

MOBILIZING FOR MAJOR CHANGE:
A CASE STUDY OF CHANGE COMMUNICATIONS AT
A LIBERAL ARTS WOMEN'S COLLEGE

by

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(Under the Direction of James C. Hearn)

ABSTRACT

Though historically higher education has been no stranger to change, institutions continually face challenges, as they strive to deliver on their missions. As external and internal forces continually bombard institutions, change is more of a necessity than a strategy for many institutions.

Understanding communications in deciding on the change to pursue and then sharing about the change both internally and externally is integral to ongoing operations of many institutions.

The purpose of this study is to examine the role and impact of communications in a change initiative and to identify practical insights on how to effectively use communications to navigate change. A single case study of a liberal arts women's college deciding on, planning, and announcing a major change initiative, a tuition reset, was conducted to better understand the role and impact of communications in a change initiative. From this study, three themes emerged that help answer the research questions about the role of communication in change decisions, the process of creating communication strategies, and how the strategies are implemented: (a) impact of presidential leadership; (b) necessity of partnerships; and (c) criticality of systematic

end-to-end planning and monitoring. Within these themes, practical lessons arose in creating communication strategies, plans, and tactics, exemplifying the role communication plays in the navigation of change. The findings highlight the integral role that communication plays, from ideation to completion of the change, and ways it is used with various stakeholder groups, including the president, the board of trustees, and internal and external stakeholders of the institution.

INDEX WORDS: higher education—change; small, independent colleges; women’s colleges; change initiatives; change communication; change leadership; communication strategies; communication tactics; partner in change; communication planning

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DEDICATION

When I began this journey, I had no idea about the twists and turns my path would take as I pursued this degree. I could never have foreseen a career change, the passing of both my parents, a medical challenge, and lots of miles traveled across various countries. Through it all, I learned how incredibly dependent I am on others—God, family, friends, and colleagues—and to all of these amazing people in my life, I dedicate this dissertation.

Thank you to my parents who always gave me complete love and support and spoke truth to me when I needed it the most. I wish you had been here to celebrate the completion of this journey with me, though I feel your love and pride all the same. To my brother and family, I appreciate your encouragement and patience.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since its beginnings, higher education has been no stranger to change. While one may contend change has been ever present for higher education, it could be argued the rate of change continually accelerates due to constantly developing technologies that change the landscape of higher education. Over time, this ebb and flow of change has affected higher education with a proliferation of challenges that pose complications for small, independent colleges. The higher education industry is experiencing a convergence of forces that have exponentially increased the complexity and rate of change across all functions of the institution. This situation is often referred to as a *VUCA* world—one full of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

The term *VUCA* was coined by the U.S. Army War College in the 1990s, during the tensions in the Middle East and the Gulf War (Stiehm & Townsend, 2002). *VUCA* aptly describes the current environment for many higher education institutions. Institutions face change not as a strategy, but as a necessity. This necessity is driven by multiple, external forces beyond institutions' immediate spheres of control—continually declining state and federal funding (Ehrenberg, 2012), changing student demographics (Snyder, 2012), increasing accountability—and other factors in their spheres of control, including the application of “big data” to make decisions across campus functions (Picciano, 2012), the rise of the student as consumer, a focus on job-related degrees (Breneman, 1994), and the impact of technology on learning (Chistensen & Eyring, 2011). These forces, both individually and collectively, present challenges for those who lead, manage, and are responsible for the integrity, quality, and growth

of institutions (Brown, 2012; Fullan & Scott, 2009; Mehaffy, 2012). In addressing these challenges, institutional leaders make choices about whether or how external forces affect institutional structures and functioning.

Against this VUCA backdrop, institutions of all sorts—particularly small, independent institutions—identify, select, and implement changes ranging from incremental changes helping them remain viable to major changes helping them remain competitive (Newman & Couturier, 2001), and further to transformational changes helping them optimally thrive as an institution (Shaw, 2005). Once an institution decides on undertaking a change initiative, a key component of determining, planning, and implementing the change is communication. Communication and the way in which various strategies and tactics are used throughout the change process are linked to outcomes realized from the change. Identifying the change to pursue, articulating the rationale and case for change, defining the process of the change, and describing the desired outcomes of the change necessitate a communications strategy and plan to increase the probability of success with a change initiative (Armenakis, Harris, & Field, 1999; Goodman & Truss, 2004; Klein, 1996; Klein & Ritti, 1985; Richardson & Denton, 1996; Young & Post, 1993).

