Exploring the Perceptions and Leadership Roles of Human Resources Professionals During Consolidations in Georgia: Human Resources in Search of a Strategy

by

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(Under the Direction of Libby V. Morris)

ABSTRACT

Human resources professionals are not perceived as strategic partners in higher education. The opportunity for these professionals to participate as strategic partners is dependent on the perceptions and engagement of institutional presidents, chief business officers, and chief academic officers. The human resources professional's opportunity to engage at a strategic level depends on their depth of professional experience, building leadership relationships, and defining the role of human resources.

Four primary questions were used to develop the research for this study. Four sets of questions specific to the role of each participant group were used to explore perceptions regarding the engagement of human resources professionals, classified as chief human resources officers during consolidations in Georgia.

A case study approach was used in this exploratory research to collect the data on the individual lived experiences of senior leaders during change. Semi-structured interviews revealed four primary findings: (a) HR professionals are expected to perform multiple roles, (b) a succinct understanding of HR's scope in consolidations is needed, (c) building trusting relationships with senior leaders is necessary before HR leaders can engage in strategic initiatives, and (d) chief human resources officers did not feel empowered to initiate change.

INDEX WORDS: Human resources, human resources management, higher education, chief human resources officer, personnel management

EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS AND LEADERSHIP ROLES OF HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS DURING CONSOLIDATIONS IN GEORGIA: HUMAN RESOURCES IN SEARCH OF A STRATEGY

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DEDICATION

This aspirational effort was made possible through the support of my heroes. First, I give glory and blessings to God for making this all possible. Thank you to my husband Horace (also known as the best husband and dad ever, chief brownie baker, and super protector) for being the center of my life. To my beautiful daughter Sarah (my faith whisper, reality checker, and all-around wonder teen), you made this journey a wonderful experience. Your love and support have sustained me through the difficult times, and it will continue to sustain me for the remainder of my life. I love you both dearly.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities threatened by diminishing state appropriations, changing student demographics, and the rising cost of a college education are considering new opportunities for innovation, sustainability, and relevance (Azziz et al., 2018; Denneen & Dretler, 2012; Johnstone et al., 2020). Mergers and consolidations, although not new to higher education, are expanding beyond the traditional academic partnerships into broader complex partnerships between higher education institutions. These partnerships include the traditional merging of a single academic program or degree and expand to include the consolidation of the institutions' entire educational and business enterprise (Johnstone et al., 2020; Martin & Samels, 2017). Efforts to address financial and demographic challenges are taking the form of mergers and consolidations, which are predicted to grow and increase in frequency in higher education over the next decade (Azziz et al., 2019; Denneen & Dretler, 2012; Johnstone et al., 2020). Mergers in higher education have been described as a "broader trend across many industries: consolidating two or more entities into one or merging one into another, to increase operational efficiencies and reduce cost amid shrinking budgets in a weakened economy" (Azziz, 2013, p. 2). Consolidations in higher education provide an opportune environment to study the role of chief human resources officers in support of the change process in higher education.

Decreased funding and student demographic projections are at the top of the list for consolidations. Still, internal and external pressures for increased academic status and political interpretations influence the decision-making process of senior leaders (Martin & Samels, 2017). Azziz (2013) expounded on the reasons for a merger or consolidation to include the opportunity for increased efficiency, greater educational value, enhanced reach (i.e., broader outreach and

enhanced university image), and more substantial competitiveness. Similarly, Pinheiro et al. (2016) suggested that mergers were increasing in popularity as a strategic initiative by governments to restructure higher education systems increase productivity, enhance quality and increase effectiveness and efficiency across institutions. Pinheiro et al.'s references to the government's involvement in higher education structure focused on international institutions and governments, but the same can be attributed to mergers and consolidations of institutions in the U.S. (Pinheiro et al., 2016; Russell, 2019). Pinheiro et al. suggested that these partnerships are also driven by the need for increased status and visibility of higher education in the global marketplace to attract top faculty and students to an institution. Each of these reasons is impactful on its own merit; however, when addressed simultaneously, mergers and consolidations could appear to be a safe opportunity to strengthen an institution's sustainability. Furthermore, the causes for consolidations listed by Azziz et al. and Pinheiro et al. are compounded when you include less funding from state governments, higher tuition costs, and a projected student demographic shift. This convergence of problems encourages aggressive discussions in search of a solution (Denneen & Dretler, 2012; Parish, 2021).

Public colleges and universities threatened by these challenges are now implementing organizational change efforts, either independently or through a system-wide strategy, designed to increase institutional efficiency (Johnstone et al., 2020; Russell, 2019). Institutional leaders are strategically engaged in discussions of mergers, acquisitions, and consolidations, which have historically not been the go-to answer to address challenges in U.S. higher education institutions (Azziz, 2013; Denneen & Dretler, 2012). In a report by Azziz et al. (2019), mergers of higher education institutions from 2000 to 2017 remained at a steady 12 mergers per year covering the entire 17-year period. However, the report also predicted that mergers would double in the next

decade, increasing to over 24 mergers during a similar period. Recently, an article in *Higher Ed Jobs* emphasized that "while some leaders still contend that it is hard to kill a college or university . . . no matter how hard it may be to close an institution, it is less hard than it used to be" (Martin & Samels, 2017a, p. 1), which is antithetical to the opinions of presidents and other decision makers who have historically wanted to preserve the culture and mission of the university with limited disruption.

A timely example of potential consolidations originates from the Pennsylvania State University system, where officials recently introduced and voted to consolidate six institutions into two universities. The Pennsylvania State System voted to combine the California University of Pennsylvania, Clarion University, and Edinboro University into one institution, and Bloomsburg University, Lock Haven University, and Mansfield University into another single institution. Like the Georgia Board of Regents (BOR), officials at Pennsylvania State University stated that the consolidations are a strategic approach to make the system financially sustainable as they address enrollment declines and decreases in state appropriations (Parish, 2021). As the list of institutions considering consolidation grows and the reasons for the action increases, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 added another burden that could impact the decision to consolidate higher education institutions.

As the research for this dissertation commenced, the world experienced and continues to experience the impacts of a novel coronavirus called COVID-19. Several researchers have already predicted that this pandemic will add to the potential for more consolidations. Arguably, the traditional college student between 18 and 24 has not experienced a crisis of this magnitude in the United States, which could impact their intentions to attend college. The pandemic could hasten the need for higher education institutions to consolidate. However, the consideration for

consolidation should be closely monitored as the attractiveness of a consolidation partner could diminish as lower funding and enrollment negatively impact institutions' ability to sustain their operations (Azziz et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions that senior leaders have of the expected and enacted roles of chief human resources officers during organizational change in higher education. The setting for the study was the consolidation of 12 higher education institutions into 6 in the state system in Georgia.

Defining Terms: Consolidation, Human Resources and Chief Human Resources Officer

Understanding the terminology that describes the joining of higher education institutions is important to the discussion about consolidations in higher education. Azziz et al. (2019) described institutional-level unifications as amalgamations, unification, federation, acquisitions, take-overs, consolidation, and mergers. In this section, a focus on the two primary terms used in higher education institutions (HEI) defining the joining of institutions or departments within the institution will be covered: mergers and consolidations. Definitions for human resources (HR) and chief human resources officer are also included.

Seltzer (2018) defined *merger* as an all-encompassing term to mean combining two institutions. Additionally, similar to Russell (2019) and Azziz et al. (2019), the terms merger and consolidation are often interchangeable. The term merger is used in HEIs to describe the joining of two or more separate institutions that "surrender their legally and culturally independent identities in favor of a new joint identity under the control of a single governing body" (Azziz et al., 2019, p. 6). Although the term consolidation is used to define the "merger of equals" the consolidations in Georgia were not always of institutions in the same sector classification (Azziz et al., 2019; USG, 2018). However, the authors do go on to share that mergers in higher education are typically not equal in institutional and faculty status. Terms matter, particularly in

HEIs where faculty, and to a lesser extent staff, feel they are owners of the institution's framing (Kreiser, 2001). Other considerations, like the perceptions of the surrounding community, alumni, and donors, impact how an institution will want to communicate the changes on campus. In public higher education, being politically considerate in labeling the phenomenon selected to describe the change is important for clarity and adoption of the change.

The term consolidation is sometimes preferable to the term merger because it does not have negative connotations (Azziz et al., 2017). Most of the literature on combining organizations is focused on the for-profit sector and not on HEIs. Leaders in the University System of Georgia (USG) framed the changes they were implementing in Georgia as consolidations for its perceived correctness. For this study, to align with the terminology used by the BOR and the USG, the term consolidation will be used to describe combining two HEIs into one new institution.

Primary to this research are the role and function of the HR professional, which will be identified as the chief human resources officer (CHRO) for this study. Literature documenting the transformation of HR distinguishes the role of HR director from the CHRO by describing the shift from day- to-day tasks to more strategic initiatives aligned with business goals (Caldwell, 2001; Collings & Wood, 2009; Storey, 1996; Tichy & Devanna 1984; Ulrich 1997). The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) is a nonprofit organization designed to elevate the HR profession. Its mission is to empower people and workplaces by advancing HR practices and maximizing human potential (SHRM, 2021). SHRM defines an HR director as one responsible for planning, leading, directing, developing, and coordinating the HR department's policies, activities, and staff while ensuring that policy and practices comply with federal, state, and local laws (SHRM, 2020). Industry-specific workforce development programs at universities like

Southern New Hampshire University defined CHROs as strategic partners designed to focus on people issues such as retention, employee engagement, and organizational culture. The primary responsibilities for these positions are to advise senior leadership on human resource strategy while also being deft in employment law and compensation and benefits strategies and implementation. This study will use the term CHRO to describe the position of the HR person involved in organizational change with senior leaders. Overall, this research examined the perceptions of senior leaders concerning the role of CHROs during consolidations.

Statement of the Problem

Consolidations are expected to double over the next decade to address diminishing state appropriations, changing student demographics, and affordability. These reasons drive the need for effective strategic partners to support senior leaders through organizational change (Azziz, 2013; Johnstone et al., 2020; Russell, 2018). Although consolidations are expected to grow, there is no single path or guidebook for leaders to follow to ensure a successful consolidation process, specifically related to the transition for faculty and staff. An ineffective transition for faculty and staff can potentially disrupt the organization's overall culture and environment, thereby impacting the successful adoption of the consolidation (Azziz et al., 2019; Harman, 2002; Pinheiro et al., 2016). Ultimately, the final decisions determined throughout a consolidation process are the responsibility of the president. However, supporting the change is a collective process involving strategic partners from across the university. Considering faculty and staff as essential contributors to adopting a consolidation, a dedicated, committed, and focused approach to their transition into the new institution should be developed by senior leaders and executed by qualified faculty and staff.

Few studies have analyzed the potential and opportunity for the CHRO to effectively support senior leaders during significant organizational change. There is a gap in the literature addressing: (a) the potential for HR professionals to effectively support change that impacts the workforce, and (b) perceptions of HR professionals in organizational change.

This research was grounded in HR development frameworks built from Dave Ulrich's (1984) human resources management (HRM) model that defined HR as management that focuses on organizing all HR functions into four central roles: strategic partner, change agent, administrative expert, and employee champion. HRM strategy can be simultaneously emergent and planned (Storey et al., 2019). Depending on the type of institution, HRM could align to a traditional or strategic approach supporting the institution's goals or mission. Institutions focused on recruiting top faculty and rewards emerging student success initiatives could benefit from a strategic HR leader that is well versed in effective recruitment strategies, flexible compensation, and best practices. Conversely, an institution centered on implementing policies, processes, and compliance may benefit more from a traditional HR leader well-versed in government regulations, institutional policy, and standard HRM practices. Effective HRM, aligned with the institution's goals and objectives, especially during the organization, could strategically support senior leaders.

Research Questions

Most research in higher education consolidations focuses on one or two of the consolidation process stages and typically only on the involvement of high-level administrators in the change process. Furthermore, the literature about HR is developed outside of the framework of HEI, with limited literature focusing on CHROs role in strategic organizational change in higher education. This study aimed to analyze the role and perceptions that senior

leaders have of the CHRO during organizational change at higher education institutions in Georgia and identify what aspects of their participation were most helpful in the process. Senior campus leaders include institutional presidents, chief business officers, and chief academic officers. I refer to these three positions as *stakeholders* in my research questions. CHROs are not considered senior leaders in the institutions that I interviewed. However, the CHRO is critical to understanding the topic of the CHRO role in consolidations and they were included in my interview pool. This study sought to answer the following research questions;

1. How do stakeholders engage with CHROs to influence organizational change?
2. How do stakeholders perceive the CHROs purpose in the strategic implementation of consolidations?
3. How do CHROs perceive their ability to influence decisions regarding the workforce in transformational organizational change?
4. What did stakeholders suggest might be done differently to better engage CHROs in organizational change going forward?

These questions guided the research into how stakeholders perceived the engagement of HR professionals and their contributions and value in addressing workforce-related issues during institutional consolidation.

The research I conducted for this study was built from the literature that examined (a) the reasons for consolidations in higher education, (b) change management in higher education, and (c) human resource management models. I used semi structured interviews and document analysis at selected public institutions in Georgia that consolidated between 2011 until 2018, following a directive from the Georgia Board of Regents. The approach that I took allowed for a scholarly investigation of HR theory and practice as revealed by examining selected institutional

mergers across a public higher education system in the southeastern United States. Interviews and document analysis were used to understand the perceptions of HR and their involvement in the change management process.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation begins with an overview of consolidations in higher education and the potential impact to faculty and staff involved in the consolidation process. Chapter 2 includes a more extensive discussion of the literature covering the causes and potential for additional mergers and consolidations in higher education. Included in Chapter 2 is a review of change management models and HR models that could support organizational change. Chapter 3 covers the research design for this qualitative case study, followed by the findings from the study. Chapter 4 includes the feedback from institutional leaders in response to the interview questions. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the findings and recommendations, and implications for future research.

Significance of the Study

There is no clear path or book of instructions to guide leaders and organizations through the consolidation process. For years, HR leaders have depended on senior leaders to help them find relevance, opportunity, and purpose in institutions where senior leaders have historically been hesitant to engage CHROs in strategic initiatives. These institutions are now facing continuous change, more intense than ever before, resulting from consolidations, and need a strategic support for faculty and staff concerns during the change process. Although the opportunity to be perceived and engaged as a strategic partner during organizational change exists, there remains the hesitancy of senior leaders in launching a plan to do so. This research

sought feedback from senior leaders and HR professionals regarding their perceptions of the role of CHROs during organizational change.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Consolidations have not been the norm in U.S. higher education institutions, but governing boards and senior leaders are now reconsidering the potential for new consolidations. The first section of this chapter reviewed perspectives of consolidations from an international and state lens. The second section discusses the three primary institutional stressors that are precipitously encouraging a new focus on consolidations. The third section reviewed the change management theories available to guide the implementation of a consolidation process. Finally, the role of the chief human resources officer (CHRO) was reviewed to determine if there was a plausible framework to identify if this role could be helpful to senior leaders, faculty, and staff in the consolidation process.

Understanding Consolidations

Change initiatives are complex involving a strategic and focused approach to implementing organizational change. Discussions about consolidation and efficiency are increasing by HEI leaders as an answer to address organizational sustainability. Although college closures are difficult to envision, they are getting easier to imagine as challenges mount against higher education institutions (Martin & Samels, 2017a). Lower funding levels, college affordability, and student demographics remain some of the major concerns being addressed by college leaders.

Institutions that have historically been stable, with little concern about the need to consolidate, are now facing unprecedented challenges to their institutions' established structure and culture (Diana, 2020). Consolidations in higher education are projected to increase over the next decade and now is the appropriate time for leaders to develop a strategy to address these

challenges (Azziz et al., 2019; Denneen & Dretler, 2012; Russell, 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2012) reported that the number of colleges and universities that have closed increased for public universities over the last 25 years. The NCES study reported that between 2008 and 2010, 33 private institutions closed. No public institutions were reported closing during this time. However, between 2010 and 2012, another 30 institutions closed, of which four public institutions were included in those closings. Private institution closures represent most closures totaling 59 between 2008 and 2012. Martin and Samuels (2017) found private 4-year institutions that have closed or were acquired doubled from about 5 per year before 2008 to about 10 in the 4 years through 2011. Additionally, the same report found that 37 institutions consolidated in the 3 years prior to 2013, more than triple the number of consolidations between 2006 and 2009.

Between January 2016 and February 2020, 90 nonprofit institutions announced their plans to close or consolidate. Diana (2020) found 230 of the 2,300 institutions participating in the 8-year study reported there remained a possibility of closure or consolidation if they did not address college affordability, competition between schools, and the impact of a learning environment during the pandemic. A recent report by *The College Stress Test* predicted that the prevalence of college closings could be fewer than expected (Zemsky et al., 2020b). This survey measured enrollments, revenue streams, and expenditures to determine the potential sustainability of the institution. Based on the report, 10% or less of the nation's higher education institutions faced a severe market risk, 30% faced some measure of risk and would struggle, and the remaining 60% faced limited to no risk at all. The 60% of institutions facing no risk were institutions that have historically been the most competitive and prestigious among institutions. The report predicted that these institutions would continue to grow with little to no threat of

closing or consolidating. Forty percent of institutions having the potential to struggle to sustain their missions provides an urgent platform for leaders to actively begin discussions about institution sustainability, which could include consolidating with another institution.

Leadership discussions about institutional consolidations are warranted based on the challenges readily identified. However, these discussions are not always welcomed by presidents or other campus leaders. Table 1 is a snapshot of responses from presidents and senior administrators from a 2020 survey conducted by *Inside Higher Ed*. The study reported that 16% of presidents had had "serious" discussions with senior administrators about mergers with another institution, while 84% had not had discussions. Only 9% of public college presidents reported having merger conversations, while 23% of private nonprofit presidents had these discussions. With state funding identified as one of the challenges of financial sustainability, it was interesting that 91% of public presidents had not held conversations about consolidations. Similarly, when asked if they felt *very likely* that their institution would merge into or be acquired by another college or university in the next 5 years only 1% of presidents reported feeling *very likely* that their institution would merge or be acquired. The percentage did not vary between public and private nonprofit institutions with 1% in each category. However, even with the challenges faced by many institutions over 70% of respondents reported that their institutions were *not likely at all* to merge or be acquired in the next 5 years. Public sector presidents responded 10% higher than private nonprofit institutions when asked this question. Seventy-five percent of public sector presidents reported *not likely at all* to merge versus 64% of private nonprofit presidents reporting that they would *not likely at all* merge.

Table 1

Inside Higher Ed – 2020 Survey of College and University Presidents

Scale	Total	Public sector	Private nonprofit sector
Have senior administrators at your college had serious internal discussions in the last year about merging with another college or university?			
Yes	16%	9%	23%
No	84%	91%	77%
How likely is your institution to merge into or be acquired by another college or university in the next 5 years?			
Very likely	1%	1%	1%
Not likely at all	70%	75%	64%
Do you think your institution should or should not merge with another college or university in the next 5 years?			
Should	15%	10%	20%
Should not	85%	90%	80%
Have senior administrators at your college had serious internal discussions in the last year about consolidating some of its programs or operations with another college or university?			
Yes	30%	28%	35%
No	70%	72%	65%
I could see my college closing or merging in the next 5 years.			
Yes	9%	5%	14%
No	91%	95%	86%

Note. Data from *the 2020 Survey of College and University Presidents* by S. Jaschik & D. Lederman (Eds.), 2020, Insider Higher Ed (https://www.insidehighered.com/system/files/media/20200313_Presidents_Survey_Original_new.pdf).

