much a work in progress. While I have come far, there is still much more for me to learn and do.

Lastly, the unpredictability of engaging in insider action research and the challenges of attempting to effect organizational change in an unsafe system provide a compelling example of "the dark side" of the inverted U. As the results of this research indicate, not all organizations move smoothly toward presencing and the emerging future. On the contrary, many organizations, as was the case with the particular institution of higher education in this study, often get stuck in dysfunctional patterns of communication and behavior leading them toward a path of absencing and organizational dysfunction. If they are not careful, facilitators can often fall into a pattern of replicating the very systemic practices they espouse to change. Hopefully, the results of this research contribute not only to our understanding of "the dark side" of the inverted Theory U process, but also inspire future research efforts to continue investigating this organizational change phenomenon.

Epilogue

As I complete the final chapter, not only does this action serve to bring the study to a close, but it also serves to bring to a close my doctoral journey. As I arrive at my destination, I cannot help but reflect on the overall process of getting to this point. When I first began my action research study, I was fearful my topic would not inspire others to participate. I was also

afraid my findings would be of no real significance. Once I began poring over the enormous amount of data I had collected, my concerns shifted from not having enough to how I would ever make sense out of all the information I had. As I reach this point of the journey, my hope is this study of civility in higher education with an emphasis on first-person inquiry can contribute to the scholarship and practice of organizational change. In addition, I hope the study provides facilitators with the tools they need to more effectively navigate the individual, collective, and systemic challenges they face when attempting to employ action research to create and sustain organizational change. From my experience of having lived through the many challenges this study presented, the process has taught me change and adapting to complexity is a reality to embrace rather than fear. I have learned to confront the messiness and look forward to the opportunities the next phase of the journey brings.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Culture of Civility—Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in the study "Creating a Culture of Civility in Higher Education." You have been enthusiastic from the start and I thank you for your help and encouragement! This interview will be the final part of the study and serves as an opportunity to reflect on the purpose, process, and outcomes of the study. Thank you for your willingness to speak with me to bring closure to this study!

1. What attracted you to the purpose of this study and to join a group of people at this institution to explore civility?

2. Given your participation in this study and interest in the subject of civility in all its aspects at this institution, how would you describe the culture and practice of civility in your department or program? What instances of civility have you personally experienced and/or witnessed in your department or program? How would you describe the quality of civility that exists at this institution at each level? In other words, what does it look like on these levels when we have civility and when we do not? What are some examples? (So, based on your example, when civility does show up here, it looks like this, correct?)

3. The purpose of this study was not only for us to come together to try and understand the quality of civility that exists here, but to also explore how could we develop, encourage, and support a culture of civility at this institution. In coming together to explore the quality of civility at our institution at each level, what do you think we discovered over the course of our action research sessions using appreciative inquiry as a tool to focus on our strengths? What are our strengths in your view? What do you think was going on? Why do you think we had such a hard time connecting to the positives and really connecting to our strengths as an institution?

4. I intentionally used appreciative inquiry as a tool for inquiry because it seemed like a good approach to discuss a difficult subject, but we could never get past the "dream" phase. We seemed stuck in the "discover" phase for a long time. What was your experience with this method? What do you think happened in your view using this approach? What do you think were the limitations of this method? What do you think were the strengths of this method? Do you think we were ready or ripe for this conversation? What do you think got in the way of that readiness or ripeness? What could we have done differently?

5. Given your own experience over the course of this study and our appreciative inquiry sessions, what opportunities did we miss at the individual level as faculty members, within our departments, and at the larger culture or climate of the institution? If you were to lead a conversation about civility, how would you do that? What would you hope to discover? Given our work in the action research group, what do you think stands as our greatest finding?

6. Is there anything else you would like me to know that I have not asked and/or something you would like to add or on which you want to comment?

Please take a moment to answer a few questions:

Name you would like to use: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Racial Identification: _____