While most institutions understand communication should be considered, current change models provide for broad recommendations that communication should be a part of the process (Lewin, 1951; Kotter, 1996; Ulrich, 1998) but include few specifics and sparse instruction on how to manage communications in the change process or what components of communications to consider, organize, or plan. Without such specificity, many institutions are less intentional about communications than the other components of the change process and run the risk of miscommunication or having limited control over how the information about the change initiative is being received or interpreted. Adding further complexity to communications in

change is the rise of social media and the ability for information to rapidly be disseminated from a limitless set of sources (Aulo, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

A broad spectrum of public and private institutions and formal organizations, including those in higher education, have been and will continue to be under pressure to consider and engage in change—incremental, major, or transformational--to remain competitive, viable, and relevant (Cohen, 1999; Dickeson, 1999; Fraham and Brown, 2007; Green, 1997; Jones, 2002; Lucas, 2000; Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997, 1998; Rowley & Sherman, 2000; Shaw, 2005). As higher education institutions undertake change initiatives, understanding the role of communications and how it interacts with and impacts the change process is critical.

The literature is replete with research that provides insight and guidance about the organizational change process, though it provides less-specific guidance about how to develop strategies and plans for communicating change to stakeholders (Armenakis et al., 1999; Goodman & Truss, 2004; Klein, 1996; Klein & Ritti, 1985; Richardson & Denton, 1996; Young & Post 1993). While there is extensive research on communicating change, there are numerous models and contexts in which to use them. Though some commonalities exist across much of the literature, the suggestion of multiple communication strategies implies there is no dominant model or consistently included methods and strategies for communicating change across models (Armenakis & Harris, 2001; Goodman & Truss, 2004; vanVuuren & Elving, 2008).

Lewis and Seibold (1998) reviewed major areas of research on implementation of planned change. The authors concluded research on change implementation is wanting of a communications perspective to enhance understanding of implementation activities. They argued

for a reconceptualization of the implementation of planned organizational change as a communication-related phenomenon.

The literature in the areas of change communications and communications strategies is primarily focused on change in the private sector, predominantly large, commercial organizations (Johansson & Heide, 2008; Karp & Helgo, 2009; Marrow, 1969; Richardson & Denton, 1996; Torppa & Smith, 2011), and the literature in higher education primarily has a focus on large, public institutions (Bastedo, 2007; Bruininks, 2006). Insight and knowledge derived from empirical research with a focus on higher education organizations, particularly small, independent colleges and women's institutions, is largely absent from the literature on communicating change.

The advent of social media adds a complex dynamic to communications in general and organizational change communications specifically (Aula, 2010). Kaplan and Haenleine (2010) discussed challenges and opportunities of social media and observed social media allows for timely and direct interaction, which makes it relevant for all types of organizations. They stated that in general communications, using social media is not easy and may require new ways of thinking. Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden (2011) suggested in the communications ecosystem, organizations need to consider the social and traditional media elements that accomplish a common objective. Learning advantages and consequences of the medium of social media, with its timely connection to institutional stakeholders, is critical for higher education institutions, as they undertake change initiatives. To identify practical insights on the role of communication in the identification, selection, planning, and implementation of change, this study will investigate a change, namely a tuition reset, at Converse College, which is a small, independent, liberal arts women's college.

The history of women's colleges is relevant in understanding inherent circumstances that contributed to Converse College's decision to embark on a change initiative. After the development of private, secondary schools for young women in the early 1800s, women's colleges were founded in the mid to late 1800s. This increased interest in women's education was a response to societal trends, such as an increase in labor-saving devices in the home, a shortage of teachers due to the growth of common schools, and an increase in philanthropic and employment opportunities for women (Harwarth, DeBra, & Maline, 1997). The number of women's colleges grew, and colleges were characterized by a great vitality, with their strengths being their capacity to sustain traditions of women's intellectual excellence, promotion of women as scholars, and focus on a healthy educational climate for women (Chamberlain, 1988).

By 1960, there were approximately 300 women's colleges in the United States (Brown, 2012). By the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s, the number of women's colleges declined due to weakening interest and institutions experiencing financial trouble, partially driven by increased competition (Harwarth, et al., 1997). While numbers were declining, some women's colleges reaffirmed their missions, continued to live their convictions, and offered all-women educational environments. These institutions added new programs, appealed to nontraditional students, and weathered environmental changes, partly due to generous endowments and alumnae/i who supported institutions' decisions to remain all women (Harwarth, et.al, 1997; Brown, 2012). Despite such efforts, by 2010, the number of women's colleges remaining was fewer than 65 (Brown, 2012).

Founded in 1889, Converse College is an independent, women's, liberal arts college located in Spartanburg, South Carolina (Kibler, 1973). Being aware of the history and circumstances of women's colleges and small, independent colleges, college leadership was concerned with the position of the institution. As Converse College neared the 125th anniversary

of its founding, it faced challenges endemic for small, independent colleges and for women's colleges. Numerous factors have challenged similar institutions of higher learning, including the economic downturn, demographic shifts, enrollment declines, emergence of new educational entrants, and changes in the regulatory environment. These issues were reason for concern for the board of trustees and leadership at Converse College and motivated them to take action. The leadership at Converse College engaged in an 18-month period of analysis beginning in early 2012 to safeguard the institution's long-term viability as it looked beyond its anniversary.