Similarly when asked if their institution should merge with another college or university in the next 5 years, 15% of presidents reported that they *should* merge while 85% felt that their institution *should not*. Focusing on smaller initiatives like consolidating programs in the college 30% of presidents reported that they had discussions with senior administrators, while 70% said that they had not conversed about the option. Over 72% of the presidents predicted that more

than five colleges would close, while 49% predicted that more than five private colleges would merge, and 19% said that more than five public colleges would merge (Jaschik & Lederman, 2020). Nevertheless, the president's expectation of seeing their college close was only 9%, a 5% decrease from the previous year. The survey of college and university presidents included other essential topics in higher education to include financial health, change management, race relations, affirmative action, federal higher education policy, and images of higher education. Several of these topics will be covered later in this section.

The predictions of closures in higher education have been contradictory and confusing at best for the last 10 years. In 2015, Leslie McBain, a research analyst for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, predicted a "trickle [in consolidations] rather than a wave of consolidations" (Zalaznick, 2015, p. 1). Six years later, Azziz (2021) reported that he expected a "wave" of consolidations due to the financial burden on families brought on by the pandemic. However, similar to McBain's predictions, Azziz also contributed the cause for consolidations to shifting demographics, decreased funding for public institutions, and college affordability (Azziz, 2013; Zalaznick, 2015). Each article also described the benefits of institutional consolidations, including streamlined administration and more efficient resource allocations.

With predictions of more consolidations over the next decade, presidents and senior administrators are still not on the same page when considering consolidation. Even discussing how to refer to the phenomenon as a consolidation, merger, or acquisition causes anxiety in the decision-making process. Still, the challenges ahead of HEI leaders necessitate a clear direction that could include consolidating institutions, academic programs, or operations.

Types of Consolidations

Institutions selecting to consolidate with another institution must also carefully plan for how the consolidation is introduced and managed throughout the process. Harman and Meek (2002) reported that consolidations can take on various forms and structures that impact how students, faculty, and staff determine their level of engagement in the change. These models include voluntary and involuntary consolidations or loose affiliations or tightly integrated consolidation models. Azziz (2013) provided a similar discussion about types of consolidation, where he placed consolidations into two categories based on (a) the number of institutions involved in the merger: single-sector versus cross-sector; twin (i.e., two institutions) versus multiple partners; similar academic profiles (i.e., horizontal merger) versus different academic profiles (i.e., vertical merger) or (b) the mission or sector classification as complementary or noncomplementary (i.e., overlapping) institutions.

International Perspectives on Consolidations

In addition to consolidations in the United States, other countries have executed consolidation efforts over the last 50 years to include consolidations in Australia, the Netherlands, Norway, Canada, New Zealand, Asia, South Africa, and Eastern Europe. These consolidations were determined strategically necessary by their national governments (Aguilera & Dencker, 2004). In Australia, the government highly encouraged the development of new higher education institutions through consolidations to lessen organizational confusion and administrative inefficiencies. Beginning in 1987 until 1991, 11 institutions in Australia were consolidated to reduce administrative overhead and to align the university's mission closer to the mission of the government (Harman, 2002). In the last 2 to 3 decades consolidations in international countries have been more active than consolidation in the United States. This could

be a result of international countries having more authority over their institutions and the governments' strategic approach to developing a systematic way of redesigning higher education for the broader population. Governments in Canada, Germany, Britain, South Africa, Hungary, Vietnam, and New Zealand experienced an increased interest in consolidations as a way of restructuring institutions to increase institutional collaboration. Various models and approaches were designed to (a) increase efficiency and effectiveness as student populations increased, (b) address the sustainability of fragile institutions, (c) address the need for broader student access and equity strategies, (d) respond to a call to diversify course offerings, and (e) increase government's control to frame the overall direction of the higher education systems. In each of these countries, the government's strategy was to encourage institutions to fulfill more of a national and regional economic objective versus the institution's individual objectives (Harmon & Meek, 2002b). Lastly, small and highly specialized institutions were consolidated and merged into larger comprehensive institutions with multiple site locations to increase efficiency and access for students. Two types of new institutional structures dominated: a system-like structure or what Harman (2002) identified as a federal system or a single operational structure described as a unitary system. These structures were designed by government leaders to lessen the financial pressures on the system and to provide open access to develop an inclusive student body (Harman & Harman, 2003).

In the federal structures, the responsibilities for the operations of the university remained the primary responsibility of the institutions, as organized before the consolidation, with each institution having lesser autonomy in the operations of the new structure. However, in the unitary system, former individual universities were no longer recognized as individual entities, but

instead as a unified body as one university. Universities that were a part of the unitary system were led by a single governing body with a single leader in charge of the university.

Consolidation in international countries emerged in the mid-1960s lasting through the mid-1990s. The United Kingdom experienced a period of consolidations and partnerships that followed the federal structure, which combined smaller non-university institutions to form new larger universities that served a broader population of students (Curaj et al., 2015; Harman & Harman, 2003). In the 1970s and 1980s, consolidations were used to restructure institutions to address problems with fragmentation and the small size of colleges, resulting in many institutions being combined, or being absorbed into nearby polytechnics or universities. Consolidations were guided and implemented through two focused processes determined by the government (Curaj et al., 2015). The first approach aligned similar universities to develop more substantial research organizations that began with the creation of "associated laboratories" (i.e., university laboratories that were co-funded by the French National Center for Scientific Research [CNRS]). The second strategic approach regrouped universities into one or more universities in similar locations. European countries recognized that their universities had grown beyond a reasonable size to manage their missions successfully. The new universities represented the government's strategy for greater interdisciplinarity by pooling academic resources and combining smaller disciplines into larger cross disciplinary programs able to support more students. The combination of resources offered new opportunities to strengthen the merged institutions. Institutions entered into multiyear contracts intended to strengthen the connection between the university and the ministry. The new universities were now required to develop and negotiate a strategic project plan with the ministry to ensure that sustainability was a priority. The contracts called for the central leadership of universities to shape and coordinate an

institutional strategy. Universities were assigned an advisor, often a former university president, to assist them through the consolidation process. The advisor served as coach and mentor to the consolidating institutions and to the president's team. Throughout the consolidation process, the advisor was responsible for advising the institution's new president through contract development for finalizing the consolidation. The advisors were contracted through the ministry, which provided a direct reporting relationship between the university leadership and the ministry's interest.

Consolidations in Georgia

In Georgia, consolidations of higher education institutions have seen significant activity over the last 15 years. As early as 2009, the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) conducted several consolidations paring down the number of technical colleges from 33 to 22 (TCSG, 2017). The TCSG is the state of Georgia's governing body for technical colleges, which supervises the state's 22 technical institutions. The TCSG board ensured that their consolidations would reduce the number of administrative positions but would not reduce the number of faculty and instructors that were critical for continued quality student instruction. A second goal of the consolidations was to increase operational efficiencies and service levels to students.

Additionally, the consolidations would allow the TCSG to realize the mandated budget reductions of between 8% and 10% as determined by Georgia legislators after the 2008 recession. The consolidation of Georgia's public technical colleges possibly provided a platform and roadmap for the consolidation of the University System of Georgia (USG) colleges and universities beginning in 2011. The TCSG consolidations set an example going forward for public higher education in Georgia; however, TCSG did not face the same level of financial

concerns during their consolidations that would plague the University system after the 2008 recession (Russell, 2019).

Before the consolidations in the TCSG were enacted, the first major consolidation in Georgia was the consolidation of the state's public universities and colleges under one governing board. The Board of Regents (BOR) for the USG was established by the Georgia General Assembly in 1931, effectively consolidating all the state's colleges and universities to be overseen by one governing board managing authority. The stated purpose for consolidating the institutions was to unify and strengthen the institutions' educational and administrative offerings. This approach was intended to eliminate duplication in academic offerings to allow for institutions' classifications to provide distinct levels of instruction (Fincher, 2003). The BOR has governing authority over 26-public colleges and universities that make up the USG while also having responsibilities for the Georgia Archives and the Georgia Public Library Service. The governor of Georgia appoints all BOR members to staggered 7-year terms with the ability to be reappointed to subsequent terms by a sitting governor. Regents are not employees of the USG. Instead, the regents are on voluntary appointments to serve as the governing body of the institutions. Currently, the BOR is composed of 19 members, five appointed from the state-at-large and one from each of the state's 14 congressional districts. The BOR elects the chancellor, who serves as the chief executive officer and chief administrative officer of the USG. Assisting the chancellor are two executive chancellors who serve as the chief academic officer and chief administrative officer; both positions report directly to the chancellor.

In 2011, a new chancellor, Henry Huckaby, was appointed to head the USG. Six months before being appointed, Huckaby had been elected to the Georgia House of Representatives and served as the floor leader for Governor Nathan Deal. Before being elected chancellor, Huckaby

had also served in various roles in state government to including executive director of the Georgia Housing and Finance Authority, commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, and director of the Office of Planning and Budget for Governor Zell Miller. Huckaby also served at the University of Georgia as the director of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, senior vice president of Finance and Administration, and special assistant to the president of UGA. Huckaby was instrumental in strengthening the human resources department at the USG, reestablished a new vice chancellor for human resources, and added additional staff to the department to spearhead the implementation of human resources strategic efforts across the USG.

Early in 2011, the BOR also launched an internal strategic initiative to evaluate the potential for consolidations across the system. One of the first recommendations made by Chancellor Huckaby was a strategic approach to address the decreases in enrollment and lower funding received from state legislators during the 2008 recession. Soon after taking office, Chancellor Huckaby shared with the BOR that the demand for services from the USG was increasing while funding restraints hindered the system's responsiveness to that demand. Reallocations of existing resources were necessary to serve the state and students better. At the request of the BOR, the chancellor formed an internal consolidation subcommittee to explore options for implementation. Precedents had been set for institutional consolidations by the TCSG, which reduced administrative overhead costs while preserving service delivery levels. This approach appeared to have applicability in the USG. The BOR quickly developed a set of guiding principles to frame the discussions of the subcommittee. The six "Principles for Consolidation" published by the USG would guide the decisions to identify which institutions would be considered for consolidation. The principles included (a) increasing educational

attainment levels; (b) improving accessibility to an education based on geographic proximity and cultural fit; (c) eliminating duplication of academic programs and improving instruction; (d) increase economies of scale through cost efficiency, degree offering, and increased enrollment; (e) increase regional economic development; and (f) streamline administrative costs (University System of Georgia, 2018). The BOR adopted the guiding principles in November 2011. The BOR's system staff and the board's consolidation committee worked diligently and quietly on the task to identify potential consolidations in the USG in the final months of 2011.

The quick work of the subcommittee resulted in a BOR agenda item being announced in early January 2012. The agenda item called for work to commence on the ultimate consolidations of eight institutions into four new USG institutions. The BOR reviewed and discussed the agenda item and quickly approved the initiative to move forward. The BOR has the sole and independent authority to determine the nature and membership of its USG institutions according to the state's constitution and the governing board's bylaws (USG, 2020). That authority was exercised then and repeatedly over subsequent years to consolidate a total of nine pairs of USG institutions. Table 2 lists the consolidations recommended and approved by the BOR. Phase I of the Georgia consolidations was announced in 2011 and included eight institutions consolidating into four new institutions. In 2013 and 2015, Phases II and III were announced and included two additional consolidations. Phases IV and V were announced in 2015 and 2017 and involved the consolidation of six institutions into three. Six of the nine consolidations included in Table 2 served as the foundation for this research. In chapters 4 and 5, I will share the findings and discussions from the analysis of the HR function in these six consolidated pairs.

Table 2

University System of Georgia Consolidations

Phase	Legacy institution 1	Legacy institution 2	Consolidated pair
I	George Health Sciences University	Augusta State University	Augusta University
I	Middle Georgia College	Macon State College	Middle George State College and University
I	North Georgia College and State University	Gainesville State College	University of North Georgia
I	South Georgia College	Waycross College	South Georgia State College
II	Kennesaw State University	Southern Polytechnic State University	Kennesaw State University
III	Georgia State University	Georgia Perimeter College	Georgia State University
IV	Albany State University	Darton State College	Albany State University
V	Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College	Bainbridge State College	Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
V	Georgia Southern University	Armstrong State College	Georgia Southern University

Note. The Georgia Health Sciences University and Augusta State University consolidation resulted in the new University initially being named Regents University by the Georgia BOR. After significant community uproar the university was renamed Augusta University. Adapted from the University of Georgia's consolidation website (https://www.usg.edu/consolidations/).

The initial steps in the consolidation process included the formation of implementation groups for each of the consolidations. Several key campus constituents, including faculty, staff, students, alumni, foundation, and community members, were selected to participate in the consolidation process. Another essential step of the process was the appointment of presidents as the implementation leader for each of the consolidations, establishing a reporting mechanism back to the USG, and developing key indicators for tracking through the consolidation process (Rugg, 2021; University System of Georgia, 2021, USG, 2018). Although the affected faculty,

staff, administrators, and other institutional constituents did not participate directly in the BOR decisions to consolidate these institutions, they had the opportunity (albeit limited) to voice their concerns about the consolidation before the board's votes were taken. The initial vote gave the institutions authority to begin the consolidation process and the final vote, happening a year later, would make the consolidation final. The year between the initial and final votes was time allotted for the consolidating institutions to assign working groups, with stakeholders from each campus, to determine how to consolidate academic programs, campus operations, faculty, staff and a host of other activities necessary to begin the new university. More importantly, these constituencies were involved in the detailed planning and implementation of the consolidations and in securing Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) approvals to enact substantive changes. Each consolidated pair formed a consolidation implementation committee (CIC) of about 50 members representing both campuses and cochaired by the two sitting presidents. The CIC was responsible for the consolidation planning process and reviewed and approved recommended implementation actions from the operational working groups (OWG). The OWGs were smaller task forces of faculty, staff, administrators, and students charged with detailed consolidation planning that was specific to each functional area of institutional operations. The OWGs in each consolidated pair were also made up of representatives from both institutions appointed by the presidents. They were charged with planning how the new university would be structured. Each consolidated pair could have between 26 to 30 OWGs. As an example, in the Georgia State University and Georgia Perimeter College consolidation the two presidents, Presidents Becker (Georgia State University) and President Rob Watts (Georgia Perimeter College) cochaired the OWG for the overall university structure (Operational Working Group, 2019). The university structure was one of the first

OWGs convened as it would determine the overall structure of the new university. Critical decisions determined by this OWG included:

- Determining the overall university structure and functional units necessary to manage the new institution.
- Designing the academic colleges to house the various degree programs.
- Developing a new vision and mission statement.
- Collecting the feedback from multiple OWGs that could impact the work of the overall university structure OWG.

Each of the subcommittees of the OWG was responsible for developing recommendations for their respective area. OWGs were also convened to design academic degree programs, academic affairs, student success, faculty affairs, student enrollment, advancement, development, and alumni affairs, student services, facilities and physical plant, human resources (HR), information technology, risk, audits and security, shared governance, student organizations and student life, student services, business and finance, legal affairs, and university and research foundations. Together, these recommendations would produce the structure of the new university. The USG chancellor's staff was also engaged with each CIC and selected OWGs to facilitate the consolidation planning, implementation, and accreditation processes.

While the CICs, OWGs, and system staff were heavily engaged in consolidation planning, a select group of faculty, staff, and administrators prepared an Institutional Consolidation Substantive Change Prospectus on the proposed consolidation review and approval by SACSCOC before the BOR's final vote. The BOR would not approve the consolidation before SACSCOC approved the Substantive Change Prospectus. SACSCOC approval of the institutional consolidation was a federal requirement before the governing board

could approve the effective date of the consolidation. However, the consolidated institution was not finished satisfying SACSCOC at that point. Numerous SACSCOC accreditation compliance reports for a substantive change visiting committee's review and approval during the fall of the 1st year of the consolidated institution's actual operation had to be prepared in that 1st year of the consolidation. Many of the consolidated institutions also had to prepare for a complete decennial accreditation reaffirmation with SACSCOC within 5 years after consolidation (Campus Consolidation News, 2021, Rugg, 2021).

The typical schedule for the nine consolidations in the USG began with the governing board's decision to consolidate two institutions by the beginning of a new calendar year after carefully applying the board's guiding principles for that consolidation. The CIC and OWGs were formed first and charged with consolidation planning aimed at having much of the consolidation become operational administratively by the beginning of the next calendar year (i.e., 12 months later) and implementing the instructional program's consolidation in the fall semester of the following calendar year (i.e., 20 months later). The CIC first developed a new mission statement for the consolidated institution and subsequently received the governing board's approval. While campus planning was underway, a Consolidation Substantive Change Prospectus was prepared and submitted to SACSCOC by September of the 1st year for review and approval by December of the 1st year. Once SACSCOC accreditors approved the proposed consolidation, BOR voted to make the consolidation final and effective in January of the 2nd calendar year. Once consolidated, the new institution began processing the necessary paperwork with the U.S. Department of Education to ensure that Title IV funding arrangements could be fully and smoothly converted by the summer of the second calendar year before the curricular consolidation took effect in the fall semester. During this time, extensive documentation was also

prepared for the SACSCOC Substantive Change Committee's campus visit during the fall of the second year to verify the new institution's continuing compliance with institutional accreditation requirements (Rugg, 2021).

External and Internal Stressors Impacting Consolidations and Closures

The stress and confrontation experienced by the university community throughout the consolidation process suggest that participants allocate a significant investment of time and effort to the change process. In the United States, declines in state funding, shifting student demographics, rising tuition costs, and operational inefficiencies are significant stressors that support collaborative and intentional considerations for a consolidation. These factors are relevant for the majority of consolidations in discussion at the date of this research (Jaschik & Lederman, 2020; Zemsky & Baldridge, 2020). Decreases in state funding, operational inefficiencies and educational access were the drivers of the consolidations in the USG (USG, 2018).

Lytle (2016) published a report analyzing the reasons institutions should be alert to emerging in predictive factors leading to closure or becoming vulnerable to closure. Three categories in the report identified institutions in danger of closure or consolidation because of weakened institutional strength, poorly designed academic offerings, and tuition-dependent revenue generation models. An institution was considered to have weakened institutional strength if enrollment was below 1000 students and precipitously falling without a mitigation plan to stop the decline. Institutions without some level of fully online programs were at risk of closure or consolidation. Lastly, institutions that depended on tuition increases to meet revenue goals were predicted to be financially unstable and at risk during a crisis of any significant level.

The predictive factors that Parthenon-EY offers are not surprises as many colleges and universities have engaged in challenging conversations about college affordability and institutional sustainability during the past 10 years (Azziz et al., 2019). These indicators were categorized into institutional strength, revenue generation ability, and the financial structure of the institution. There were also predictors about revenue to include institutions with large tuition increases (i.e., having an 8% or higher possibility of seeking an alternate answer to closure) or tuition discounts greater than 35 % and depended on tuition for more than 85% of their revenue. Financial concerns were also highlighted like ratio of endowment to revenue and expenses that surpassed the available revenue generated by the institution.

Decreasing state funding, college affordability, and shifting demographics are ongoing concerns for every college president regardless of mission, sector, or location. The need for change is not new to higher education; however, the current pressure to change and consider consolidations deserve a more critical review. In the sections that follow, these concerns will be discussed in more detail. These stressors were the backdrop for the consolidations that occurred in the University System of Georgia.

Declines in State Funding

An institution's strong financial position provides the bedrock to support innovative academic programming, attracts the best faculty and staff, and offers high-profile academic programs. With lower funding after the Great Recession of 2008, institutions likely reevaluated their business model to adjust spending so that cost did not outpace tuition and other revenues. However, with a prolonged decrease in state funding, redirecting spending is not a sustainable business model. During the last decade, HEIs declining state funding and enrollment are variables to include in the institution's funding model.

Some institutions have already implemented various efficiency measures to address lower funding. Measures include developing systems of shared services to lower administrative costs, affiliations with business partners, partnerships for shared resources, and other costs cutting efforts. In Georgia, between 2008 and 2018, state funding per full-time equivalent student (FTE) dropped from $11,235 in 2008 to $6,655 in 2012 with a slight increase in 2019 to $8,499 (Lee, 2019). While there was an appreciable increase from 2018 to 2019, the amount per FTE is still significantly lower than in 2008. Denneen and Dretler (2012) suggested much of the higher educational, financial arena crisis stems from the concept of the "Law of More," where colleges and universities possibly lost focus on their core mission and moved to grow beyond their stated goals.

Since 2008, state contributions to higher education institutions have continued to lag behind inflation and below historical levels. At the end of the 2018 academic year, state funding for public 2- and 4-year institutions was more than $7 billion below its 2008 levels after adjusting for inflation (Mitchell et al., 2018). In states like Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, state funding decreased by more than 30% (Denneen & Dretler, 2012). In Georgia, the 10-year trend beginning in 2010 has shown per-student funding stable but far from previous years. The 2018 budget represents a 6.3% increase in state funding per FTE from last year; however, funding FTE remains almost half of what it was in 2001 (Lee, 2019).

In 2020, institutions continued to experience funding challenges as they faced another recession and a global pandemic. These challenges can prevent institutions from meeting the diverse needs of the U.S. student population over the next 10 years. Financial struggles over the

last decade have caused tuition to increase, which also leads to students being unable to meet their college debt obligations (Denneen & Dretler, 2012)

In 2020, the emergence of a global pandemic put more of a financial strain on colleges and universities that could accelerate conversations about consolidations (Carlson, 2020). Concerns about financial stability, student demographics and college affordability combined to encourage more strategic conversations about college sustainability and consolidations.

College Affordability

As annual tuition increases beyond the rate of inflation, a college education is becoming more difficult for students who need financial support. The cost of education becomes a barrier to success for many students. The barrier impacts levels of educational attainment and college completion. Financial barriers can also lead to high degree attainment inequities for students of color, students of limited economic means, and first-generation students. These groups access and complete college at lower rates than their peers. Pennamon and Warrick (2018) reported that college affordability failed by over 75% for residential 4-year institutions, causing students highly in need of college financial support to forgo the typical college experience. The affordability test reported the total tuition price to attend 2- and 4-year public institution and added $300 for emergency expenses. They compared this total to the combined total of the institution's average federal, state, and institutional grant award; average federal loan disbursement; the expected family contribution of the average Pell Grant recipient; an average Federal Work-Study award; and the contribution of summer wages. A gap in affordability was identified when an institution's total price, plus $300, exceeded the sum of financial aid, family contributions, and student wages. From a sample size of 551 institutions, 139 met their affordability benchmark. This leaves 74% of students with an affordability gap. As the

affordability gap broadens the cost for tuition is also increasing. NCES (2019) reported that for the 2018–2019 academic year, annual current dollar prices for undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board were estimated to be $18,383 at public institutions, $47,419 at private nonprofit institutions, and $27,040 at private for-profit institutions. Between 2008–2009 and 2018–2019, prices for undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board at public institutions rose 28%, and prices at private nonprofit institutions rose 19%, after adjustment for inflation. The price for undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board at private for-profit institutions were 6% lower in 2018–2019 than in 2008–2009, after adjustment for inflation. Annual published tuition at 4-year public colleges rose by $2,651, or 36%, since the 2008 academic year. Increases of this magnitude are an unmanageable barrier for low-income and first-generation college students. Mitchell et al.'s (2018) reported, over the last 20 years, the price of attending a 4-year public college or university has grown disproportionately faster than the median income.

Students' ability to afford college in part depends on states' ability to return to a level of support that existed before 2008, which would provide colleges and universities with more funds for the support of students. Institutions that can decrease cost through increased efficiencies or transformational changes in operations may meet the increasing divide between institutional costs and student ability to pay. College affordability may have an even greater impact on enrollment and college viability in the years ahead.

Demographic Shifts and Impact on Enrollment

A downward shift in college-aged students is expected over the next 10 to 15 years. This shift will result in fewer traditional college-age students attending institutions. In Fall 2021, NCES projected that between Fall 2009 and Fall 2019, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions decreased by 5%. This decrease represents roughly 1 million

students absent from higher education institutions. Over the same period, enrollment for White students decreased from 10.8 million to 8.5 million, 2.5 million to 2.1 million for Black students and increased from 2.4 million to 3.5 million for Hispanic students. The trends listed here are expected to continue (NCES, 2021).

Similarly, in Spring 2019, the National Student Clearing House Research Center reported overall postsecondary enrollments decreased by 1.7% from the previous spring. In the immediate past 3 years (i.e., 2016–2019), public college enrollment decreased by 1.9%. Enrollments decreased among 2-year public institutions by 3.4% and 4-year public institutions by -0.9%. These results, in total, show a 1.9% reduction in public sector enrollment for this period.

In 2019, the U.S. experienced the lowest annual growth rate in a century (NPR, 2019). The U.S. general fertility rate (i.e., births per 1,000 women aged 15–44) declined 2% between 2017 and 2018; fertility rates declined for non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic women (CDC, 2019).

The growth rate reported by NPR is lower than the growth rate during the Great Depression, which saw the smallest expansion of the U.S. population before the past decade. Decreases in the number of college-age students is another reason to prompt HEIs to seek new ways to sustain their institutions (Johnstone et al., 2020). Changes in the decrease in population are not equal across the entire United States, but within the next decade, every region will experience a decline in the population that traditionally represents first-time public college students. For example, it is expected that births will decrease for all races with the largest increase in births for White Americans (Martin et al., 2019).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, all states and the District of Columbia had fewer births in 2019 than in 2018 (Bureau, 2019). There were only minimal increases in birth rates in

just eight states, with an average of less than 1.5% in 10 years. In a report by Market Watch, Shapiro, the executive research director at the National Student Clearinghouse, described the state of lower enrollment contributing it to a slow economic recovery after the Great Recession, and a decrease in the number of adults returning to school (Berman, 2019, p.1). While lower birth rates may decrease college demand in the future, adult students without a college degree may become even more attractive to colleges as they seek to sustain or grow enrollment. A new category of students may encourage institutions to become innovative in attracting students and restructuring their new HEIs. The call for innovation and partnerships in higher education is driven by significant financial outlook changes, calls for operational efficiency, and changing student demographics. These shifts in demographics are cause for HEIs to adjust their business models. As institutions continue to see financial, enrollment, and political pressures impact their sustainability, many will consider consolidations in some form to see a measurable difference.

Change Theory and HR Frameworks

The consolidations across multiple higher education institutions in Georgia provide an environment to study how CHROs were perceived by senior leaders in significant organizational change and how performance in future change could be different. This study used the consolidations in Georgia to explore how CHROs were included in the change process. The change process is unique in higher education institutions because of the connectivity that faculty and staff have with their organizations. Change can be explained in the three phases published in Lewin's three-step model of change (Burnes, 2004; Galli, 2018). Lewin's model provides a simple map for change to envision an institution's movement through the consolidation process to get from the current state to the desired state of change. Ulrich (1997) developed a framework

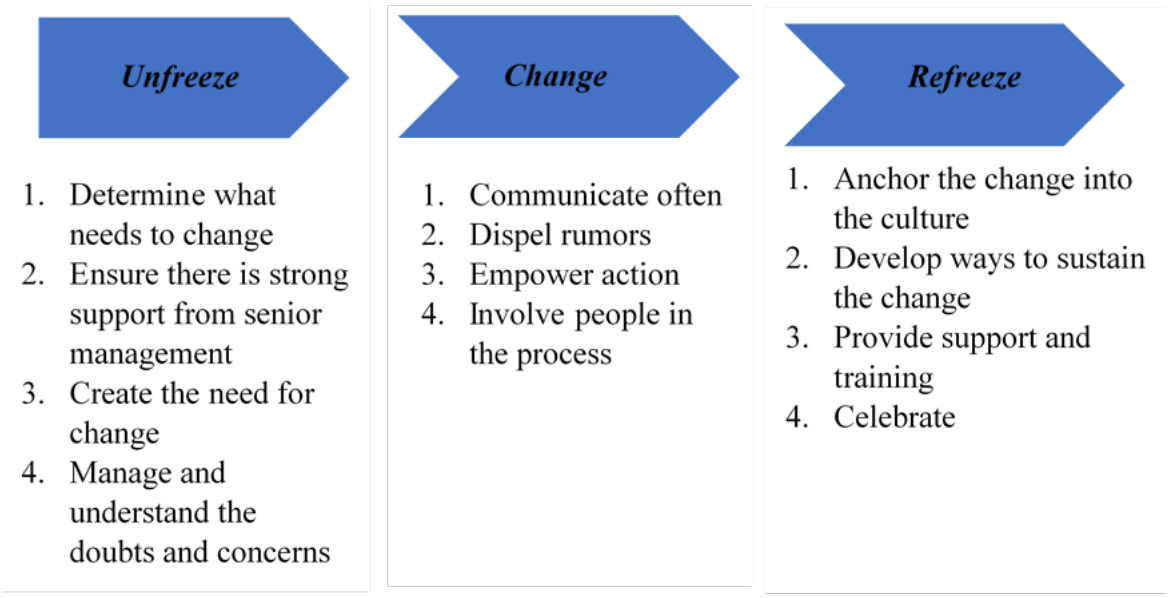
or model positioning CHROs as strategic partners supporting senior leaders. These two theories were used to frame change and the support for change in this study.

Lewin's Three-Step Model of Change

Kurt Lewin's three-step model of change is one of the earliest change process models that was introduced in 1947. Lewin's model provides a guideline for implementing change, building on relevant stages in the implementation process (Burnes, 2004; Galli, 2018; Hussain et al., 2018). Lewin developed the model out of research involving resolutions for social conflict, however, the model was quickly applied to organizational change (Burnes, 2019). Figure 1 depicts Lewin's conventional three-step model of change.

Figure 1

Lewin's Three-Step Model for Change



Source: Grube & Wynn, 2020

Individuals typically desire to maintain the status quo and they will avoid change if possible. Change, similar to consolidations, is necessary to grow and improve. The human part of change likely plays one of the biggest roles in how change is introduced, implemented and

maintained. Lewin's model is a linear process that depicts an organization's movement from the known (current state) to the unknown or the desired future state of change (Burnes, 2019).

Lewin presents three steps of change: unfreezing, moving, and freezing. These three steps describe behaviors that often occur during each phase. By implementing a planned approach to change such as this, organizations can build on accomplishments made during the first step of unfreezing (i.e., L1) and throughout the next two steps of change (i.e., L2) and refreezing (i.e., L3). To unfreeze the status quo, Lewin suggested increasing the momentum toward change or decreasing the forces maintaining the status quo (Burnes, 2004; Hussain, 2016; Lavasseur, 2001). Increasing the momentum can include employees taking the lead on certain decisions or helping to frame the new organization based on honored traditions. Conversely, removing forces that obstruct removal of the status quo could involve removing a trusted leader who does not agree with the change underway. All of these actions involve unfreezing the organization from its current state in preparation for the move to the new state of business. This phase focuses heavily on the faculty and staff being prepared to make the change necessary to support the new institution.

Planned activities in L1 help to move faculty and staff toward the change phase, or the L2 phase, of organizational change. New behaviors are expected in this phase. The activities in this phase are the foundation for how the changes are made a permanent part of the new culture.

Following the L2 step, leaders attempt to move their organizations to a point of maintain the change that has occurred. Advancing to L3, or refreezing, can be difficult and can take multiple attempts to make the new change become a true part of the institutions culture. Often it takes up to 10 years to see significant change take place in an organization (Harman, 2002). The

refreezing step helps organizations establish a new quasi-stationary equilibrium that can be further developed in the future (Burnes, 2020).

The simplicity of Lewin's change model encouraged the development of other change models like those listed in Table 3. These models are also relevant to the discussion of organizational change and further underscore the underlying concepts of Lewin's model. Table 3 compares models from several authors to Lewin's model and aligns the changes in the models with the three-step model.

Table 3

Comparative Models of Organizational Change

Lewin (1947)	Unfreezing	Moving	Re-freezing
Tichy and Devanna (1986)	Recognizing the need for change/Creating Vision	No match	Institutionalizing change
Beer, Eisenstat and Spector (1990)	Mobilize commitment/Develop a shared vision/Foster consensus	Spread revitalization	Institutionalizing revitalization/Monitor and adjust strategies
Cummings and Worley (1993)	Motivating change/creating a vision/developing political support	Managing the transition	Sustaining momentum
Judson (1991)	Analyzing and planning the change /Communicating the change/Gaining acceptance of new behaviors	Changing from the status quo to the desired state	Consolidating and institutionalizing the new state
Goss, Pascale, and Athos (1998)	Assembling a critical mass of key stakeholder. Doing an organizational audit. Creating urgency	Harnessing contention	Engineering and organizational breakdowns
Kotter (1998)	Establishing a sense of urgency/Forming a powerful coalition/Creating a vision/Communicating the vision	Empowering/Short-term wins, Consolidating improvements	Institutionalizing the new approaches
Galpin (1996)	Establishing the need for change/Developing a	Detailing the recommendations/	Measuring, reinforcing, and

Lewin (1947)	Unfreezing	Moving	Re-freezing
	vision/Diagnosing and analyzing the current situation/Generating recommendations	Pilot testing the recommendations/Preparing the recommendations for rollout/Rolling out the recommendations	refining the change.

Note. Adapted from Burnes (2020); Hussain et al., (2018)

Lewin's three-step model of change has also attracted criticism. The model has been described as too simplistic, linear, and prescriptive with limited resembles to how organizations change (Bartunek & Woodman, 2015). There is not a guidebook for higher education consolidations and the simplicity of Lewin's change model could be helpful. The model can incorporate the more detailed elements from the other change models, and its linear approach allows for monitoring and tracking complex organizational change through action research.

Human Resources Management Theory and Practice

Research in HRM has produced several frameworks to describe the theory and practice of the function. For this study, the theory of HRM or HR through the practice of the CHRO intertwined to explore the perceptions of CHROs in assisting institutional leaders in organizational change like consolidations. Differentiating between the two terms—HR and HRM—is difficult as they are often used interchangeably. It is not easy to distinguish the terms in HEI's as the complexity of identifying its intellectual boundaries and its application in practice challenges the scope and influence of the CHRO role (Collings & Woods, 2009).

An inclusive definition of HRM or HR has been challenging to determine as the function transitions from the historically siloed personnel department to HRM. In general, HRM is defined as a system of activities and strategies that focus on successfully managing employees at

all levels of an organization to achieve organizational goals (Byars & Rue, 2006). Secondly, the systems and activities included in HRM are described as having the dichotomies of soft and hard approaches to designing and implementing HRM plans (Collings & Woods, 2009; Kaufman, 2015). Understanding the basics of both approaches helps to identify which approach would work best in organizational change.

The *soft* HRM approach focuses on the treatment of employees as an important organizational asset. Management of employees under this approach assumes that employees need a high level of care, training, and development to gain their commitment to the organization. Soft HRM approaches view employees as critical resources who are critical to the long-term success of the organization. The *hard* HRM approach considers employees as an input or factor to strengthen the organization's bottom line. A hard HRM approach treats employees similar to other organization assets that do not require training or development and can be treated with dispassion. Employee performance is expected regardless of how the employee is engaged or treated (Collings & Woods, 2009).

Activities can also be soft and strategic, with CHROs advising senior leaders about the best way to attract research-driven faculty through better pay and benefits. Conversely, the activity could take a hard HRM approach that leaves the needs of faculty and staff out of the decision-making process and focuses on implementation by policy activities. For example, the CHRO could assist senior leaders in designing the workforce for the new institution without faculty and staff input or determine reductions in force based only on financial data without care for the needs of faculty and staff. The differences between the two approaches impact how CHROs apply HRM practice during organizational change.

Hard HRM considers employees as resources, similar to other resources like buildings, equipment, and the like that require tight strategic control (Collings & Woods, 2009). The concept of hard HRM is also aligned with the Theory X model of human work motivation developed by Douglas McGregor in 1960 (Morse & Lorsch, 1970). This theory suggests employees are motivated by authoritative direction and control or integration.

The two approaches of HRM provide a foundation to develop HR policies and implement HR practice. These activities are guided by the CHRO with direction from senior leaders. The two approaches are significantly different models making it impossible to use both at the same time in the same HRM strategy (Truss et al., 1997). HRM's overall purpose is to ensure the organization is situated to achieve success through its people's engagement.

Human Resources Management Models

Several HRM models have been developed in support of the HR practice. The models provide an analytical framework for studying HRM. Individual models have distinctive strengths and weaknesses, as shown in Table 4. The models are listed by title and authors and their associated concept, implementation phases, strengths and weaknesses. There are several models available, but Table 4 summarizes four of the most popular models in use today.

Table 4

HR Management Models

Author(s)	Fombrun, 1984 Michigan Model	Beer, 1984 Harvard Model	Storey, 1996 Ideal Type Model	Ulrich et al., 1997 4-Box Model
Concept	Fundamental interrelatedness and coherence of HRM practices with the overall business strategy.	Comprehensive statement on the nature of HRM and specific HR outcomes	Differentiates between Personnel and HRM.	Promotes HRM as a strategic business partner.

Author(s)	Fombrun, 1984 Michigan Model	Beer, 1984 Harvard Model	Storey, 1996 Ideal Type Model	Ulrich et al., 1997 4-Box Model
Phases	4-Phase Cycle Selection Appraisal Development Reward	6 Components Situational factors Stakeholder interest Policy choices HR Outcomes Long-term consequences Feedback loop	4 Phases Elements, Beliefs and Assumptions Strategic qualities The critical role of managers Key levers	4-Key roles Strategic Partner Change Agent Administrative Expert Employee Champion
Strengths	Emphases coherence of internal HR practices and the importance of matching internal policies and practices to the organizations external business strategy.	Management as a real actor. Considers McGregor's Theory Y. Classification of inputs and outcomes at the societal and organizational levels.	Uses 'soft' HRM. Emphasized commitment rather than compliance. Highlights human capability as the difference in organizational competitiveness.	Quicker response to the needs of management and changing conditions. Proactive HR approach toward its internal and external clients.
Weakness	Uses 'hard' HR model relating employees as a means to an end. Limited focus on employee commitment	Absence of a coherent theoretical basis for measuring the relationship between HR inputs, outcomes and performance (Guest 1997)	Personnel vs. HR debate. "New wine in old bottle" analogy, suggesting the model was a new way of describing an old function.	Competencies that support the four key roles described were not developed until 2001. During the inceptions of the new model and the development of the core competencies, HR leaders remained 'in the dark' (Caldwell 2003)

Note. Collected from Caldwell, 2001, 2003; Storey, 2007; Ulrich, 1997.

Fombrun et al. (1984) developed the Michigan model in 1984 at the Michigan Business school. The model was first known as the "best fit" or "matching model" because it considered the need for the HRM systems and the organizational structure to be developed side by side in a way that is congruent with the organizational strategy model (Bratton & Gold, 2007; Caldwell,

2001, 2003). The Michigan model was designed to support a strategic approach to implementing HRM practice. However, the HRM policies selected for implementation typically aligned with the employer's needs as the primary focus.

The Harvard model for HRM is one of the first HRM models developed by faculty from the Harvard School by Beer et al. in 1984 (Klett, 2010). The model supports the alignment of organizational performance with how well supervisors manage employees. Soft HRM is closely aligned and influenced by the Harvard management model (Beer et al., 1985). This model recognizes that there are multiple influences on developing an organization's HRM policies. The model encourages effective and efficient implementation of all HR policies as they have a long-term consequence on its actual effectiveness (Beer et al., 1985). In addition to understanding various stakeholders' influence on an organization's strategic plan, the model also accounts for internal and external stakeholders; all stakeholders have a role to play in the organization's success and direction. Employees are viewed as critical stakeholders in this model (Shanock et al., 2019). Emphasis is placed on outcomes and how well employers treat employees, encouraging them to support their success. The Harvard model or soft HRM emphasizes HRM's human element (Collings & Woods, 2009).