In response to the challenges, Converse College's administration—in conjunction with the college's key stakeholders, including the trustees, faculty, staff, students, and external partners—engaged in a holistic review process of the institution, which resulted in the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategic plan, designed to address its needs at that time and to build a more durable foundation for long-term viability for the institution. The college's new strategic plan was ambitious and signaled there would be significant, far-reaching changes on campus. The overall strategic plan would fall into what Shaw (2005) deemed as *transformational change*. Components of the plan included such changes as lowering or resetting tuition, although counterintuitive to short-term financial performance, to better reflect the true cost of educating a student; reviewing all programs of study for relevance in the current market, resulting in some programs being discontinued and new market-responsive programs being added; investigating new revenue streams; and restructuring the organization of the institution to make effective use of personnel (i.e., administration, faculty, and staff).

After the plan's approval, leadership implemented the initial change—the tuition reset of lowering the tuition 43% for academic year 2014-2015—with a public announcement on

September 10, 2013. The timing of this initial change was intentionally aligned with the 125th anniversary of the college to further highlight the college's commitment to delivering their mission in a contemporary and relevant manner. As the implementation of the plan continued, great progress occurred on many important objectives. For example, student enrollment increased, some programs were discontinued while others were added, finances improved, and donations increased; all of these led to support for future goals and sustainability. While initial outcomes trended positively, not all aspects of the efforts proved to run smoothly or provide for intended outcomes. Even with a phased approach to the strategic plan, some initiatives have required more time and greater focus than anticipated.

Converse College's experience of implementing major and transformational change provides insight on the change process and the role of communications. Examination of the role of communications in the identification, planning, and communication of the first major change, the tuition reset, is the focus of this study.

A review of the literature on change pointed to several potential reasons for challenges Converse College experienced in the creation and implementation of the strategic plan and the resulting organizational changes the college experienced. Challenges may be attributable to the skill of the college's leadership (Fullan & Scott, 2009), federal and state regulatory and programs (Bastedo, 2007; Bruininks, 2006), technology concerns (Johansson & Heide, 2008), response by the business community (Bruch, Gerber, & Maier, 2005), and economic conditions. The literature informed the working hypothesis and focus of this study: A key component of Converse College's ability to implement the transformational strategic plan is the role of communications and the way communication planning and implementation transpired throughout the process.

The purpose of this study was to identify practical insights and contribute to the current body of literature on the role of communications in the identification, selection, planning, and implementation of change in small, independent colleges. Insights were gathered by exploring communications during Converse College's change initiative to reset tuition. The period studied began with the discussion of the change to be implemented and concluded with the public announcement of the tuition reset. This selected period of time includes review of the communication in the decision of the change to implement, the creation of the communication strategy and plan, and the execution of the announcement of the change.

Based on the purpose of this study and informed by the current literature, the key research questions are:

1. What role did communications play in identifying and deciding on the change to implement?
2. What was the process by which Converse College created the communication strategy and plan for the major change (i.e., tuition reset)?
3. What communication strategies were included in the communication plan?
4. How was the communications strategy and plan implemented?

As context for this exploration of Converse College's communications through the initial change initiative, an organizational-perspective conceptual framework and four streams of literature were reviewed to provide a better understanding of change-process models and the role of communications in these models.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this case study is communications in the change process, with specific interest in the role of communications in the identification and selection of the change, development of the communications strategy and plan, and the implementation of the plan for a change initiative. For the purposes of this study, communications is defined as “the central means by which individual activity is coordinated to devise, disseminate, and pursue organizational goals” (Gardner, Paulsen, Gallois, Callan, & Monaghan, 2001, p. 561). The literature on communicating change is dense on business organizations and higher education (mostly in public institutions) and nominal on small, independent, and women’s colleges.

A review of literature in four areas and a conceptual framework provide insight on key topics to inform the questions of this study. The literature explores models for communications strategies and plans from the macro level as components of change processes to the micro level of identifying leaders’ roles and specific components contained in communication strategies and plans. The literature review concentrates on four areas: (a) leadership and communications; (b) rationale for communications plans; (c) perspectives and strategies for communicating change; and (d) human resources perspectives of communicating change. The conceptual framework provides a context for the environment and mindset of an institution’s community as they approach and then navigate change. As an overlay to the observations on communication strategy and change initiatives, a review of the quantum paradigm as a conceptual framework

can aid higher education leaders in understanding and navigating their environments and being more effective during change initiatives.

Leadership and Communications

Foundational skills of leadership include setting and communicating the vision and mission of the organization (Cohen, 1999; Green, 1997; Jones, 2002; Kotter, 1995; Kotter, 2012; Kretovics, 2011; Lucas, 2000; Zemsky, 2013). Beyond day-to-day operations of an organization, these skills become even more critical for a leader during change. While articulating the mission and vision of the organization, leadership must also communicate the content of a change, its purpose, and its impact (Richardson & Denton, 1996). The focus for leadership's communication of a message is at the organizational level, while the communication of the message becomes individual as it cascades throughout the organization (Goodman & Truss, 2004).

Leadership is responsible for delivering appropriate messages, fostering a culture of feedback, creating readiness for change, generating a sense of urgency, and motivating others to act by using a variety of communication techniques (Gilley, Gilley, & McMillan, 2009). These techniques include frequent and enthusiastic communication (Lewis Schmisser, Stephens, & Weir, 2006), curbing bias toward unrealistic optimism (Lovallo & Kahneman, 2003), and abundant and relevant information about the change (Green, 2004; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1999). By using such techniques, leaders can motivate employees involved in change (Luecke, 2003), provide employees with feedback and reinforcement during the change (Peterson & Hicks, 1996), and enable employees to make better decisions and be prepared to participate in the change (Saunders, 1999).

Covin and Kilman (1990) concluded top management's visible and consistent support for the proposed change is key to success in a change process. Young and Post (1993) found

effective managers strategically use communications to manage tough organizational change. Denning (2005) noted leaders are responsible for communicating risks in clinging to the status quo and potential rewards of embracing a different future. Leaders throughout an organization aid in the communication of change, as noted by Gonring (1991), who stated supervisors are key links in the change communications process. Further, as Young and Post (1993) concluded, management can convert employees concerns into support for the change initiative.

Leadership throughout the organization plays a vital role in the responsibility of developing and facilitating communication strategy and plans, internally and externally, across all aspects of the organizational change process, from the ideation stage to the execution of the change.

Rationale for a Communications Plan

Change initiatives include many elements and steps in their processes. Examining the dominant change models to understand their elements provides a context for how communications is incorporated as a foundational component of change processes. Change models by Lewin (1951), Kotter (1996), and Ulrich (1998) are the dominant models in organizational change. A key component in the implementation of these three change models is communication. Elements of these models are provided in Table 1.

The literature indicates the need for a communications plan and provides credible answers to the question of why it is necessary to have a communications strategy and plan as a component of organizational change. Several studies have emphasized the vital role of communications in the change process and the inextricable link between communications and organizational change (Daly, Teague, & Kitchen, 2003; Elving, 2005; Ford & Ford, 1995). Young and Post (1993) concluded effective communication is vital to any organization

undergoing significant change and providing affected stakeholders adequate information can support the organization in achieving its goals.

Table 1

Change Model Elements

Lewin's Model	Ulrich's 7-Step Model	Kotter's 8-Step Model
Unfreeze	Lead change	Establish a sense of urgency
Movement	Create a shared need	Form a guiding coalition
Refreeze	Shape a vision	Create a vision
	Mobilize commitment	Communicate the vision
	Change systems & structures	Empower others to act
	Monitor progress	Plan for and create short-term wins
	Make change last	Consolidate improvements & produce more change
		Institutionalize new approaches

Note. Adapted from Gilley, Gilley, & McMillian, 2009.

Gilley, Gilley, and McMillan (2009) concluded, “An effective communication plan shows greatest positive correlation with change effectiveness” (p. 85). Goodman and Truss (2004) determined the manner in which organizations communicate with employees during a change has effects on the success of the change initiative. Goodman and Truss’s study showed how matching the profile of the employees with the message, timing of the dissemination of the message, and the medium used affects levels of employee commitment, morale, and retention.

Richardson and Denton (1996) found many attempts to affect change result in failure due to poor communications and lack of acceptance of the change by employees in the organization. Other studies show change process failure rates are between one third and two thirds of changes pursued. (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Bibler, 1989). Burns (2004) showed failure rates may reach 90%, while other research indicates organizational change initiatives fail 70% of the time due to shortcomings in internal communication (Barrett, 2002; Elving, 2005; Lewis, 2000). Semeltzer (1991), in a study of 43 organizations, found the primary reason for failure of a change process

was due to inaccurate and negative rumors, and frequently rumors stemmed from management's inability to provide timely and accurate information.

Research shows communication plans and their execution are critical to effective and successful change processes (Gilley et al., 2009). Klein (1996) suggested change often stalls or is unsuccessful when not enough strategic thought is given to communicating the rationale, progress, and impact of the change. Research suggests having a well-thought-out communications plan is one of the most critical factors in an organizational change process. Multiple studies have indicated communications plans should include key strategies well supported by research (Gilley et al., 2009; Goodman & Truss, 2004; Richardson & Denton, 1996).