This model is also recognized as drawing its theoretical foundation from the school of human relations due to its concept of employees being the competitive advantage of organizations. The model takes a holistic approach to HRM and considers the possibility of different employee performance outcomes based on inputs from their employer. Harvard's model suggests that HRM has two characteristic features to include (a) supervisors accept more responsibility for ensuring employees are aligned with the competitive strategy of the organization, and (b) HR has the responsibility of determining policies that govern how

employee engagement is developed and implemented for an optimal commitment from employees (Alam & Mukerjee, 2014). The model includes four key HRM practices to include employee influence, HR flows or activities (i.e., recruitment, selection, placement, and promotion), reward systems (e.g., pay system, motivation), and work systems (e.g., definition and design of work and alignment of people). Situational factors impact these HRM practices, including workforce characteristics, business strategy, management philosophy, and labor market. The Harvard model has what it describes as its central four "Cs" to include commitment, congruence, competence, and cost-effectiveness. The Harvard model recognizes an element of mutuality between the employer and the employee, whereby one depends on the other for their success and advancement. Although the model considers the employee as stakeholders in the organization, it is likely not to the same extent that faculty consider themselves stakeholders and owners in the university environment.

The Michigan and Harvard models developed a foundation for scholars to study the HR profession. However, the models did not provide a framework for HR professionals to fit the practice into the theory. These models quickly became outdated and new models developed to identify HR as a profession (Caldwell, 2001).

Two models formed after Michigan and Harvard: Storey (1996) and Ulrich (1997) advanced the development of HRM theory and established a framework for the practice of HR by HR professionals (Caldwell, 2001, 2003; Collings & Woods, 2009; Kaufman, 2015; Ulrich & Filler, 2015). The Storey model (1996) of HRM, labeled "ideal type" model, identified key dimensions of policies and practices and identified differences between personnel and HRM. However, the model was believed to be unrealistic because it deemphasized traditional HR or personnel management and supported a more strategic HRM practice. The model established 27

points that differentiate HRM from personnel and industrial relations practices. HRM and personnel management both deal with the management of people, but they differ about how the management of people should be approached. The difference in the management styles of personnel and HRM are identified in the ideal type published by Storey (1996). Storey identified four essential characteristics of HRM that include:

1. A set of beliefs and assumptions that are used to orient the workforce toward achieving certain outcomes. HR professionals would determine certain activities were required by employees based on a particular belief or assumption about the workforce and would then design programs around those beliefs. For example, an employer may require its employees to confirm that they are tobacco free to enjoy lower benefit costs because they believe a tobacco free workplace will keep employees healthier and more productive.
2. HRM would be aligned with the strategic concepts of the organization by managing the workforce toward the desired goals fulling the organization's mission.
3. Supervisors directly involved with front line employees, also called line managers, would take on more management and essential communication with employees to accomplish the organization's goals.
4. HR professionals would employ key levers to determine how to be the employment relationship between the employee and the organization leaders. In this item managing culture is more important than managing procedures and systems.

The effort to identify personnel activities separate from strategic HRM functions challenged the historical approach of micro personnel as the only responsibility of HR professionals (Storey, 1996). Storey offered a new definition of HRM as a distinctive approach

to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce using an array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques (Storey, 2019). Storey also posited that leaders should use HRM to develop a committed workforce to increase the organization's competitiveness. Using employees to be competitive was faced with some confrontation as it expressed employees as a resource of the organization similar to non-HR like property and land. The debate over the difference in the approach of the model overshadowed the strength of the model. The model's primary goal was to establish a foundation for a renewed, engaging, and humane approach to managing.

Ulrich (1997) focused on organizing all HR functions into four central roles: strategic partner, change agent, administrative expert, and employee champion (see Figure 2). Ulrich's conceptual framework for the four-role model consists of two main dimensions: operational and strategic. The first dimension reflects the continuum from an operational (i.e., present) focus to a strategic (i.e., future) focus, while the second reflects the conflicting demands of people and processes (Conner & Ulrich, 1996; Tracey, 2002). The model frames a concept that HR can support the organization's needs by performing in any of the four roles included in the model. The first box reflects HR as a strategic partner supporting senior decision makers of the organization to help with strategy execution. Second, HR can contribute expertise in the efficient and effective performance of work so that the organization is run efficiently as employee cost is often the most significant expense in any organization. Third, HR can represent the concerns of the employees to senior management and work with employees to increase and ensure their ability to contribute to the organization through their competence and commitment. Finally, the model suggests that HR professionals can continually support the change process to help facilitate the organization's capacity to grow (Boxall, 2008; Ulrich, 1997).

Figure 2

Ulrich's Four Box HRM Model

Note. Adapted from Human Resources Champions: The Next Agenda for Adding Value and Delivering Results (Ulrich, 1997).

The Ulrich model produces four roles for CHROs that travel along two continual axes of process and people. Included in the focus on processes and function, this model includes the roles that CHRO can perform in the larger environment of the organization (Ulrich, 1997). Ulrich emphasized that remodeling HR does not rely primarily on HR functions but the support of senior leaders in transforming HR. Similar to the Storey model, the Ulrich model challenges the historical concept of how HR is used. It brings into perspective the role of HRM as a strategic business partner involved in developing and aligning HRM strategies with the business model. Ulrich's model suggests HR professionals must be competent to work in multiply subcategories in HRM to include recruitment, benefits compensation, and employee relations.

Using HRM in the Organizational Change Process

This study used the Ulrich et al. (1997) model of HRM roles in Lewin's three-step model (1947) of change to explore HRM's role in organizational change. Specifically, considering change as a process with distinct steps, Lewin's model provides a basis to apply all of the roles of the Ulrich model in organizational change. The L1 step involves preparing the organization to accept that change is necessary. L2 provides the workforce opportunities to resolve the uncertainty in the new organization and proactively begin to change. The final stage, L3, allows employees to embrace the change to stabilize the new organization. Ulrich's model aligns as it matches similar roles in human resources management with the change model's roles.

Researchers have determined that organizations can achieve strategic objectives using sound HRM theory and effective HR practice to support the change (Jiang et al., 2017). I explored presidents, chief business officers, and chief academic officers' perceptions of the role of the CHRO during the strategic implementation of consolidations in Georgia.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

This study explored the perceived role of chief human resources officers (CHRO) in assisting presidents, chief business officers, and chief academic officers during consolidations in Georgia. The four key research questions focused on understanding how presidents, chief business officers, and chief academic officers, critical to the decision-making process during the consolidation, perceived and engaged the CHRO. The perceived role of CHROs during a consolidation effort is not well defined or studied in higher education. The opinions and decisions of presidents, chief business officers, and chief academic officers are important to understand how and why the CHRO was engaged in the process. For these reasons, I used a qualitative research approach to collect data for this study.

Study Design

Through this lens, a qualitative research approach was most appropriate to conduct this study. A qualitative research approach allowed for a review of HR engagement during the consolidation process. The interviews were then used to develop the findings of this research to "improve the quality of the practice of a particular discipline" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 3). While basic research is expected to inform practice, its primary purpose is to know more about a phenomenon so that "administrators and policymakers can use the information to improve the way things are done" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 4). Additionally, a qualitative approach provided a foundation to determine opportunities for applying HR practice and theory to improve the quality of HR in higher education in the larger theoretical framework of Lewin's (1947) model of organizational change.

With a focus on individual lived experiences, a case study approach was used to "explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 17). This approach allowed for a deep description of "how they perceive it, describe, feel about it, judge, remember it, and make sense of it, and talk about it with others" for the participants included in the study (Marshall & Rossman 2016; p. 104). This case study approach provided several advantages, including the flexibility to incorporate multiple perspectives, data collection tools, and interpretative strategies. These professionals were the primary designers and implementers of the six consolidations in Georgia. Additionally, CHRO were also included in the research process to collect and analyze their perceptions of their engagement in organizational change. The case study was focused on a small group that set up boundaries around the research topic and prevented the scope from becoming unmanageable.

Research Criteria

This research attempted to conform to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for rigor and trustworthiness in qualitative research, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. To ensure this research topic is relevant to inform practice, consideration of its value was considered. Marshall and Rossman (2016) encouraged the researcher to consider evaluating three interrelated factors that will add value to the coverall study. These interrelated concerns capture key questions of feasibility, competence and ethics, and interest. Marshall and Rossman referred to these factors as the "do-ability, should-do-ability, and want-to-do-ability" that should be considered for every research project. The research's do-ability relates to the study being "possible and realistic," specifically as it relates to the availability of resources, access to the targeted population of interest, and the researcher's knowledge and skills for the successful completion of the research study. As discussed by Marshall and Rossman (2016), it is the

researcher's responsibility to ensure every interaction through the study projects a thorough, ethical, qualitative research study conducted by competent research. The should-do-ability refers to the study's potential to contribute to theorizing and research, to policy issues and policymaking, and or to issues of practice. Considerations should be given to the study's outcome to provide research that would be useful to the practice and scholarship in the selected field. Before executing the study, the research should ask the questions: "Should the study be conducted? How will it contribute to scholarship? Policy Deliberations and Practices?" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 5). For the study to be relevant, the researcher must also convince reviewers that the study should be entered into but should actually be undertaken. The research must ensure that engaging in the study is needed and sufficiently complete the study as designed.

Involving peers and others to identify potential bias was critical for a fair and deliberate review of consolidation information. This research's scope took me beyond the function of HRM into the theory and best HRM practices across the broader higher education landscape. Prior to conducting research for this study, I sought and received approval by the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A for approval letter).

Overall, the study and the methodology allowed me to collect essential data to develop a comprehensive study that discusses the perceptions of CHROs during a consolidation. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, few studies analyze the importance of CHROs role throughout the consolidation process. This research highlighted a relatively overlooked theory and practice in the execution of organizational change: engagement of HRM and the CHRO. Highlighting the expectations and perceptions of this crucial role further defines the function of HRM.

Research Questions

The research questions for my study facilitated the collection of presidents, chief business officers and chief academic officers' perceptions to understand the role of CHROs during the consolidation process in higher education in Georgia. I refer to presidents, chief business officers and chief academic officers as stakeholders in the research questions. The more significant questions that my study sought to answer were:

1. How do stakeholders engage with CHROs to influence organizational change?
2. How do stakeholders perceive the CHROs purpose in the strategic implementation of consolidations?
3. How do CHROs perceive their ability to influence decisions regarding the workforce in transformational organizational change?
4. What did stakeholders suggest might be done differently to better engage CHROs in organizational change going forward?

These questions provided the overarching framework for the study that resulted in helpful insights into the perceived roles of CHROs in assisting institutional leaders during organizational change. The framing of the questions also resulted in finding***s*** for improvement of the HR practice that could be helpful across multiple HEIs in the USG.

Site Selection

Six of the nine consolidations in the USG were selected for this study. All total, the USG consolidated 18-institutions of various Carnegie classifications into nine schools. For clarification purposes, going forward, these consolidations will be referred to as "consolidated pairs," referring to the consolidation of two institutions into one new institution. This move decreased the number of institutions in the nation's fifth-largest enrolled university system from

35 to 26. These institutions differ in enrollment, mission, and sector, but each institution went through a similar consolidation process led by campus leadership and the University System of Georgia (USG) central office staff. Of the nine consolidated pairs, six consolidated pairs were included in this study. These six consolidations represent four of the five phases of the BOR's consolidation mentioned in Chapter 2. These consolidations began in early 2012 and continued as late as 2018. Table 5 represents the six consolidated pairs included in this study.

Table 5

Consolidated Pairs included in Study

Phase	Legacy institution 1	Legacy institution 2	Consolidated pair
I	George Health Sciences University	Augusta State University	Augusta University
I	Middle Georgia College	Macon State College	Middle George State College and University
I	North Georgia College and State University	Gainesville State College	University of North Georgia
II	Kennesaw State University	Southern Polytechnic State University	Kennesaw State University
III	Georgia State University	Georgia Perimeter College	Georgia State University
V	Georgia Southern University	Armstrong State College	Georgia Southern University

Note. The consolidations of Albany State University and Darton State College, Waycross College and South Georgie College and Abraham Baldwin Agriculture College and Bainbridge State College were eliminated from this study. See reasons under Elimination of Three Consolidated Pairs.

Three of the consolidated pairs were not included in this study: Albany State University and Darton State College, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, and Waycross College, and South Georgia State College.

Elimination of Three Consolidated Pairs

Albany State University, developed from the consolidation of Albany State University and Darton State College, was eliminated from the study. During the development of this research, I served as the Albany State University president, developed from the consolidation of Albany State University and Darton State College. As president of the institution and researcher of this study, including the institution that I led, would be problematic as there is an opportunity for my bias and participants' hesitancy to participate or honestly answer the interview questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Understanding that my role could impact a potential participants' decision to participate or alter the feedback suggested that interviewing Albany State University stakeholders would not follow an ethical practice model.

I chose to eliminate the study of the consolidation between Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College and Bainbridge College (ABAC) based on the consolidation being executed considerably different from the other eight consolidations in the USG. The consolidation of ABAC and Bainbridge involved moving a large portion of the 2-year academic programs of Bainbridge to a local technical college. Southern Regional Technical College (SRTC) assumed responsibility for the technical programs available in Bainbridge. The uniqueness of the consolidation also included the only consolidation that involved three institution instead of two. The three-institution consolidation in which a TCSG institution (i.e., SRTC) not only acquired a large portion of Bainbridge College's technical education programs and their associated faculty, staff, and students, but also acquired ownership of the former Bainbridge College campus. This consolidation, unlike the others, led to the new institution, ABAC, eliminating programs, faculty, and staff. This was unlike the other consolidations where they retained two major campus operations and the bulk of their existing educations, faculty, staff, and students. ABAC began to

offer its academic programs on what was once the Bainbridge campus. SRTC assumed responsibility for the technical programs available in Bainbridge. Understandably, the HR issues involving these faculty and staff were much different from those in the other eight consolidation.

The consolidation of South Georgia State College (SGSC) and Waycross College (WC) was a significant change for the region. The institutions had the lowest enrollment of any other institutions in the USG when the consolidation was announced. With enrollment declining at both institutions, the decision to consolidate the institutions seemed appropriate based on the USG guidelines. The consolidation resulted in fewer administrative positions and more faculty and student support jobs (Athens Banner-Herald, 2014). Administrators currently leading the institution were not at the institution during the consolidation. The administrators at the new SCSG shared they were not close enough to have perceptions of CHROs during the consolidation process to participate in the study. For these reasons, I chose to eliminate this consolidated pair from the study.

Operational Working Groups

The work of each consolidation largely took place in the operational working groups (OWG). The OWG and the specific subgroups varied somewhat from institution to institution; however, all of the consolidations formed an academic affairs and HR working group. Table 6 is a representative sample of OWG's appointed in the consolidation of Georgia Southern University and Armstrong State University and the responsibilities assigned to the OWGs that are relevant to this study. For this research, I invited the leads of the OWGs responsible for decisions related to academic affairs, business and finance, and HR to participate in the interview process. The leads of these OWGs developed in-depth knowledge about the needs of the new institution while guiding the establishment of new departments, organizational structures,

policies, and procedures. The leads were also responsible for establishing opportunities to maintain some of the processes and traditions of the two individual institutions to include in the new institution.

Table 6

Example of Operational Working Groups

OWG	Subgroup
Academic affairs	• Organizational structure • Faculty governance • Faculty senate • Faculty performance evaluation • Tenure and promotion, and • Post-tenure • Academic programs • SACSCOC
Business and finance	• Budgets • Business operations and contracts • Procurement • Tuition and fees • Facilities and maintenance
HR	• Organizational structure & organizational charts • HR policy • Reductions in force • Recruitment • Workweek schedule for 12-month faculty and staff • Determine need for salary adjustments • Staff governance-determine structure and policies • Staff advisory group

Note. Adapted Operational Working Groups. (2017).

The academics affairs OWG was responsible for policies and processes that covered faculty affairs, faculty governance, and faculty development. An example of the personnel selected to lead these subgroups included provost, associate provost, chair of the faculty senate, ranked professors, deans, and chairs. The HR OWG was responsible for decisions about campus-wide policies and procedures relating to faculty and staff compensation, recruitment, reductions in force, staff governance, and other employee-related policies. While every consolidation

supported an OWG that focused on faculty-related decisions, no institution included an OWG specifically for staff issues. The HR OWG focused on staff concerns and their request through HRM policy.

Participant Selection

I selected interview participants from the categories of institutional president, chief academic officer, chief business officer and CHRO (see Appendix B for the introductory email to participants). I asked these senior leaders, with the exception of the CHROs, questions pertaining to their perceptions of CHROs before, during and after the consolidation process. These individuals were also responsible for leading the OWGs for their institutions and therefore had direct knowledge about the decisions that were made and the individuals involved in the decisions. In some cases, these individuals led more than one OWG. I then interviewed the CHROs to collect their perceptions about their involvement in the consolidation process.

To minimize any possible undue influence, all invitations to interview were made directly to the participant and not through a supervisor. Potential participants were contacted using the following approach, an email was sent to each potential participant that contained the consent form with an explanation of the study scope, research objectives, and the estimated amount of time expected for their participation. Participants were asked to reply via email if they were interested in participating in the study. Next, candidates were asked via email to sign the standard interview consent form before interviews were scheduled. Consent forms were collected from interviews prior to the completion of this research project (see Appendix C for the applicant consent form).

For this study, interviews were determined the best approach for the collection of data. Participants were offered confidentiality in the interview process. Participants were greeted with

the same introduction based on the Interview Protocol Developed before the interviews (see Appendix D). Each participant was assigned a pseudo-identity to mask their actual identity. Participants' comments and feedback were masked, and precautions were taken to eliminate or modify any language that could be directly attributed to an individual. Comments directly relating to a particular institution were sanitized to remove references that could otherwise connect the individual to the statement. All interviews were offered via Zoom, with the request to record the session for future transcription. Any participant expressing discomfort with recording the interview was offered an unrecorded session, with me taking notes. All participants agreed to being recorded for transcription of the interview at a later date. If requested, the interview transcripts and notes were made available to the participant.

I developed separate questions for the four participant groups to accurately capture the experience that would be appropriate at the level of engagement. Presidents were asked broader questions about their engagement with the CHRO (see Appendix E) than questions asked of chief business officers (see Appendix F) and chief academic officers (see Appendix G). CHROs were asked more specific questions to capture their opinions of how they experienced their engagement by senior leaders (see Appendix H). Of the individuals identified as participants for an interview, 18 out of 24 participants agreed to be interviewed. A total of eight White males, seven White females, and three Black females shared feedback on their experiences in the consolidation efforts of their institutions. By position category, I interviewed five presidents, six chief business officers, two chief academic officers, and five chief human resources officers.

Four participants had retired from the USG before the interviews began, and new employees did not have the background related to the consolidation to share experiences during the consolidation. When asked if other employees could provide feedback, no one was offered as

a plausible substitute for the retiring participants. The input from chief academic officers was limited, with only two agreeing to interview for this study. However, the remaining participants, presidents, chief business officers, and CHROs were represented at higher numbers.