Perspectives on Strategies for Communicating Change

The review of literature on strategies for communicating change reveals numerous and varied perspectives, strategies, and models for effectively and successfully communicating organizational change. Johansson and Heide's (2008) review of an article by Lewis et al. (2006) stated the authors analyzed some of the best-selling books in the United States on change management. Lewis et al. concluded all books reviewed emphasized the importance of communication in change processes. There was also, according to Lewis et al., a great coherence between popular press books and scholarly conclusions on communication in change processes. Both genres stressed the importance of:

- Wide participation in the change process to make organizational members feel more included, committed, and in control of the situation;
- Wide dissemination of information together with openness, early notification, and discussion possibilities; and

- Communication about vision and purpose of the change process in order to provide justification.

Perspectives and strategies to communicate during change initiatives proposed in multiple studies are strikingly similar to each other (Armenakis, Harris, & Field, 1999; Goodman & Truss, 2004; Klein & Ritti, 1985; Richardson & Denton, 1996; Young & Post 1993), suggesting efficacy. In these studies, the authors discuss the role of leadership, use of appropriate messaging and medium, message redundancy, timeliness, relevancy, and consistency of the message. While there are many commonalities across studies, each study included its own set of findings and recommended specific strategies for communicating change (see Table 2).

Table 2

Communication Plan Strategies for Communicating Change

Strategy	Armenakis, Harris, & Field	Klein & Ritti	Richardson & Denton	Young & Post
Senior leadership support	√	√	√	√
Middle management and supervision use		√	√	
Message redundancy	√	√		
Use of multiple mediums and channels		√	√	
Transparency			√	√
Timeliness of information			√	
Relevancy of information	√	√		
Face to face communication		√	√	√
Mechanism for feedback			√	√
Identify and understand audiences	√			√
Consistency of message and action	√	√		√
Evaluation of plan			√	

Armenakis, et al. (1999) argue based on their findings that the foundation of a communication plan must describe the discrepancy between where the organization is and where it needs to be, and then align the proposed initiative to that discrepancy with a clear explanation

of how it addresses the gap. They contend that supervisors are expected to communicate and are the most effective source of organizationally sanctioned information. The information shared by direct supervisors in the line hierarchy should be less abstract, general, and unfamiliar to organization members and should be individually and personally relevant. They further suggest attention to relevancy and message consistency and redundancy increases message retention. While Klein and Ritti's (1985) work advocates for face-to-face as a preferred medium, they found using several types of media to be more effective than reliance on just one type.

Richardson and Denton (1996) provide a rich set of strategies for communicating during change initiatives, based on their work. Unique strategies from this study include using formal communication assessments to establish baselines, employing direct communication strategies, and monitoring progress, with emotional considerations of individuals in the organization. Richardson and Denton indicate there must be recognition and willingness to deal with anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and mistrust, specifically noting top management must be attentive to not isolating itself from nonrational aspects of the change process. Involving the entire organization with top management showing wholehearted and visible support for the change, middle managers and supervisors as key communications links, and involving employees in the change process and in decisions about changes are all recommended. Training, encouraging, and holding leaders accountable are noted as critical and part of the perspective of evaluation. Communication should begin as early as possible, with as much information shared as possible. Richardson and Denton also suggest the more face-to-face opportunities to share information, the better the information will be received. While using a variety of rich communication media is preferred, if types of communication must be limited, technologies that provide interactive ways of staying in touch should have first consideration. Other suggestions included group meetings,

toll-free telephone lines, and frequent newsletters. Communication efforts should continue throughout and after the change has occurred or been implemented.

Young and Post's (1993) findings suggest the chief executive is critical as the communications champion; face-to-face communications are critical; and there is a shared responsibility across organizations for employee communications. Young and Post emphasize consistency between words and action of leadership; knowing customers, clients, and other audiences, to best align the communication to each audience; and a commitment to two-way communication.

Lengle and Daft (1988) state the importance of using an appropriate medium when communicating change. They found many managers "do not understand the relationship between the medium used and its effects" (Lengle & Daft, 1988, p. 225), and the face-to-face method is the most effective medium.

Semeltzer (1991) establishes the biggest reason for failure during change is employees learning about the change from outside sources, and reliance on lean channels of communications, such as memos, rather than face to face. Young and Post (1993) corroborate this finding and suggest a key fact of success is related to means of communication, which includes face-to-face meetings, company publications, videos, and television programs.

While many strategies exist for communicating change, some strategies are critical to the effectiveness and success of the change. These strategies emanate from the top organizational leader and include consistency, timeliness, relevance, and the consideration of the listener's perspective and acceptance. Though there is notable overlap in suggested key strategies (see Table 2), there is an array of perspectives on critical strategies for developing communication plans. Though research in the area of strategies for communication plans has increased over the past 30 years, it has focused primarily on commercial organizations. While some research has

been done on communications strategies in higher education (Bastedo, 2007; Bruininks, 2006; Gioia & Thomas, 1996), little has been focused on small, independent, or women's colleges.

Human Resources Perspective of Communicating Change

According to Thomas and Helgo (2009), "How one leads change depends upon how one views people; by this we mean how people make sense of reality, how people sense/know/feel, and how they consequently behave" (p. 82). The authors contend people need to hear stories and other forms of communication about their core values and their alignment with the purpose of the organization. Communications is a two-way process with effective communications being dependent on the receiver hearing the message intended by the sender (Johnson & Scholes, 2002; Klein, 1996). The timing and form of communications are important because some forms may oversell the message of change and demotivate people. Thomas and Helgo show identities of employees become threatened when organizational balance is disturbed by a change initiative and may cause them to demonstrate resistance, typically challenging leaders and the change itself. Shaw (2000) suggests, "Change is about emotions" (p. 5), and some institutions go through a "grieving process" as they undergo change. Institutions and their people deal with objective issues and emotions surrounding them, and many change efforts fail because leaders underestimate the effects of major change.

Explicit throughout the literature on communicating organizational change is the importance of the human resources dimension and role of the individual. Key foci of the literature are employees in the organization and recipients of the change message. Also present in the literature is the notion that successful organizational change occurs to some degree through personal transformation by employees, who are influenced by the communications plan (Clampitt & Williams, 2005; Goodman & Truss, 2004; Gilley et al., 2009).

To support the possibility of personal transformation of employees, Clampitt and Williams (2005) conclude employees who are cognitively and emotionally challenged by uncertainty sometimes reject or distort information, resist change, and cling to past models. Consequently, the communications plan must include strategies to mediate and moderate negative reactions of employees.

Goodman and Truss (2004) also recognize the importance of personnel as a critical factor for success and concluded at the individual level, appropriate communication is a significant factor in employees understanding the need for change and personal effects of the proposed change. Goodman and Truss state the content of the communication plan should be attentive to what information is conveyed to employees before, during, and after the change initiative. Regarding communicating with employees, Kitchen and Daly (2002) identify three types of information: (a) what employees must know; (b) what employees should know; and (c) what employees could know.

Studies show the importance of approaching change from a person-centered perspective, and researchers suggest organizational leaders who address issues of motivation and communications are more likely to successfully implement change (Gilley et al., 2009). A key consideration for employees is job satisfaction, and Klein and Ritti (1985) found deficient communications were a major contributor to lower job satisfaction, and rumors and misconceptions generated anxiety for employees, causing them to be less motivated to engage in the change process. Key to successful change is communicating the change to individuals with a consideration for them as whole people and providing information for both intellect and emotions.

Conceptual Framework

Organizational models can provide insight on how to navigate the complexity of higher education (Manning, 2013). Considering the way in which the organizational structure of institutions work on a day-to-day basis provides a context for viewing how they more specifically navigate change. Exploring how the organizational structure interacts with the process of change at institutions provides another lens for examining the role and impact of communications in a change initiative. Because higher education faces constant change, utilizing the foundational idea of an organization paradigm to understand how the people in the institution interact can be useful.

Considering this foundational notion, Zohar (1997) suggests, “Leaders who want to initiate real change processes must become aware that they have been acting out of a paradigm. . . . And they must get to a point where they can feel the reality of an alternative paradigm” (p. 25). By using an organizational paradigm lens, higher education administrators can better understand how institutions work and can change. With Birnbaum’s (1988) mainstay text, this organizational paradigm lens became foundational for graduate students and higher education practitioners. However, continued volatility in the environment for higher education has expanded the need beyond the four frames Birnbaum described—collegial, bureaucratic, political, anarchical—to frames and theories from outside higher education. One such frame that fits this study well is a paradigm referred to as *emergent*, *new science*, or *quantum* (Allen & Cherry, 2000; Clark, 1985; Lincoln 1985; Wheatley, 2007, 2010; Zohar, 1997). For the purposes of this study, I shall refer to this model as the quantum paradigm.

In general, Zohar (1997) suggests shifting to a new paradigm involves understanding that environments can be understood though not controlled, that there are many possible outcomes to

situations, and that there is more going on than objective measures reveal. More specifically, supporting the quantum paradigm, Manning (2013) argues that in a world characterized by complexity, interrelatedness, and uncertainty, the quantum paradigm explains the environment and provides a flexible and creative approach to organizational structures, multiple power configurations, and elaborate networks of stakeholders. Manning states, “The quantum paradigm emphasizes (the characteristics of) interrelatedness, mutual and multiple causality, multiple realities, uncertainty, and control as an illusion” (p.138).