Data Collection and Analysis

All recorded interviews were kept secured by using password-protected protocols. A master interview list was maintained to document the actual participant's identity; however, "Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2," and so forth were used if quotes are determined repeatable. The master interview list and final interview notes will be maintained for up to 2 years. However, the goal is to dispose of the interviews and transcripts as soon as this research is finalized. All information collected, including the interview recordings, has been password protected and identified with pseudo identifiers. Each interview recorded was transcribed using Zoom transcription services. The transcripts and interview data were organized and housed using MaxQDA. As discussed by Yin (2014), analyzing documents in the data collection process can help support and enhance the information collected through interviews and other data collection forms. To determine if there are patterns in responses from the interviews, I employed an inductive open coding approach. Following Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) recommendation, for consistency, I used the constant comparative approach and axial coding to group the codes into broader categories and themes.

Data collection for this research was managed in a prescribed manner by coding the interview feedback in a two-step process. The process involved the following steps,

1. The first cycle of data analysis used in vivo coding to capture, segment, and label responses from respondents using the actual words and phrases from the interview. Phrases or words repeatedly used by participants were used to identify patterns and

common perceptions, experiences, and opinions. At the conclusion of the interviews an example of a priori codes that were developed included the following; emerging, administrative, competency, strategic, compliance, and administration. After each interview, I made the determination if additional codes were needed based on the information received.

2. The second cycle patterns began to develop in the categories of respondents. For example, one category of respondents insisted that they engaged CHROs at a strategic level, while another category made the same proclamation, but when they described how they engaged the position, it was consistently describing behaviors that guided compliance actions.

All interviews were transcribed using TranscribeMe transcription service and then reviewed for accuracy by replaying each interview and making corrections to the transcription. All participants were given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. I used pseudonyms to track the comments from each participant; however, the small size of the participant groups prevented me from including the aliases in the findings. Notes accompanied each interview, and these notes were also transcribed immediately after each interview. To ensure the content and notes appropriately reflected what transpired during the interviews, the transcriptions were submitted and reviewed as close to the time of the virtual meetings as possible. All transcriptions were completed within 1 week of the interviews taking place. I began interviewing participants on June 29, 2021, and I conducted the final interview on July 18, 2021. At the end of each interview, I forwarded the recorded interview to TranscribeMe for transcription. Although TranscribeMe transcribed the recordings, I replayed and reviewed each interview and adjusted the transcribed document as needed. All transcriptions were completed on August 9, 2021.

Various documents were analyzed to help inform me of the structure of the OWGs, what positions were chosen to lead these groups, how changes were communicated and how the CHRO engaged in the process. Appendix I includes a list of documents that were analyzed for this research study. Documents were reviewed from six of the consolidated pairs and include documents specific to the OWGs for the University Structure, Human Resources, and news reports from the consolidation. Documents for phase I consolidated pairs, which began in 2012, were limited, but what was available was reviewed in accordance with the purpose of this research.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Qualitative research should clearly articulate a sound design for trustworthiness in the study process. Shank (2006) defines *trustworthiness* as the degree to which we can trust given research findings. The applied nature of most social science inquiry makes it critical for researchers to confidently explore ways of ethically conducting investigations and presenting the results of the research or any particular study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, the findings must be *sufficiently authentic*, thereby convincing the reader that they can trust the reported information and safely act upon it if there is a desire to do so. Marshall and Rossman (2016) addressed central questions initially posed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that determine our trust in research: Do we believe in the claims that a research report puts forward? On what grounds do we judge these credible? What evidence is presented to support the claims? How do we evaluate that evidence? Are the claims potentially useful for the problem in consideration? (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The questions posed here by Marshall and Rossman (2016) represent concerns with validity, reliability, objectivity, and generalizability.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) captured similar concerns by defining *trustworthiness* as the sum of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. *Credibility* is defined as confidence in the 'truth' of the findings. Lincoln and Guba recommended that the researcher be present in the study setting for an extended period (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Lincoln and Guba defined *dependability* as showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Marshall & Tisdell, 2016). *Confirmability* is defined as the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the respondents and not researcher bias shapes the findings of a study, motivation, or interest (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

As a vice chancellor for human resources with the USG, I inherently developed credibility in conducting my research through ongoing collaboration with senior leaders. As vice chancellor and the liaison to several consolidating institutions on human resources matters, I was provided greater insight into my interview subjects' experiences than someone not intimately involved in the process. I benefited from participating in the decision-making process with presidents, chief business officers, and academic officers. I was also engaged in assisting the CHROs in their search for participation in the process. I was careful during the interview process not to share my experiences of the consolidation process with the interviewee, even when asked to do so. Because of the familiarity with several interviewees, I was careful to focus on the study's topic, and I deliberately redirected conversations that did help with the data collection process back to the study topic.

As with qualitative research, the aim is to understand particular situations or phenomena. Rich data is gathered from which ideas can be formed. My study included a relatively small group of 18 respondents. When categorized into position categories, my findings are dependable and were replicated by the group. The responses showed that the feedback was consistent within

the position but differed across the position group. As an example, all presidents felt discussed having a more significant engagement with their CHRO. They also discussed having a CHRO proficient in multiple HR roles, including being a strategic partner and having skills as an administrative expert, change agent, and employee champion. The responses were repeated in some variation by all of the participants in the president job category.

Similarly, although the chief administrative officer was a much smaller respondent group with two respondents, the feedback was similar within the position. In this classification, they had limited engagement with their CHRO. They also perceived the CHRO as an administrative expert and not as a change agent or strategic partner.

Confirmability was the category that I paid close attention to throughout my study. I had a significant list of experiences with most of the responders in my study. I used the strategies of peer examination and debriefing, member checks, audit trail, and triangulation to ensure dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. I partnered with others similarly situated and connected to the consolidations throughout this research to ensure my biases are not a part of the interviews or intertwined in the data analysis. Peers were asked to examine the data and to comment on the plausibility of the emerging findings. Discussions with those similarly involved provided an opportunity for me to review responses from respondents for additional feedback and differences of opinions. These discussions also allowed me to explore my participation in the consolidation process at the system level.

Finally, to further support my study, data triangulation was conducted. Data collected through interviews of various individuals with similar characteristics like presidents, business officers, and academic officers, I elected to use additional data points to confirm the data

collected. Data collected from each of the consolidation websites of each consolidate pair, the USG, and media coverage were included in the data evaluation process (See Appendix I).

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

My professional career spans over 25 years as a human resource professional in private, public, and higher education organizations. I have served in multiple positions at various levels, including experience in the four roles described in Ulrich's (1997) model. This experience, including supervising other human resources professionals, provides me with awareness about the potential for the function and the expectations of the role.

As former vice chancellor the possibility existed that I had previously engaged with some of the participants that were interviewed for this study, therefore it was particularly important that I maintained integrity in the interview process. I worked closely with the primary decision makers in the USG consolidations to include the chancellor, USO staff, Board of Regent (BOR) members, and external organizations connected with USG institutions thereby, providing me with a level of awareness about decisions that others may not have. With the focus of this research to explore the perceptions and roles of CHROs in higher education, I would have had some knowledge of before the study. I was careful during the interview process not to share my experiences of the consolidation process with the interviewee, even when asked to do so. Because of the familiarity with several interviewees, I was careful to maintain focus on the study's topic, and I deliberately redirected conversations that did help with the data collection process back to the study topic. As vice chancellor, I was acutely aware of decisions that directly impacted faculty and staff during the consolidation process, but I did not position myself as a person of knowledge on these topics during interviews. The interview subjects are all senior

administrators of institutions, which provided an even broader opportunity to experience a high volume of decisions that directly impacted the campus level environment.

Overall, because of my previous position in the USG, I had a more expansive awareness of activities that took place behind the scenes of the consolidation process than individuals who did not work in the system office. The safeguards discussed through this study served as guideposts to mitigate my bias on the study.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the role and perceptions that senior leaders have of the chief human resources officer (CHRO) during consolidation in Georgia. Consolidations are predicted to continue and potentially increase over the next decade due to decreasing state funding, shifting student demographics, and college affordability. Senior leaders directly involved in six of nine consolidations in Georgia's public colleges and universities were interviewed for this research study. Due to the current state of the COVID-19 global pandemic, all interviews were conducted via Zoom.

Four different participants groups were invited to interview: presidents, chief business officers, chief academic officers, and CHROs. Questions for each group were developed and guided by emerging Human Resource Management (HRM) roles published by Ulrich (1997). Ulrich's (1997) model of HRM roles guided the development of the questions which were written to follow Lewin's (1947) three-step model for change. The participants were all current employees of the University System of Georgia (USG) at the time of the study; therefore, it was important that I maintained their anonymity through the interview process. Each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure their identities were not divulged. Responses shared during the interview process were also masked to ensure the participant's institution was not disclosed. After an overview of the research questions, the findings are offered and grouped into four themes. The findings relied heavily on the quotations from the interviews and a full discussion of the findings is included in Chapter 5.

Senior Leaders Differed in Expectations of the CHRO Role

My research question asked senior leaders to define the role and purpose of the CHRO in the consolidation process. The responses to the question revealed that senior leaders expected CHROs to serve in multiple roles; however, there was not consensus across the senior leadership groups. Senior leaders had a diversity of perspectives in what role the CHRO should perform. Senior leaders did not find it acceptable for the CHRO to serve as a strategic partner if policies, processes and administrative responsibilities were not also addressed. One chief business officer described the interaction as follows:

> Reductions [in force] during the consolidation were handled by the two CBOs. We handed off our decisions to the HR director, and they implemented them. Yes, we kept them in a strategic decision-making role during the consolidation. They also handled the benefit changes and other things with the System office. HR was a new function for us.

When asked about faculty and staff transitions, one president shared, while displaying a sense of regret based on his change in posture and voice, the following::

> We did not spend time transitioning our faculty and staff to the new institution. Yes, HR changed titles in some cases, we even adjusted salaries for some, but it took too long and they do not trust us now. What we did do for the faculty was not enough.

This chief business officer's statement begins the discussions of perceptions of HR from the leadership lens, when they said:

> Enrollment at both institutions was declining before the consolidation, so HR had to focus on reductions in force quickly. Well, when that is your goal out of the gate, you have blown it with the entire [expletive] workforce.

In sharing how reporting relations impacted the consolidation engagement, one president shared:

> Although [HR leader] didn't report to me, I would typically get several briefings with [HR lead]. I definitely relied on her to essentially provide me with the details of what needs to be presented. And then, I would take that tactical information and put it in my own words. I would not dare share anything at a town hall that involved anything close to employee-related without having spoken to [HR lead] first.

Other comments from leaders framed HR as the department that addresses employee problems but only after they have gotten out of control. Comments were similar to this chief business officer's perceptions:

> Our HR department is seen as firefighters, not strategist. They come in, put out the fire, and leave the department to figure out what is next. It is not a healthy relationship. They help prevent scandals or address scandals that are already underway.

A very similar comment from another president at a larger institution supported the HR as firefighter scenario stating:

> HR is only called upon if there is a problem. I don't hear anything from them unless there is a fire. You never hear the wins. You only hear about the problems. I think they are missing the opportunity to remake who they are.

Expanding on the perceived role for HR one president recommended:

> HR has to feel approachable. Even if they are in the middle of some bad stuff, they have to be reachable. I want my HR person to be comfortable knowing that HR will hear a lot of the bad stuff and not much of the good stuff. [HR leader] was universally respected, but she was also someone that people would enjoy going up and talking with and would deal with the issue. She didn't tell me all that was going on, but I know they came to her with a lot of problems.

Some administrators spoke of the need for HR to provide coaching and mentoring for employee development issues when it involved senior-level employees. One president said:

> I've enjoyed the relationship with my HR lead. [HR lead] doesn't find it strange that I just pick up the phone and ask questions. I mean, sometimes I have challenges with the VPs, I'm not sure, I'm struggling a bit with the VP's thinking or behavior or attitude towards something, and I would call her to help me figure out what's the best—coach me through how you would suggest I handle them. So not only do I need them to advise me, but I need them to mentor and advise me.

Other declarations were similar. One president offered the following:

> I think I need someone that can think policy but also think about the process of change. And I don't mean the process of implementing policy, but the process of elevating the institution that's committed to that. I want them to know what needs to be implemented because they are in tune with what the university needs, and then they know how to implement the process. What's needed and how to implement initiatives would be ideal for me. Another thing, I think HR should be unequivocally at the table of decision making, both in terms of voicing a challenging but also voicing executive thinking.

Senior leaders with longer tenures tended to comment in more inclusive ways about their HR needs. For instance, one president stated:

> I depend on my HR lead to help me understand the landscape. For instance, we have convocation at the beginning of the year. This year, I wanted everything to be about these priorities that I have set up. Now mind you, they are not the priorities included in the campus strategy. No, they are some internal priorities. [The HR lead] just looked at me and asked, "do they really need to hear this?" Is this a campus thing or your thing?"

> (Participant laughing). They were right. Instead of sharing those goals, they convinced me to share things that would improve employee morale. They thought it was important to get some easy wins for faculty and staff that don't cost tens of thousands of dollars by using a little bit of human imagination that allows for some great employee development time.

Leaders spoke about HR as administrators and strategists, one chief business officer noted:

> HR has undoubtedly got to be acutely aware that the university counts on the rules and policies to be correct. It is admirable that HR wants to be a strategic leader, but I also need to know that someone is watching what could cause a lawsuit and making sure that we are doing it right. I mean, you know how it is. I do not want an HR person that forgets about USG policy and has me in hot water with the chancellor.

Another president believed:

> HR needs to be advisory and give advice on best practices not necessarily to solve every problem but help people discover the solutions to some of the problems they encounter. And in that sense, I guess they have to be both strategic and executive and advisory.

One president described the difficulty of a new HR leader working with a legacy vice president of finance saying:

> One of the challenges with their reporting relationship is that HR reports to the CBO. That is just how it is done in higher education. My "new from corporate America" HR person reported to a long-term vice president for finance and chief business officer. I think she was concerned that staffing decisions seemed to be coming from budget rather than from HR for a while. They seemed to be all financially driven, and not HR driven. It drove them crazy for the first couple of years. I had to work with both the HR lead and

> the finance lead to shape their expectations. The most gratifying thing is that the friction points between HR and budget had disappeared for the last three years or so. They understood each other. The work was better because they trusted each other.

Senior leaders were seeking their support in these change efforts, and one chief academic officer commented:

> There are some minor concerns that I wish had been resolved when we went through the consolidation process. I would want to say, though, that 90% of the uncertainty, and with it some of the distrust that we experienced was being resolved very satisfactorily. First, one of the big issues was getting the faculty to realize that the promotion and tenure criteria are now that of the state university and are consistent between all campuses. Although HR had absolutely nothing to do with the policy, they were blamed for the salaries being incorrect due to the policy. We have been sued over this and all types of stuff.

Senior leaders shared how they want HR to support them and the institution. These comments included this one from a chief business officer:

> One of the things that I needed HR to help with was to develop a staff council. There was a great faculty senate, but there was no staff council. So we established one. Now you know, just establishing one doesn't mean that it works well. I made HR the ex officio adviser to the char. So HR shapes how the staff council thinks about what it raises to the administration's attention.
>
> I think HR has to be heavily involved in that and that sort of thing. But we've also had three or two other aspects of things that we have to deal with now, I guess you might call similar in nature. How do we wrap the compensation plans for both institutions under one

> umbrella? We have been able to do it yet. How do you implement shared services between the two entities? HR has played a critical role in that, and we are truly talking about two completely different institutions that were brought together. Different levels of research and different schools of thought. Different cultures from an HR perspective.

CHROss were asked to describe gaps in the role they desired to perform during the consolidation and the actual role performed in the change process. One CHRO responded that "We played the role of mediator." Another CHRO aligned their perceptions of HR with their professional role. They shared their commitment to HR by stating that "HR is personal to me. I am responsible to everyone for everything. I'm here to help, not to just sit on the sidelines." Still, another administrator, who seemed to deeply reflect before responding that, "HR seemed challenged with emotional intelligence in the workplace and they seemed unable to fully perform the role that was needed."

Another CHRO shared:

> HR is not objective (participant rolls her eyes). We play favorites just like everyone else. You need someone objective and unbiased to manage through the process, and that is something that we did not have. If faculty or staff see this behavior from within HR, there is the likelihood that HR will not be engaged when needed.

One CHRO shared, "HR had been a gatekeeper, and unfortunately, it makes people see us as the group that makes them follow the rules. The department [HR] and its leaders are not creative or flexible."

Senior Leaders Needed Help Identifying How CHROs Could Help Them

The statements from senior administrators confirmed the gap between what is expected of HR and how HR is positioned to perform in organizational change. Aligned with the first theme,

senior leaders wanted CHROs to perform in multiple roles, but they did not have a clear understanding of what form those roles would take. CHROs had not historically worked with senior leaders during change, therefore a clear understanding of how they could help in this setting was not apparent. Respondents in my study shared that they needed their CHRO to perform in multiple roles, and a single strategic role or approach would not be sufficient to support the change needed during a consolidation. In reference to other items that the participants considered strategic, one chief business officer stated:

> HR did not help to foster the new culture of the university. Do not get me wrong, we have the best HR department in the System [University System of Georgia], but they were focused on checking the box. We just did not focus on culture.

One president reflected on how they used HR during the consolidation:

> We needed HR to help convince faculty and staff that we would get through this process. I see that now (participant became reflective and looking away). But we didn't let them [HR] play that role during consolidation. The CBOs handled everything. In hindsight, it seems like we left a lot on the table when combining cultures. The fear from everyone that set in was sickening.

Administrators shared that they were clear in how they made changes, but they were not flexible with HR "at the table." One president continued:

> How I go about making decisions does not change. Moreover, as I think about this, HR is more, in my view, the group that carries out the strategic decision instead of being at the table making that strategic decision.

Expectations from presidents were different than those from chief business officers. One president shared::

> I felt that my HR leader wanted to do what I wanted to do, and, in reality I needed guidance. I did not need her telling me back what I told her! I needed her to tell me that I needed to do something different. Now I have to build trust with her to point me in the right direction if I am going in the wrong direction.

One president's response to the question included:

> What we hadn't worked out, and needed HR's help with, was a strategy as an institution. I mean, we were a bit unsure of our identity and what our mission meant. We knew that it was now one institution, but it did not quite know well what then was its expression of itself, its sense of voice, its sense of direction, its sense of priority, its sense of who we are as a community. We still needed to build that sense of ownership.

It was clear from one chief business officer that HR did not need to report to the president, and he shared:

> Where human resources sit [positioned in reporting relationship] in the organization weighs heavily on how the president interacts with the HR leader. Our HR leader reports to the CBO, and I think that is appropriate. I can't have HR reporting to me. I do not have time to manage the workforce or another direct report.

One chief business officer shared the following, raising doubt that they have a vested interest in HR providing value to the organization:

> Although HR has always reported to me, I do not really know what they are supposed to do. I had them managing benefits and stuff like that. They still report to me, and I kind of do not pay much attention to what they are supposed to do. We have only had an HR department for like 10 years. We strengthen our department during the consolidation.

In consideration of CHRO as change agents, one president stated:

> The consolidation process was a journey for my HR leader and me. I never considered HR as a key leader until the consolidation. No, not in any of these roles. I just did not think that it was what they did. I am thankful or my HR director. Those new to the system were able to engage my VP's, communicate with the faculty and staff. I mean, I would see them walk across campus, and everyone would want to talk to them, from the janitor to the dean. They made everyone comfortable. I am sure they know more about what is going on at this institution than I know. It was a journey, and I think we are better at it. Much [better].

Additional concerns about how to engage CHROs in consolidation included this statement from one president:

> So the different campuses can have different identities around a shared mission. And so what I will be looking for from HR is to make sure that we have a structure in which both faculty and staff appreciate and support that. There are going to be some exciting ways in which HR can shape those different campus experiences and not just say, we spend Monday on one campus and go on Tuesday to the other one. There is more interesting work and more rewarding work to be figured out in how we build the subculture of each campus. I need HR to help with that.