The quantum paradigm world is interrelated. Parts are not viewed as separate but as components of the whole. The reality of the quantum paradigm world is made of interrelationships: “Relationships are not just interesting. . . They are all there is to reality” (Wheatley, 2010, p. 25). Humans and their relationships are all there are in an organization; hence, quantum theorists postulate relationships form the core of reality in organizations (Manning, 2013). Leaders in the quantum paradigm express mutual and multiple causality when they stop searching for one cause or response to a problem and seek ways to build adaptability and flexibility into the organization so its actions are more responsive and more nimble. Because higher education exists in a VUCA world, Zohar (1997) calls for leaders to use the quantum paradigm to help institutions become organizations that “thrive on uncertainty, deal creatively with rapid change, and release the full potential of the human beings who lead and work or live in them” (p. 5). The ability to adapt is vital during institutional planning (Manning, 2013). In complex organizations, flexibility and adaptability may decrease efficiency, but they increase effectiveness.

The quantum paradigm includes the assumption that multiple realities are possible in any given situation in the institution, which is seen as a complex organization. Stakeholders in the

institution perceive different realities for each situation. Manning (2013) observes without recognizing the existence of multiple realities (e.g., realities of the board of trustees, administration, and faculty), decision making is incomplete and ineffective.

The quantum paradigm requires relinquishment of the illusion of control. Such release does not mean forsaking the possibility of influence or failing to plan appropriately; rather, the release of control is looking for order. To support relinquishing of the illusion of control, Zohar (1997) suggests, “The more controlled the parts of a system are the less they contribute to the system and the less they are a part of the whole” (p. 49).

Leadership in the quantum paradigm is a process diffused throughout the organization. The distributed nature of leadership in a quantum organization means that leadership is exerted more vigorously because it emanates from everywhere not just a single position at the top of the organization. The elements of leadership in the quantum paradigm are: (a) style; (b) decision making; (c) control orientation; (d) communication style; (e) power; (f) structure; (g) change; and (h) resources (see Table 3).

Table 3

Leadership Elements in Quantum Organizations

Style	Collaborative, inter-related, “great people”
Decision making	Democratic, consultative
Control orientation	Flexible
Communication style	Information widely shared, unidirectional, power comes from everyone being informed
Power	Power earned through trust and respect, infinite
Structure	Heteroarchy, networked, round, flat, web
Change	Systematic, can be episodic (e.g., revolutionary), strategic in a systemic way
Resources	Based on infinite, human centered elements (e.g., employees)

Note. Adapted from Allen & Cherrey, 2000.

The lens of the quantum paradigm, with its characteristics and leadership elements, is applicable to this case study given that Converse College's organizational interactions deviated from their previous norm as they engaged in the change process and initiative. They ostensibly engaged in a new organizational paradigm to aid them in responding to their environment. Further understanding may be gained from viewing the college's activities used in developing, planning, and implementing their organizational change initiative, including the development and implementation of a communications strategy and plan, through the quantum paradigm.

Summary

In the review of these four areas of literature—leadership and communications, rationale for communications plans, perspectives and strategies for communicating change, and human resources perspectives of communicating change—it became apparent that there are gaps in the research relative to specifics of best practices on communications strategy and plans most aligned with or most consistently driving and impacting change initiatives. With multiple generations in the workforce who have a variety of familiarity and preferences with communication mediums, along with ever changing and expanding modes of communications, especially through digital and social media, understanding communication options and their impact on change processes is a growing need. Navigating ways to communicate with appropriate usage and efficacy for different audiences is challenging. There are rich research opportunities available, specifically around audience communication styles, preferences, and communication mediums.

Through the lenses of the quantum paradigm, power configurations, and networks of stakeholders (Manning 2013) and based on the literature, I sought to explore the role and impact of communications in a change initiative and further to identify practical insights on how to

effectively use communications to navigate change. The methodology used to explore this focus the research questions is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH STRATEGY

This focus of this study is the role and impact of communications in identification and selection of a change, the creation process of a strategic communications plan, and the selection of components involved in communications during a change initiative.

In seeking “to achieve as full an understanding of the phenomenon as possible” (Merriam, 2009, p. 42), I chose a case study methodology because of its particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic characteristics. *Particularistic* refers to the ability to focus on a particular phenomenon. This particular case is important for what it revealed about the phenomenon of change communications. It also focused on a particular phenomenon, a tuition reset, that other institutions previously undertook, have undertaken subsequent to this case, and potential will undertake in the future. The use of case studies concentrates on the way people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation (Merriam, 2009). *Descriptive* refers to rich, thick description of the case under question: “Thick description is a term from anthropology that means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated” (Merriam, 2001, p. 30). *Heuristic* is a term used to describe how a case study can illuminate understanding of the phenomenon under study. Findings can bring insights, extensions of knowledge, or confirmation to what is already understood. Case studies can bring into focus relationships between variables that converge into action that create life the way it is; case studies can bring new understanding as to why life is as it is (Merriam, 2001). Responses from the participants during the interviews describing situations, meetings, discussions, and

observations provided illustrations which brought greater understanding of how communication looked, existed, and interacted during a particular change initiative.