Additional roles include HR performing updates to the workforce, one chief business officer said:

> We have had to remove so many employees because we had terrible contracts in place, and people just didn't care about the work. HR helped us through all of those instances. Transferring employees again, not only making sure that we follow the rules appropriately but also putting employees' minds at ease, giving them an opportunity to

> understand exactly what will happen. At town halls meetings, [HR leader] sorted all of these things out for me and told me what to cover. I didn't have to worry about it. [HR leader] was the lead designer in most of the efforts.

Differences across the respondent groups suggested that HR would continue to be tactical and not strategic. When asked if they felt they had the capacity and support to make a difference in the change process, the feedback was mixed. One experienced CHRO, with a self-proclaimed "list of accomplishments as long as my arm," shared they did not feel like they were heard in the consolidation process. Another accomplished CHRO shared:

> I was on the OWG, but I did not feel that my voice was heard at all. HR's presence on the committee was just symbolic. We were told that everything would be transitioned to be like the other university wanted it. We were not being heard. The entire process was offensive the way it was handled.

One chief business officer shared:

Even now, years later, HR is still trying to get people to believe that this consolidation is real. That we are not getting a divorce (participant laughing); and that the other mascot is not (emphasis on not) coming back. I'm so tired of hearing that they weren't listened to in the consolidation process. Well, I guess when I hear myself say it that way, I guess we were not listening (participant shrugs their shoulders). Some HR leaders forced their way into the process. It became easier to get a seat at the decision-making table when faculty and staff became upset, specifically with compensation.

Senior Leaders Looked for Trusting Relationships

Senior leaders expressed the need for a trusting relationship with the CHRO prior to engaging them in the decision-making process. Senior leaders also shared that they needed to

have confidence in the work of the CHRO before they would bring them closer to the decision-making process. From the interviews conducted, I also garnered that some senior leaders' perceptions of HR were based on their inability to engage the CHRO in value-added discussions. CHROs were also frustrated by the lack of a meaningful relationship with some senior leaders and the lack of a significant role in the consolidation.

Showing the importance of trust, one president seemed excited that their HR director from a previous college agreed to join them at a newly consolidated institution. The president shared:

> It may sound arrogant, but I was overjoyed that I was able to bring someone from my old institution to this institution. It may sound arrogant, but I needed someone there that I could trust and someone that would stay as long as I stayed. They help me with judgment calls, not just regulations, but judgment calls. My HR leader had done that for me. I needed stability and leadership in the role, and before I came, the role had turned over numerous times.

Senior leaders also shared comments about building trust, such as one president:

> Honestly, I don't recall HR having a significant role in consolidation. At consolidation, the HR director from the other institution came on board, but I did not trust her. She advocated for the other institution leaders, and I just did not need that type of behavior.

Trust remains an essential factor in how senior leaders engage with HR leader. One president said:

> I have a core set of leaders who help me to make decisions. I selected this group not because of the title but because I trust them. I watch them make the university better. These people come to them with problems, but they also have ideas about resolving those

> problems. My HR leader is not one of those leaders. Honestly, she and I are not a good match. I would not go to her for advice.

Continuing with building trust, one president noted:

> The other purpose for selecting an HR person that I knew, and you can relate to this, as presidents we often think that we know what needs to happen, and we have a sense of what needs to happen. Furthermore, it is very tempting to sort of think that, Well, let's just do it. And [HR lead] is someone that would come to me and say to me, let us talk about how we are going to do it.

One president shared that they were rebuilding trust with their CHRO. He shared that:

> For me, I needed HR to help me move forward. To stop me from stumbling forward is more like it. But I also teach [HR lead] by saying, look, we need to go forward, and you are going to help me go forward. I mean, it is not a case of a game of chess. It was like, how do we make sure that HR informs the process of change? And what I would say, agency, because I think HR can often be about the structure of an organization and the structural expectations and the rules and the reg and the policies, but an organization cannot live on its structure alone. It has to live and work and breathe organically and with the agency, and I made it very clear that I expected HR to be in that game as well.

Continuing the conversations about the impact of building trust between the senior leader and HR, a president shared:

> My HR leader is a cabinet officer. Moreover, I wish truthfully, and I don't mind telling you that I wish HR reported directly to me. Nevertheless, I have not had the bandwidth to be able to do that. But what I have is a very, very clear line of communication [with the HR leader]. This action or decision could cause me trouble in the long run, but I would

> meet [HR leader] over a cup of coffee once a month just to catch up since she and I have worked at the institution together. So it has been good to keep that line of communications open.

When asked how they work with the president, one CHRO shared:

> We need permission to build a relationship with the president, even if we don't report to the president. I don't think it matters whom you report to. You need a trusting relationship with the top person. Senior leaders were let go during the consolidation, and I had to go directly to the president to make it happen. After the consolidation, things went back to me doing policy patrol. Why do we have to keep proving that we can do the work?

The other complexity that impacted this theme is seemingly limited relationship between academic affairs and human resources resulting in limited knowledge about the CHRO in the academic function. Faculty have historically not involved non-academic professionals in making rules for their profession. One CHRO shared:

> Faculty have to be convinced that we can help them. Their work is no different from the rest of the institution. If they are allowed to continue working in silos, they will continue to violate policy, fail to develop faculty engagement programs, and fail to hire the right people.

The academic leaders seemed not to be aware of how HR could help if asked to help. One chief academic officer commented:

> Frankly, we did not need HR during the consolidation. I know that the faculty didn't use them. For what, tenure and promotion? No, we don't think like that and we don't use HR.

> We adhere to faculty governance guidelines, and faculty do not want anyone weighing in on how they make or implement decisions. HR cannot make us follow the rules.

The CHROs did not expect to participate in the faculty events. One CHRO said:

> HR did not seek feedback from faculty and staff during the consolidation. I think if we had, we would have not gotten anywhere with them, especially not the faculty. We were not seen as leaders in that space. We still are not seen as leaders in that space, and the work continues to go undone.

However, some CHROs recognized the need to assist academic affairs in the future may be necessary. One CHRO said:

> HR will be more challenging than ever, especially as we get through COVID-19. So many people are leaving our institution. Succession is not a thing in higher education, but it should be. Employee retention will be a big problem, and we do not have an answer for what to do.

The Lack of a Critical Role for HR Resulted in Dissatisfaction

The four interview groups lacked clarity about the role of HR. This lack of clarity led to CHROs not feeling supported through the consolidation process. Some CHROs shared that they felt like they were the target for errors made during the consolidation. Respondents from all categories suggested that lingering issues were due to a lack of attention in faculty and staff transition. When asked who was responsible for addressing consolidation issues one chief business officer shared:

> Compensation, compensation, compensation. Everyone is still complaining about pay. "Campus 1" faculty make more than "Campus 2 faculty." "Campus 2" faculty make more than "Campus 1" faculty. It is too much to deal with. HR should have taken the lead to

> address this as soon as we knew who would be in what seat. It is still a problem, [number of years deleted to maintain anonymity] years after the consolidation. HR just did not get it done.

Another statement regarding compensation was from one president who said:

> Our school missions were different, and one school had money, and the other did not. We spent more money addressing Institution A than we did addressing Institution B. Faculty recognized that this is what we were doing. They are still not happy many years after the consolidation.

Administrators had ideas of how HR could add value to a problematic organizational change process. One chief business officer shared:

> People got their feelings hurt early in the process. The minute the consolidation was thrown at us, people started jockeying for positions. Right out the gate, people were just mean to each other. Those feelings remain with many people today. What would have been helpful to me as a leader was had HR helped me to develop a plan to bring about a more collegial campus.

Another statement from a chief business officer was the perception that, "HR has to be intentional about what change management means and how to implement change on campus. As a leader, I'm interested in developing HR in that way." Another chief business officer continued:

> During the consolidation, I needed someone to handle incorporating "Campus 1" into "Campus 2". I had no one to do that. HR did not step up to the plate to make that work. They helped with reductions in force, so people now just see them as the Grim Reapers. Now that HR has the attention of the faculty and staff, they have a great opportunity to be

> seen in a different light. I'm willing to help them show up in a different custom. No one likes the Grim Reaper.

The feedback from senior administrators and CHROs indicated that clarity and purpose of the HR function are lost on the workforce. Senior administrators shared they followed the lead from HR regarding how they could add value to the change process. A chief business officer of a large institution stated:

> We do not have HR at the table in the proper role. However, HR has to do better. HR sees themselves as gatekeepers of policy instead of problem solvers and strategic partners. Why would the staff think any differently? We are following their lead. HR needs to brand themselves as strategic partners if they want to be seen as strategic partners. Our HR department tends to be passive and not creative or innovative.

The broader scope of how HR was to perform was questioned by CHROs regarding the opportunity to rebrand during the consolidation process. One CHRO said:

> We [HR] were expected to focus on making sure people continued to get paid and hired. We were directed to do that by the System office, and that is what we did.

With regard to being leaders of change, feedback included "people expect us to be the change leaders, but we have not been trained to do that. We did not have the skill set then [during consolidation], and we do not have it now. One CHRO shared, "HR roles, HR needs the support to focus on things that are not just mechanical. We need to stop pushing widgets. Higher education HR is so far behind other industries."

CHROs felt that they were the scapegoat for actions that did not go well in the process, one remarked, "Some employees felt like it was a hostile takeover, and that was so hurtful to us.

We tried hard to include everyone." One CHRO felt the lack of support and structure from senior leaders impacted their ability to be positioned as change agents. One CHRO said:

> We should have been positioned to be change agents, building the new culture. We missed convincing them [faculty and staff] that we cared about what they thought about the consolidation. They [faculty and staff] are not dedicated or loyal to the institution now. Why should they be? We were not dedicated to the transition based on the actions we took.

The participants in the interview process provided rich and robust responses to the research questions. Each participant was engaged during the interview process and offered some suggestions on how the relationship between senior leaders and CHROs could be better. More discussion about the feedback and recommendations for research going forward are offered in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The interviews for this research study produced rich and actionable data regarding the perceptions and roles of CHROs implementing HRM theory and practice during the organizational change in Georgia. Interviews of key stakeholders involved in six of nine consolidated institutions of the USG helped explore the complexity of engaging CHROs during organizational change. HR professionals depend on senior leaders to help them find relevance, opportunity, and purpose in institutions that have historically been hesitant to engage them in strategic roles. These institutions are now facing continuous change that depends on the participation and engagement of the workforce in the change process to be successful.

The participants shared perceptions and expectations of the CHRO and the obstacles that prevented the full engagement of the CHRO as a strategic partner. While the opportunity for CHROs to be strategic partners or change agents did not fully materialize in Georgia, participants shared what they thought were necessary steps to develop a strategic partnership moving forward. Senior leaders acknowledged the possibility of engaging their CHROs as strategic partners and expressed the need for them to focus on the traditional administrative and employee advocacy responsibilities identified in several HRM models discussed earlier in this research. The feedback addressed the overarching research question of the perceived roles of HR professionals in assisting institutional leaders during organizational change. The four primary questions explored during this research and discussed in Chapter 1 were used to guide the interview process.

Research Question 1

Research question one asked participants to describe how they engaged their CHRO to influence organizational change. The feedback from participants differed based on the participant group, and two specific themes emerged: the CHRO was expected to perform in multiple roles, yet they were not seen as part of the strategic decision-making process.

Responses from presidents and chief business officers differed from the responses of chief academic officers. Presidents and chief business officers shared that their CHRO was engaged in multiple roles and responsibilities that seemed to align with the roles in the Ulrich (1997) HRM model. The type of engagement by CHROs differed across the consolidated pairs; however, the feedback that the CHRO engaged in multiple capacities was consistent with the president and chief business officer respondents. The primary sentiment was that the CHRO was engaged in multiple roles as those presented by Ulrich (1997) to support the work of the consolidation. The roles of change agent, strategic partner, employee champion, and administrative expert were needed and expected at different times during the consolidation.

The various roles performed by CHROs also supported the organizational change process. The first step of Lewin's (1947) three-step model, *L1 or unfreezing,* refers to changing the status quo by identifying the need to change. Unfreezing is an essential step as it socializes the need for change through participation, allowing faculty and staff to make an early decision about their participation in the change. The consolidations in Georgia were determined by the BOR, thereby eliminating the full opportunity for leaders to make the case for change. However, through communication and proper employee engagement, the need for change could have been delivered to employees, possibly through the CHRO, as some presidents reported. One leader shared that it was important for their CHRO to continue serving and encouraging employees to

facilitate open dialogue about the consolidation. The role of a communicator was essential to many leaders, but not all leaders used their CHRO in this capacity. During the first step of the model, multiple activities are implemented to unfreeze the status quo and convince faculty and staff that the consolidation was a necessary change. Understanding the change is believed necessary to move the organization toward developing the new institution.

Step 2, or *L2 and moving*, are activities that engage employees in the change process. Faculty and staff participation in the various OWG committees and subcommittees helped to facilitate this step. The CHRO led several of the subcommittees, but specifically the human resources OWG. Leading these subcommittees gave the CHRO the responsibility for developing new organizational structures and human resources policies. These activities are appropriate for the change agent role. Change management functions include other responsibilities like determining workforce needs through reductions in force and coordinating the shift to new workweek schedules for faculty and staff. Moving into a more strategic capacity, CHROs were engaged in training employees for their new roles and supporting change activities appropriately found in step 2. Some presidents shared that their CHRO helped organize town halls and written communication for faculty and staff to support engagement.

Aligned with step 3 of Lewin's (1947) model, *L3 or refreezing*, senior administrators shared that no specific plan was developed to ensure changes made during the consolidation process became a permanent part of the new institution's culture. Several of the respondents shared that discourse remains amongst the workforce. Leaders also shared that HR is still needed to help support faculty and staff's transition after the consolidation. Administrators wanted CHROs to be the "bridge" between staff and administration. However, lingering issues remain after the consolidation, limiting the ability to entirely implement step 3 of the model. For

example, leaders shared that compensation issues have become a divide among faculty from the two legacy institutions in almost every case. The same seems to be valid for staff. A refreezing of the changes implemented during the consolidation process may not materialize until these issues are resolved.

CHROs played a more narrowly focused role when involved in the academic enterprise of the institution. It is important to note that only two academic officers responded to my request for an interview, unlike the other administrators in this study. Part of the challenge came from the chief academic officers no longer being on contract with the USG. The two academic officers I interviewed are currently in jobs different from those they held during the consolidation. Even so, the information from these two administrators was valuable. They added value to the discussion because both have led academic departments, are long-term academic professionals, and have worked in expanded capacities in support of multiple institutions within the USG. Chief academic officers engaged with CHROs in the traditional roles of administrative expert and employee champion focused on day-to-day operations of the unit. This traditional approach is aligned with only two of the four boxes in Ulrich's 4-Box model. Historically, with no change in site, academic affairs have not involved the CHRO in faculty affairs. However, significant organizational change requires adherence to policies and procedures regardless of the employees' position or status.

The culture of higher education supports the tension between academic affairs and HR. Faculty have a strong affinity with their institutions and do not feel the need for additional oversight by what is seen as traditional HR (Edgley-Pyshorn & Huisman, 2011). CHROs implementing HRM have historically faced resistance when navigating change in higher education. Resistance comes from different origins, including the newness of the CHRO as a

strategic partner and lack of understanding of the purpose of the CHRO role. There is also the thought that the HR function is still trying to secure credibility and justification that supports their involvement in change (Edgley-Pyshorn & Huisman, 2011). This skepticism leads to an underuse of the CHRO in organizational change. Another challenge that makes the role of the CHRO challenging to execute is the silos within the academy that establish their collegial identity, sense of autonomy, and expectation of shared governance; thus, compliance efforts by the CHRO may not be welcomed (Inside Higher Ed., 2019).

Additionally, the trust had not been established without a history of partnership between academics and the CHRO. Although CHROs expressed the desire to be engaged strategically, they seemed to accept the traditional HR role when engaging with academic leaders. Some CHROs stated that they did not expect to participate in the faculty transition through the consolidation because, historically, they had never performed in that role before the consolidation.

The second theme emerged: although senior leaders engaged their CHRO in organizational change, no leader considered the CHRO an active or significant part of the strategy or decision-making process. Participants did not see the work performed by the CHRO to be directly related to change management but more aligned with compliance with the policy.

Senior leaders recommended that CHROs exemplify the purpose and value of HRM to be perceived as strategic partners. Similar to academic officers not having a relationship of trust with the CHRO, other leaders shared the same concern. The rebranding of the CHRO and the HRM function, in general, should highlight a profession that is encased in HRM practice and grounded in theory. Leaders also shared that they want to see CHROs develop core competencies to be seen as leaders of change.

Research Question 2

Research question two asked participants to share their perceptions of the CHROs purpose in strategic implementation of consolidations. Responses from participants seemed to be impacted by three factors: participants were unable to identify the purpose of HR and thus not clear about how to engage CHROs in change;; relationships with the CHRO were not developed before the consolidation; and leaders wanted guidance on how to engage CHROs. Senior leaders shared that their perceptions of their CHRO likely impacted how they engaged them during organizational change.

Returning to responses from question one, leaders discussed engaging CHROs in strategic decision-making, but they did not perceive CHROs as critical to the strategic planning process. When asked why they did not see the CHRO as a part of the strategic planning team, leaders shared that they were not very familiar with the role and had not worked closely with their CHRO to build a solid relationship. All of the presidents and two of the chief business officers shared that more knowledge about the role that the CHRO could perform in organizational change would be helpful. Leaders also shared that they had a positive perception of the CHRO as an administrative partner, but not a strategic partner. If the senior leaders expected that the CHRO was administrative and the CHRO performed as administrators, a positive perception by leaders is warranted. This finding could be related to the senior leaders' lack of familiarity with the emerging roles of the CHRO and was uncomfortable engaging them outside of their traditional role of administrator.

Participants expressed the desire to develop a more productive relationship with their CHROs. Some leaders shared that their relationship with their CHRO was non-existent and did not reflect the level of experience and trust they had developed with other institutional leaders.

Leaders shared that the lack of a trusting relationship was somewhat related to the CHRO reporting to the chief business officer, limiting the relationships' opportunities to be built before consolidation. However, most leaders also reported that they were okay with the CHRO reporting line, but they wanted to make a concerted effort to engage with the CHRO more directly in the future.

Perceptions of the purpose of the CHRO differed based on the tenure of senior leaders. Four of the respondents had been in their senior roles for over a decade and shared that they tended to see the CHRO as administrative support. One leader shared that although HR reported to them, they were unsure how to use the CHRO outside of their expectation of the role as an employee advocate or administrator of policies and processes. CHROs reporting to these leaders also shared that they were underutilized in the institution's consolidation and all other change efforts. Senior leaders, not CHROs, performed in roles that Ulrich (1996) described as a change agent to determine the process for promotions and demotions, develop new job descriptions, initiate reductions in force, and answer compensation questions. When senior leaders made these decisions, they sought little to no advice from their CHROs. CHROs of these same institutions admitted that although they were not involved in the decision-making discussions, they were responsible for correcting the problems resulting from missteps made by senior leaders. Leaders with less tenure in their positions shared that they used CHROs as communication conduits to faculty and staff and facilitators of town hall events. They included them in discussions about the workforce needs and how to begin developing a new culture for the institution. CHROs shared that in order for them to be successful, they needed the support of their leaders, and they wanted to be perceived as strategic partners with senior leaders.

Although the leaders felt optimistic about CHROs during change, the perception was broad and not focused on the CHRO as a strategic partner. Leaders expressed that they wanted guidance on how best to use the CHRO in change. Data collected through the interviews uncovered that the expectations of the CHRO were not fully understood or determined before the consolidation began. Additionally, a straightforward change management process was not developed for anyone to follow. While leaders described the various opportunities made available to engage with the CHRO, they all expressed not having a straightforward way to identify how it could serve in the consolidation process. Their confusion may stem from how the CHRO has historically engaged and the institution's position. Historically, the CHRO in higher education has been constrained by administrative and compliance responsibilities relating to employment and benefits activities. These duties will not rise to levels of engagement outside of the business office. The role has not typically worked in a strategic capacity that would allow them to interact with the institution's president. Leaders were not familiar with the roles and responsibilities of the CHRO beyond process and compliance. Respondents reported that they began to engage more directly with their CHRO to address questions coming from the faculty and staff through the consolidation process.

Overall, the perception was that the CHRO did not have a significant impact on organizational change. While some leaders determined that they could engage the CHRO in some strategic activities, the perceptions were inconsistent.

Research Question 3

Researchers have offered multiple explanations about the current and future status of the HR profession and the CHROs leading the HR function (Caldwell, 2003; Collings & Wood, 2009; Klett, 2010; Storey, 1996; Ulrich & Filler, 2015). Their research suggests that the

historical debate about the profession's value and purpose is still a point of divisiveness that impacts how the function is allowed to perform and engage. The literature review surrounding these concerns helped to prompt question three of this study. Question 3 asked CHROs to share their perceptions of their engagement in transformational organizational change in their institutions. This question was designed to allow CHROs the opportunity to share their perceptions of how they were engaged and what opportunities were offered to facilitate their engagement in the consolidation process.

CHROs interviewed did not feel as if they played a large part in the consolidation of their institution; however, they felt that they could have if given the opportunity. The first perception shared was that leaders did not adequately engage the CHRO during consolidations. Second, most CHROs felt confined to administrative tasks with limited opportunity to engage outside of day-to-day tasks and ensure compliance to policies. Third, CHROs felt that they were poorly positioned as the bad guys when they were only invited to solve problems instead of preventing them. The feedback from the CHROs was consistent across the consolidated pair or sector classification. State college CHROs shared similar concerns as those employed at research institutions.

Ulrich and Filler (2015) shared that human resources professionals have often been plagued by self-doubt as the value and competencies of the profession are repeatedly re-explored and questioned by some leaders. The authors suggested that an inclusive approach to providing insights about the profession based on a broader set of data and not on personal perceptions would improve the narrative of the profession. The data reported in this study gave relevance to the concerns of the CHROs interviewed as they also shared that the HR function's purpose was not understood and, at times, not respected. Senior leaders also shared that a new narrative of HR

would help understand the emerging role of the CHRO and how they can better support the institution. CHROs and senior leaders shared that the perception of HR could change if leaders were clear about the expectations of the CHRO and the HR department as a whole.

CHROs interviewed felt that they could have provided more support to prepare faculty and staff to transition to a new university. During the initial stages of the consolidation, each CHRO shared that they were not an active part of the strategic planning process. Nevertheless, they are now responsible for addressing the problems that have lingered long after the legal and compliance obligations have been met. CHROs were only engaged after significant decisions about the workforce were determined by other senior leaders. These decisions included reducing staff, rewarding or compensating faculty and staff in a new structure, and selecting various personnel to include critical leaders. CHROs shared that a comprehensive organizational change plan did not exist, which prevented them from planning the changes needed for the workforce. They acknowledged that the USG provided a list of tasks, but the activities to transition the workforce were not included in the task list; therefore, no one insisted that the change be managed for faculty and staff.

Kezar (2014) found that leaders tend to adopt a single approach or strategy for change. Successful change agents use multiple approaches to align with the change initiative and context of the change. Many of the respondents spoke about change from the lens of satisfying policy and compliance requirements: BOR, SACSOC, and other accrediting body approvals. Few, including two of the CHROs, discussed the change from the faculty and staff point of view. The change required during consolidation is difficult for faculty and staff. Consolidations are inherently challenging and require competent leaders to facilitate the management of a workforce transition needed for an extensive consolidation (Evans et al., 2016). HEIs are historically

isolated within the discipline, department, and college, and each silo can have a different culture. CHROs shared these cultures could have been identified if they had been included in the strategic discussions about the consolidations. A plan to keep and modify the culture could have increased faculty and staff commitment to the change. Respondents also shared that many of the concerns that were not addressed during the consolidation, for example, compensation and leadership placements, are still dividing faculty and staff today. CHROs did not feel that they had the authority or influence to serve transformational change, nor change management as part of the overall plan of the consolidation.

Research Question 4

Finally, question four pulled the research interviews together by asking what might be done differently to better engage CHROs in organizational change going forward. This question provided an opportunity to collect data on the future potential of HR as a strategic partner or change agent in higher education. Stakeholders shared that there needs to be a balance regarding traditional and emerging HR roles to help with future change initiatives.

The previous three findings may have led to the final finding of senior leaders and CHROs seeking to identify how to implement strategic HRM policies and how the CHRO can support senior leaders in strategic initiatives. Specifically, senior leaders talked about identifying how CHROs could perform in helping faculty and staff to adopt new initiatives. Respondents also shared that CHROs were needed to enact multiple roles, including traditional personnel roles, to support the institution. CHROs reported wanting to see more strategic opportunities in strategic initiatives.

CHROs were not charged with developing a plan to bring faculty and staff from different institutions together. Throughout the interviews, it appeared that no single group or position was

charged with identifying how the culture of the new institution would take shape. Leaders shared that this [developing culture] was not the type of work they were used to engaging in, and, somewhat by default, they directed these issues to the CHRO. Although not intentional, these actions allowed some of the CHROs to be involved in a process that they would not be engaged in historically.

Without exception, the CHROs reported to the chief business officer in the six consolidated pairs. The reporting relationship may have hindered the ability of CHROs to develop trusting relationships and role clarity with leaders outside of the business office. Some of the CHROs acknowledged that the reporting relationship impedes working with other leaders on strategic initiatives. Other CHROs shared that the function of the business office or fiscal affairs are not strategic but reactionary, thereby regulating them to perform in a similar reactionary manner. For several decades, researchers of HR have attempted to define the profession absent a defensible set of criteria with a sufficient level of substance and meaning (Ulrich, et al., 2013). The lack of criteria has left CHROs absent of a narrative focused on change and strategy. Some researchers have begun to define the work of CHROs through a macro lens, focused on the spectrum opposite HR administration, and looked at the strategic aspects and roles of CHROs (Wright & Boswell, 2002).

While only two chief academic officers were interviewed, they confirmed the practice of using CHROs in traditional personnel roles during the change process. Faculty expect to have a shared governance relationship with their institution, and this relationship is not expected to be altered during organizational change. This expectation is grounded in the shared governance model developed over 50 years ago by the AAUP (Kreiser, 2001). The 1968 AAUP statement provides a framework for college administrators to follow to ensure a collaborative, shared

decision-making model. *Owners* of the institution want to be involved from the beginning, with a valid and action-oriented seat at the strategic planning table.

Consolidations will continue into the next decade, and the transition of faculty and staff has been identified as an essential part of the process. Focusing on a deliberate plan to address the integration of faculty into the new institution is somewhat new. In the USG, faculty were part of the planning process for policies and compliance as guided by instructions from the BOR. However, they were not, nor was anyone else, focused on addressing the personal and cultural change of the new workforce. Possibly through trial and error, the blending of traditions and cultures could have happened; however, most respondents shared that this was not the case and that solidifying the culture of the new institution is not final in most of the consolidated pairs. If identifying the culture of the new institution is still in question, faculty and staff commitment to the change could also be in question. The publications by the AAUP speaks to the expectations that faculty are a part of the early stages of any organizational change. However, it does not point out that there are human aspects that have to be addressed. Several studies have shown that organizational restructuring may fail because of employees' feelings of threat to their self-esteem and well-being (Cartwright et al., 2007). Identification with the new organization has proven to be one of the tools for a successful consolidation. Understanding how CHRO can support the change process is not new; it is grounded in theory and practice in corporate settings but not higher education. In the consolidated pairs of the USG, there was no one group responsible for addressing the human side of the consolidation.

Leaders also shared the need for the CHRO to perform in multiple roles in support of the institution. Although the CHROs recommendations for engagement during organizational change weighed heavily towards strategic duties, senior leaders emphasized the need for CHROs to

maintain traditional HR roles. The role of strategic partner would not be successful if the other roles of change agent, administrative expert, and employee champion were not performed. Ulrich (1997) developed an HR model to transform HR from administrative to strategic roles. The model organized HR into central roles: strategic partner, change agent, administrative expert, and employee champion. Strategic Partner describes the alignment of HR activities and initiatives with the institution's strategy. The change agent supports the organizational change and facilitates the change and transition of the institution's workforce. Employee champion supports the institution by advocating for employees and protecting employees during the change process. An example of these protections could be designing employee separation packages to incentivize mutually acceptable separations or encouraging senior leaders to hear the workforce's concerns. The roles in Ulrich's model are designed to support organizations through change that aligns with and successfully meets the steps in Lewin's change model. Engagement with the faculty and staff's readiness for change is essential in the consolidation process.

Recommendations

CHROs are positioned to expand their roles to include strategic responsibilities. However, getting to that position is not linear like the models discussed in this research. Becoming a strategic partner requires establishing importance as part of the process, developing experience through practice, and securing sponsorship from senior leaders to support being a part of the strategic decision-making process.

The recommendations that follow align with the concept of the CHRO becoming a strategic partner to senior leaders of the institution. Overall, higher education leaders have the opportunity to reshape how CHROs are used in HEIs. There are published models for engaging CHROs and other HR professionals in strategic roles (Storey, 1996; Ulrich, 1997). However, the

success of implementing any of these models depends on the senior administrators support and acceptance of HR as a leader in the organization.

CHROs need a strategic approach to redesign their professional narrative to secure executive sponsorship and advance toward being a strategic partner positioned to impact the institution and support leadership.

Recommendation 1 – Define Human Resources and the role of the CHRO in Higher Education

Researchers have spent decades identifying the theory, practice, and roles defined in the HR function (Collings & Wood, 2014). Higher education institutions can benefit from a similar effort guided by senior leaders and aligned with HR. One of the first opportunities to develop a better narrative is to succinctly define HR as a function that adds strategic and operational value to the institution. There are various ways to improve the perception of HR by having a succinct definition of the purpose of the function.

The feedback from participants suggested that they were not completely aware of the capabilities or responsibilities of HR. The limited awareness could be one of the core reasons why HR is not engaged at the level CHROs expected to be engaged. This recommendation involves senior leaders making intentional opportunities to develop and experience HR in a strategic capacity.

CHROs would benefit from a rebranding of the perceptions of HR. Perceptions of critical stakeholders need attention before HR is consistently invited to be a part of the senior leadership discussion. In this case study, opportunities to impact this recommendation start with a strategic direction led by the USG. The USG can facilitate the collection of survey data across its 26-institutions to define the expectations of HR. If specificity is desired, the survey data could specifically focus on the expectations of HR during organizational change. Participants in the

survey should include senior administrators, faculty, and staff. This opportunity would lead to a comprehensive set of expectations that develop a new HR narrative in higher education. Based on the literature from Kaufman (2015) and Ulrich and Filler (2015), higher education HR engagement could include models already implemented in private organizations, including strategy, change management, operations, and administrative responsibilities. The USG could use the data collection process through surveys, small group sessions, focus groups, and senior leader inquiries to launch the new HR brand and narrative for the USG. This rebranding should follow SHRM and CUPA-HR's missions of providing the best trained and experienced HR professionals across the HR profession.

Additional data collection needs could include a system-wide review of duplication of services across human resources. A recent effort implemented by the USG, termed the Comprehensive Administrative Review (CAR), was a first step in improving administrative processes across its 26 universities. This effort was positioned to identify opportunities for efficiencies, eliminate inefficient processes and better utilize university resources. Following sound change management processes, the steering committee developed post-project benchmarks to measure ongoing efficiency and effectiveness efforts (University System of Georgia, 2017). The project was driven mainly by campus leaders who assigned a steering committee and was supported by an external consultant for change management efforts. Similar to efforts during consolidation, a review of the implementation of the project recommendations should be a part of the change process. CAR was an extensive project that focused on multiple departments within a specific timeframe. An enhanced benefit to HR would include a revisit of this project at the system level for all HR departments. This approach would allow the CHRO to develop similar efficiencies within HR across all institutions. A revisit of this project specifically looking

at HR and its primary responsibilities would be helpful to the practice. A deeper dive into what stakeholders want HR to accomplish would set a foundation to build efficiencies. Last, a review of the project's implementation would help determine if what was stated was implemented. This step could deliver a comprehensive report that identifies if the CHRO focuses on what stakeholders want them to do.

Another part of the data collection process for rebranding should be CHROs' clarification of the HR brand. As determined through the interview process, CHROs perception of its value to the university is questioned. Kari Strobel, previous director of HR competencies at SHRM, shared an apropos quote from Gautama Buddha, "No one saves us but ourselves. No one can, and one may. We ourselves must walk the path." HR leaders should embrace this sentiment. This quote is very relevant as CHROs reidentify themselves in higher education. HR has also historically spent the majority of their time working toward operational excellence in the delivery of benefits, paychecks, vacation and training process and designing HR practices that help with talent acquisition, retention, and deployment as well as organization development.

While being proficient in these areas is important to HR leaders' success, they have to envision themselves in the broader role of a strategic partner as desired by senior leaders. Another vital part of identifying and developing the narrative of HR includes developing and implementing the skills needed to perform in these roles proficiently. The competency and application of HR skills led me to the following recommendation for the transition of HR into strategic leadership.

Recommendation 2 – Presidents Should Identify and Explicate the Institutional Role for CHRO

Leaders included in this study spoke about the desire to have HR perform in an advanced role in organizational change. They also discussed obstacles that are preventing CHROs from

being full strategic partners. In Recommendation 1, I recommended engaging senior leaders in determining the expectations of engagement of HR leaders. One of the first actions necessary to help senior leaders provide this information is positioning HR to facilitate strategy and implement change. The individuals most capable of including CHROs in these opportunities are presidents, chief business officers, and academic officers.

From feedback collected, HR was not deeply involved in the strategic direction of consolidations in Georgia. The strategy, originated from the USG, was primarily developed in finance and academic affairs. Leaders should, with intentionality, invite HR to participate in the process to provide safe avenues to open the door to participate in these change opportunities. Ulrich et al. (2013) also recommended HR 'taking the strategy to the masses' by clarifying and assisting in developing the narrative about the change initiative underway. Several leaders interviewed shared that they had used HR to help with town hall meetings and messaging. However, it was communicated as an ad hoc assignment and not a natural part of the change and communication process. Also highlighted was HR's ability to align the business strategy with HR practices. In the USG examples provided by participants, every consolidation involved changes to staffing and compensation. Although each institution had previously established guidelines and policies to address recruitment, promotions, demotions, and compensation associated with all of the above, new policies were needed to address the nuances brought on by the consolidation. The sensitivity involved in a massive organizational redesign warranted such changes. Leaders also shared that even HR policies were not fully vetted by HR. Some of the decisions were made by chief business officers, absence of HR guidance. Other decisions were determined by the president and their Cabinets, which often does not include HR leaders, and handed off to HR for implementation.

Like the consolidation implementations in Georgia, organizational change were significant opportunities to sponsor HR at the table. Leaders can engage HR when evaluating the new organizational structure to include framing the model to determine the selection of new leaders, reductions in the workforce, team development, compensation adjustments, and developing a cohesive culture in the new institution. Absent being at the table for the discussions, HR could not safely develop these skills to support future organizational change efforts. Leaders sharing their knowledge and experiences through planned and intentional sponsorship will help HR leaders grow, thereby becoming better capable of effectively engaging faculty and staff. Overall, these experiences help to strengthen the workforce and the uniqueness of the institution.

Recommendation 3 – HR must engage in professional development that enables strategic involvement in higher education

A comprehensive competency model was developed from responses of over 10,000 HR professionals and associates in 6 regions worldwide (Ulrich et al., 2013). Most professions can master just a few competencies well, and not all competencies are equal to the organization's success. The development of the right competencies has to be boiled down to core competencies that are specific to higher education. In higher education, CUPA-HR is the leading organization supporting the development of CHROs. The CUPA-HR model acknowledges that every person needs different levels of competence training for different areas. Sometimes awareness is sufficient, application, sometimes mastery, and sometimes the ability to use the competence to influence is needed.

Competences are considered a significant element that defines a *function* as a profession (Ulrich, et al., 2013). Professional organizations often establish a set of core competencies to enhance the effectiveness of the profession. The literature discussing core competencies

describes them as a construct introduced by Prahalad and Hamel in 1990 centered on identifying a competitive edge in organizations (Enginoglu & Arikan, 2016). They were initially described as the "ability of a firm to collectively learn how to coordinate various technologies and skills within the organization to deliver better value" (Enginoglu & Arikan, 2016, p.120). Prahalad later expanded the concept to "skills and techniques that enable a company to provide a better benefit to its customers. Authors also use the terms "capability," "skills," and "competence" interchangeably. The creation of core competencies is demanding. Resources, capabilities, core competence, distinctive competence, and distinctive core competence are all used to mean similar or sometimes the same thing. Like the SHRM requirements, CHROS at the campus level should develop the competencies to certify that they are ready to partner with key leaders. Learning more about the organization's financial results, understanding the numbers, and, more importantly, knowing how their decisions and actions affect the bottom line will help HR professionals' business success. Competent and proficient HR professionals understand how their behavior affects value-creating activities in the organization and, in turn, understand the impact their behavior has on gross margin. These individuals are seen as fellow business leaders and not just the HR department.

Limitations of the Study

Overall, conducting a research study during a global pandemic proved to be limiting in and of itself. In so much as the presence of a pandemic is limiting it also limited the ability to collect as much data as desired and to observe closely the interviewees involved. This study was conducted in the second year of the pandemic. Senior administrators included in the study were heavily focused on returning students to campus safely while addressing discontentment from faculty and staff for the decision to return to campus. These senior leaders graciously set aside

time in their busy schedules to accommodate my request to interview. In hindsight, I'm sure the time they allotted me to interview was likely a sacrifice in their daily schedules. Many of the interviews went longer than the hour and a half that we initially thought would be needed to conduct the interview. Although the pandemic introduced a limitation to conducted this research, the professionalism and grace of the interviewees helped to mitigate the limitation.

Another limitation of the study was the mode of data collection used during the study. Unfortunately, due to the global pandemic, I was confined to interviewing candidates in a virtual format. All interviews were conducted via Zoom. Although Zoom was efficient, this format is not conducive to witnessing the individual reactions and manners that manifest during the interview process. Therefore, in-depth documentation about the interviewees' emotional and physical reactions is limited in the findings. Interviewees were extremely engaging during the virtual calls; however, I think that face-to-face meetings would have allowed me to collect richer data.

This study also included a small sample of interviews and institutions. Only 18 of the 28 candidates invited to interview accepted my interview request. Those who did not accept shared that they felt that they were too far removed from the consolidation process or had transitioned to other roles, including retirement, to add value the interview process. It is important to note that each of the interviewees responded to my interview request, but only 18 were able to interview. Additionally, the study was confined to six consolidated pairs in Georgia. The limited scope of this study could limit the ability to apply the findings from the research across institutions that are not similar in structure or organization as the public colleges and universities in Georgia.

Finally, of the six chief academic officers invited to interview, only two accepted the interview request. The limited number of chief academic officers interviewing could limit the

potential usefulness of the perspectives shared by academic leaders. However, the depth and length of the careers of the two interviewees added a broad perspective on the consolidation topic. It should be noted that such low voluntary participation of chief academic officers was directly related to their retirement before this study started. Nevertheless, this exploratory and suggestive research study begins to address the void of research on these topics and has value in presenting some interesting indicators and insights for the direction future research could take.

Implications for research

The three recommendations above 1) identifying HR and defining the CHRO role, 2) sponsorship for CHRO development and, 3) applying the practice to reality by developing core competencies have implications for the HR practice in higher education. There has not been a succinct plan across higher education to inform the function and implementation of strategic human resources. These recommendations develop an opportunity for leaders to design and implement a plan for increased HR partnership with senior leaders in organizational change. The recommendations include engaging stakeholders that can immediately impact how HR is positioned to succeed and help the institution be successful. In alignment with this theory and from interviews conducted during this research, higher education does not critically focus on linking the business side of higher education to the academic mission of higher education. Changing this dynamic can help support higher education to develop an inclusive vision of the HR function.

Some of the many questions for future research in this regard are as follows: How much of the time and effort of CHRO professionals employed at all colleges and universities are dedicated to each of Ulrich's four key HR practice roles? What organizational factors facilitate and restrict CHROs from actively engaging in each of Ulrich's four HR practice roles? How

important are a vice-presidential title and direct reporting relationship to the president of a CHRO for fully realizing active engagement in Ulrich's four key HR practice roles, and what credentials and qualifications would be expected for a chief human resources officer? How would a human resources division be organized and staffed, and should it oversee faculty and staff affairs, training and professional development, employee policies and procedures, and other HR concerns separately administered presently under the chief academic officer and the chief business officer? In what ways do the organizational culture and traditions of the faculty and academic administrators constrain the roles of HR professionals in higher education, and why is that the case? Is it reasonable to expect HRM theory and HR practice literature, which primarily grew out of the corporate/business world, to be generalizable to the higher education enterprise, and if not, why not? How does the frequency of corporate/business mergers compare to the frequency of institutional mergers in higher education?

Are the strategies and tactics often used for resolving contentious HR issues resulting from an organizational merger in the corporate/business sector applicable to the strategies and tactics used to resolve similar issues in higher education during institutional consolidation?

Conclusion

To be successful in rebranding, securing executive sponsorship, and seizing opportunities for strategic implementation, HR must establish a strategy for change and care for the many obstacles that could prevent them from being successful (Jackson et al., 2014). The framework offered to address HR as a strategic partner is a foundational approach for future development. Successful consolidations in higher education take the collective, planned effort from multiple stakeholders across the university. These professionals, actively designing a new institution, are led by the president and include the chief business officers and academic officers, supported by

CHROs. Senior leaders in this study shared in order for the HR function to create value for the institution while supporting senior leaders, they have to develop a competitive advantage by using all four of the Ulrich (1996) 4-box model.

As institutions are strategically focused on consolidations, the transition of faculty and staff through the change process needs a similar focus. This study highlights that the potential for the CHRO to participate in organizational change exists, and senior leaders are interested in supporting the change. The focus for HR leaders should now be on envisioning a new narrative and implementing training and development to solidify HR as a profession serving in various roles in support of senior leadership.

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Appendix A – Institutional Review Board Certification

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Tucker Hall, Room 212
310 E. Campus Rd.
Athens, Georgia 30602
TEL 706-542-3199 | FAX 706-542-5638
IRB@uga.edu
http://research.uga.edu/hso/irb/

Human Research Protection Program

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

June 22, 2021

Dear Libby Morris:

On 6/22/2021, the Human Subjects Office reviewed the following submission:

Title of Study:	Human Resources Management: In Search of a Strategy
Investigator:	Libby Morris
Co-Investigator:	Marion Fedrick
IRB ID:	PROJECT00003925
Funding:	None
Review Category:	DHHS Exempt 2ii

We have determined that the proposed research is Exempt. The research activities may begin 6/22/2021.

Study team has indicated that all external sites do not require IRB review or site permission for all of these activities.

Since this study was determined to be exempt, please be aware that not all future modifications will require review by the IRB. For more information please see Appendix C of the Exempt Research Policy (https://research.uga.edu/docs/policies/compliance/hso/IRB-Exempt-Review.pdf). As noted in Section C.2., you can simply notify us of modifications that will not require review via the "Add Public Comment" activity.

A progress report will be requested prior to 6/22/2026. Before or within 30 days of the progress report due date, please submit a progress report or study closure request. Submit a progress report by navigating to the active study and selecting Progress Report. The study may be closed by selecting Create Version and choosing Close Study as the submission purpose.

Appendix B – Email Introducing the Study

Dear <insert name>

I trust that you are navigating well through COVID-19 and all of the challenges that it has brought to higher education.

In 2019, I started my studies in UGA's Executive Doctorate in Higher Education Management program. I'm now at the point of conducting research for my dissertation. The study is titled Human Resources Management: In Search of a Strategy. This research intends to explore how higher education leaders use traditional and emerging human resources practices and theory to support transformational change in higher education. In addition, this research seeks to understand better the role of human resources in higher education organizational change, the leader's understanding and perceptions of traditional and emerging human resources practices, and future opportunities for human resources to add value in organizational change in higher education.

The UGA IRB process is complete and I wanted to reach out to you now to see if you would be interested in participating in the research.

Should you choose to participate in this research this letter will provide relevant information that you may need to participate in this study. If you agree to the interview, I will interview you about your perceptions of human resources practice and policy related to your experience in consolidation of <insert consolidated pair>. Your leadership helped bring the institution forward through the consolidation.

Interviews will be conducted remotely using Zoom. If you prefer not to interview by Zoom, the option of a phone interview is available. The discussion will take no longer than 60 minutes.

Information gathered during the interview will be kept confidential. If you agree, the interview will be recorded as a means to capture the data for me to transcribe the interview. You will be assigned a pseudonym at the time of the interview and before data transcription occurs. I will not include or share with others any individually identifiable about you. Of course, you are welcome to review the transcribed interview to make corrections if you would like to do so.
If you would be willing to participate in my research or have any questions about this study, please contact me by phone or email. My phone number is XXX-XXX-XXXX.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia 706-542-3199, or at irb@uga.edu.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Marion Fedrick
EdD Candidate
UGA Institute of Higher Education

Dissertation Committee
Dr. Libby V. Morris (Chair), Director, Institute of Higher Education, Zell Miller Distinguished Professor of Higher Education
Dr. James Hearn, Professor and Associate Director, Institute of Higher Education
Dr. Erik Ness, Associate Professor and Graduate Coordinator, Institute of Higher Education

Appendix C – Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
The Role of Human Resources Management: In Search of a Strategy

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This consent form describes the research study and provides the information you need to know before deciding to participate in the process. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator:	Libby Morris, PHD	**Co-Investigator:**	Marion Ross Fedrick
Department:	Institute of Higher Education	**Department:**	Institute of Higher Education
Contact:	XXX-XXX-XXXX	**Contact:**	XXX-XXX-XXXX

Purpose and Goal of Study
The purpose of this study is to explore how higher education leaders use traditional and emerging human resources practices and theory to support transformational change in higher education. This research seeks to construct a better understanding of (a) the role of human resources in higher education change, (b) leader's understanding and perceptions of traditional and emerging human resources practices, and (c) future opportunities for human resources to add value in organizational change in higher education.

This study is a student dissertation project to pursue an Executive Doctorate in Higher Education Management through the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education. This study will focus on seven of the nine consolidations in the University System of Georgia. All total, the USG consolidated 18-institutions of various Carnegie classifications into nine schools. For clarification, as we advance, these consolidations will be referred to as "consolidated pairs."

Participation
For this study, we plan to have approximately 28-participants. All participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your participation in future studies. As a vital member of the consolidation team for (insert consolidated pair), you are invited to participate in a research study designed to answer the key question of human resources in higher education's change management process.

Time Commitment
As a participant in this study, you will be invited to a virtual interview for this study. Interviews should take between 1-1.5 hours and be conducted via telecommunication software or over the phone.

Participation Method

As a participant in this study, you will be invited to a virtual interview for this study. All interviews will be offered via Zoom, with the request to record the session for future transcription of the interview. If you prefer not to have the interview recorded, I will take written notes to capture your feedback for transcription of the interview to use in the research project. These notes will be available to share back with you if requested. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions about your experiences as participants in the consolidation between (insert consolidated pair). You will be free to refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any notes that were taken, interview recordings, and transcripts will be destroyed within 24-hours of your determination to withdraw from the study. If you prefer an in-person interview, I will attempt to accommodate your request. The in-person interview will be recorded using an audio recorder, and I will take written notes during the interview. The interview will be transcribed using the audio recording and my written notes captured during the interview. The information transcribed will be used as input for this research project.

Risk Associated with your Participation

We do not expect that filling out this questionnaire will create any risks or discomforts on your part. The possibility of harm or discomfort in this research study is the same as conducting a professional interview or recounting stories of important moments in your life. If there are questions that may make you uncomfortable, you are encouraged to skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them.

Benefits of Participation

Leaders and human resources professionals may get the most benefit from this study. Understanding how human resources are prepared and allowed to engage in organizational change can improve the practice. This study could also support leaders in their decision-making process related to faculty and staff to understand the various ways to engage human resources. Your responses may help us understand if leadership perceptions impact engagement with human resources. You will not be provided compensation for participation in this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality of Records

We will take all possible steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk of information being shared, we will take the following steps,

- Audio and video recording will be used to transcribe the interview later. All recordings will be maintained on a secure, password-protected laptop and destroyed two years after data collection.
- Transcripts will be deidentified or coded to exclude identifiable data.
- Each interviewee will have a pseudo-identity to mask their actual identity.
- Participants' comments and feedback will be masked, and we will take precautions to eliminate or modify any language that can be directly attributed to an individual.
- Comments directly relating to a particular institution will be sanitized to remove references that could connect the individual to the statement.
- Recordings and other data will be destroyed two years after data collection.

- We will not share the information you provide in other studies or with other researchers.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact me at xxxxx@uga.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or irb@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

Appendix D – Interview Protocols

Opening discussion

Opening discussion before the interview begins. I used this discussion dialogue for each group of interviewees to include, presidents, chief business officers, chief academic officers, and chief human resources officers.

Greetings. Thank you for agreeing to interview with me today via our virtual Zoom platform. I appreciate your willingness to assist me with my research project. As I mentioned my research is focused on the perceptions and engagement of human resources by senior leaders during organizational change.

To help me stay focused, I want to again share my research questions with you, and please feel free to ask me any questions you would like to if the questions are not clear. The questions are as follows,

1. How do stakeholders engage with human resources leaders to influence organizational change?
2. How do stakeholders perceive human resources' purpose and impact in the strategic implementation of the institution's goals?
3. How do chief human resources officers perceive their ability to influence decisions regarding the workforce in transformational organizational change?
4. What lessons were learned through the consolidation process that could help institutions integrate practical human resources practice theory in organizational change?

As I highlighted in my introductory email and the follow-up request for the interview, this interview should take between 60 and 90 minutes depending on how much you want to

share. You will not be identified as a participant in the student, and you will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your identity and the identity of your institution.

If you agree, I will record the interview for transcription later in the process. After the interview is transcribed, I will delete the recording as soon as reasonable. If you like, I can send you the transcription of the interview for your review and feedback. If I have captured something incorrectly, I would appreciate you letting me know.

Please know that some of these questions may make you feel uncomfortable as they will as you to recall your experiences during organizational change. They are not designed to cause harm, but if you feel uncomfortable, or you would prefer not to answer the question, just let me know and I will skip the question. You are also welcome to simply not answer and ask for the next question.

Before we get started if you agree to me recording this session please select “yes” on your screen. If not, select “no” and I will take handwritten notes during the interview. I will destroy the handwritten notes as soon as my notes are transcribed.

I look forward to hearing your feedback about your experience in the consolidation of (enter consolidated pair).

Thank you, let’s get started.

Appendix E – Interview Questions – Presidents

Opening Conversation – See Appendix D

Review the purpose of the study.

1. When you were made aware of the consolidation, what was the first challenge that you thought that you would face?
2. What were your initial thoughts about the consolidation?

Unfreeze

1. As the president and lead designer of the new institution, what were your initial HR concerns about consolidating with (insert the name of the institution)?
2. What members, by role, did you ultimately include on the academic and finance OWG?
3. Describe your engagement with HR before the consolidation process began.

Move

1. How often did you engage your chief human resources officer in the consolidation process?
2. How did you include your chief human resources officer in the change management process throughout the consolidation process?
3. Overall, how do you think your chief human resources officer performed in the consolidation process?
4. What role could your chief human resources officer have performed that would have benefited the consolidation more?

Refreeze

1. What core competencies do you think are important to consider your chief human resources officer to be a strategic partner with the ability to support you?
2. Of these skills, which ones do you think are important to remain a strategic partner with you in the future?
3. Please describe how you perceive the role of the chief human resource officer (CHRO).
4. Do you think they possess the skills, power, and influence to impact workforce decisions in transformational organizational change? Do you think they should be positioned by leadership to have this level of impact in organizational change?

Appendix F – Interview Questions for Chief Business Officers

Opening Questions

1. Which institution was your legacy institution?
2. Please describe your primary job responsibilities prior to the consolidation?
3. Introduction of consolidation – On (insert date) the Board of Regents announced that (Institution X and Institution Y) would consolidate into one institution.
4. When you were made aware of the consolidation, what was the first challenge that you thought that you would face?
5. How did you think your department would be impacted as a result of the consolidation? (Did you think jobs would be lost or otherwise altered? If so, how and how would you handle the change?)

Engagement with HR - Unfreeze

1. Prior to consolidation, to what extent, and why did you engage with HR?
2. What were your general thoughts about the support from HR at critical times before the consolidation (hiring, redesigning departments, compliance, employee relations, strategy, etc.)?

Engagement with HR – Move

1. How did you engage HR at the start of the consolidation process, and if the engagement changed during the consolidation process please describe how?
2. How did your committee or subgroup engage HR to address faculty and staff concerns during the consolidation? (Examples, reductions in force resulting from proposed changes like eliminating programs, adding or eliminating departments, new leadership, new policies relating to employment?)

3. Were you concerned about how the workforce of the new institution would take shape? Did you use human resources to discuss the possible change?
4. Where did you feel human resources engaged most effectively in the process and discussions? Least effective?

Engagement with HR - Refreeze

1. What was the most beneficial engagement by the chief human resources officer with you and or your committee?
2. What do you think human resources could have done to better support you and your committees?
3. What role do you think human resources should serve in the strategic direction of the new university?
4. What particular skills and abilities do you think are required of a CHRO to be effective in supporting you through organizational change.
5. Is there anything that you would do over or differently if given the chance through the next organization change transformation?
6. Are there other people that you think would be helpful in identifying HR's role in organizational change?

Appendix G – Interview Questions for Chief Academic Officers

Opening Questions

1. Which institution was your legacy institution?
2. Please describe your primary job responsibilities prior to the consolidation?
3. Introduction of consolidation – On (insert date) the Board of Regents announced that (Institution X and Institution Y) would consolidate into one institution.
4. When you were made aware of the consolidation, what was the first challenge that you thought that you would face?
5. How did you think your department would be impacted as a result of the consolidation? (Did you think jobs would be lost or otherwise altered? If so, how and how would you handle the change?)

Engagement with HR - Unfreeze

1. Historically, academic affairs functions outside of HR policy and practice in many ways? Can you share how your institution engaged HR, before, during and after the consolidation?
2. What were your general thoughts about the support from HR at critical times before the consolidation (hiring, redesigning departments, compliance, employee relations, strategy, etc.)?

Engagement with HR - Move

1. How did you engage HR at the start of the consolidation process, and if the engagement changed during the consolidation process please describe how?
2. How did your committee or subgroup engage HR to address faculty and staff concerns during the consolidation? (Examples, reductions in force resulting from

proposed changes like eliminating programs, adding or eliminating departments, new leadership, new policies relating to employment?)

3. Were you concerned about how the workforce of the new institution would take shape? Did you use human resources to discuss the possible change?
4. Where did you feel human resources engaged most effectively in the process and discussions? Least effective?

Engagement with HR - Refreeze

1. What was the most beneficial engagement by the chief human resources officer with you and or your committee?
2. What do you think human resources could have done to better support you and your committees?
3. What role do you think human resources should serve in the strategic direction of the new university?
4. What particular skills and abilities do you think are required of a CHRO to be effective in supporting you through organizational change.
5. Is there anything that you would do over or differently if given the chance through the next organization change transformation?
6. Are there other people that you think would be helpful in identifying HR's role in organizational change?

Appendix H – Interview Questions for Chief Human Resources Officers

Opening Questions

1. How long were you with the university prior to consolidation?
2. Take a few minutes to describe your background to me and what brought you to the university.

Unfreeze

1. Tell me about your responsibilities prior to the consolidation.
2. Describe the measures you put into place to collect the concerns about the consolidation from faculty and staff?
3. How often did you speak with your president during the consolidation?
4. Describe the role that you think you would play as a part of the consolidation process.

Move

1. Describe any gaps in expectations from the role you desired to perform in the consolidation and the role you performed.
2. How did you share these concerns with the OWGs and the president?
3. Do you feel that you had the power to facilitate changes based on the wishes of the faculty and staff?

Refreeze

1. What plans did you put in place to facilitate implementing the desires of the faculty and staff relating to change?
2. What plans did you recommend and/or implement to support faculty and staff after the consolidation was official?
3. How would you position HR in the next strategic change for the university (reporting relationship, inclusion on committees or task forces, etc.)?

4. What changes would you recommend to the president if your institution was to go through another consolidation?

Appendix I – Document Analysis

Phase	Consolidated pair	Name of document	URL	Date Retrieved
NA	University System of Georgia	Guiding Principles	https://www.usg.edu/consolidation/guiding_principles	April 23, 2021
1	Middle Georgia College and Macon State College	Profiles - Consolidated Institutions	https://www.usg.edu/consolidation/previous/middle_georgia_state_college	June 12, 2021
1	North Georgia College and State University and Gainesville State College	Consolidation Plan Approved by SACS	https://ung.edu/president/presidential-updates/2012/consolidation-plan-approved-by-sacs.php	June 12, 2021
1	Georgia Health Sciences University and Augusta State University	Transition Forward Strategic Plan	https://www.augusta.edu/about/planning/transitionforward/documents/gru-transition-forward.pdf	June 30, 2021
2	Kennesaw State University & Southern Polytechnic State University	Kennesaw State & Southern Polytechnic State Consolidation	https://issuu.com/kennesawstateadmissions/docs/consolidation_info_page_v9issuu	August, 15, 2021
2	Kennesaw State University & Southern Polytechnic State University	Accreditors approve Kennesaw State, Southern Poly merger	https://www.ajc.com/news/local-education/accreditors-approve-kennesaw-state-southern-poly-merger/wJk87K5wFLwJEMbvL8YSmL/	June 30, 2021
3	Georgia State University and Georgia Perimeter College	Consolidation website	https://consolidation.gsu.edu/	June 30, 2021
3	Georgia State University and Georgia Perimeter College	Consolidation Committee OWG Final Report – Human Resources	https://consolidation.gsu.edu/files/2015/03/Committee-35-Human-Resources-Final-Report.pdf	June 30, 2021
5	Georgia Southern University & Armstrong State University	13. Human Resources OWG	https://consolidation.georgiasouthern.edu/owg/human-resources/	June 3, 2021
5	Georgia Southern University & Armstrong State University	27. Diversity and Inclusion Programs/Activities	https://consolidation.georgiasouthern.edu/owg/diversity-and-inclusion-programsactivities/	June 3, 2021
5	Georgia Southern University & Armstrong State University	Operational Working Groups	https://consolidation.georgiasouthern.edu/owg/	June 3, 2021
5	Georgia Southern University & Armstrong State University	GASOU/ARM Consolidation Implementation Committee Operational Working Groups: Leadership	https://consolidation.georgiasouthern.edu/wp-content/uploads/GASOUARMLeadershipResponsibilitiesDocumentRev051217.pdf	August 30, 2021

Phase	Consolidated pair	Name of document	URL	Date Retrieved
		and Responsibilities		