The focus of this research and case study is to explore the following research questions:

1. What role did communications play in identifying and deciding on the change to implement?
2. What was the process by which Converse College created the communication strategy and plan for the major change (tuition reset)?
3. What communication strategies were included in the communication plan?
4. How was the communications strategy and plan implemented?

Sample Selection

Determining the appropriate sample for this study involved several considerations. First, I determined a research site that had characteristics important to the study and had experienced a change. Next, to select participants, I identified who participated in and experienced the change process. Lastly, I collected the appropriate documents and added them to data needed to explore the research questions.

Research Site

Merriam (2009) stated a “purposeful sample is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). Merriam noted there are two levels of sampling, with the first being the case. The case selected aligns with what Yin (2009) calls a revelatory case. The institution selected for this case study, Converse College, provides a look at how an institution pursued a change initiative of a tuition reset. At the time that the college pursued this change, many in higher education saw it as a controversial path. Because lowering or resetting

tuition was perceived to be a bold step for an institution to take, they received national mention in higher education circles for the initiative which makes this case an interesting instance to examine what role and impact communications had in the change.

Converse College is a small, independent, liberal arts, women's college founded in 1889 in Spartanburg, SC (Kibler, 1973). As Converse neared its 125th anniversary in 2014, leadership of the college saw the institution's operations were not sufficient to support continued relevance, growth, and success. The institution undertook a 19-month review and planning process in beginning in September 2011 to position them for short- and long-term success. Dynamics for the institution at the time of the holistic review included funding model challenges, shifting competition, changing student profiles, and rising operational costs. These dynamics align with similar small, independent and women's colleges (Fullan & Scott, 2009). This process included identifying needed changes, planning how to implement those changes, and preparing for the 125th-anniversary milestone. The review process produced a proposal to lower tuition by 43%, which was approved by the Board of Trustees and then announced publicly on September 10, 2013 to begin for the 2014-2015 academic year. This case looks at the period of time from the strategic review through the public announcement.

The president, Dr. Betsy Fleming, granted permission to access documents, administration, faculty, staff, students, alumnae/i, board of trustee members, and external partners as a part of this study.

Participants

Merriam (2009) described the second level of purposeful sampling as having a set of criteria for whom to interview. Merriam (2009) described, "snowball, chain, or network sampling as perhaps the most common form of purposeful sampling" (p. 79). The criterion for

selecting participants was having been in a leadership role or part of a team charged with any part of the change process, from identifying and selecting the change to creation and implementation of the communications strategy. I identified initial participants from a conversation with the president, validated the list with documents provided, and added additional participants suggested from initial interviews. Because the case involved examining a part of the change process that was complete, at the time of the interviews, some participants were still in their roles at the college and others had moved to other roles or were no longer at the institution. Table 4 includes the roles of participants interviewed and their status in that role at the time of the interview.

Data Collection

Qualitative data consist of “direct quotations of one’s experience, opinions, feeling, and knowledge obtained through interviews; detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviors, actions recorded in observations; and excerpts, quotations, or entire passages extracted from various types of documents” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). Yin (2009) suggested various sources of data are complementary, and a good case study will use a variety of sources of evidence. Collecting data is about asking, watching, and reviewing (Wolcott, 1992). The data collected, reviewed, and analyzed for this study included transcripts from 16 individual interviews and selected documents from the holistic review and planning process.

Documents

For context, corroboration of evidence, and augmentation (Yin, 2009), documents were reviewed before and after interviews. Documents reviewed included the strategic plan, commissioned third-party studies, articles and studies used by the review and planning committees, meeting notes, projections, modeling, sample communications, timelines, talking

points, communication collateral, electronic communications, newsletters, social media communications and posts, videos, and website content (see Appendix A).

Interviews

The interview protocol for this study was semistructured and neo-positive, as identified by Roulston (2007). In this type of neo-positive interview, a “skillful interviewer asks good questions, minimizes bias through [their] neutral stance, generates quality data and produces valid findings” (Roulston, 2007, p. 5). The interview protocol began with general questions and then became more specific to areas of investigation. Interview questions addressed three categories in alignment with the research questions: (a) change planning, (b) change-initiative communications planning, and (c) implementation (see Appendix B).

Participants selected for interviews were involved in the change planning or the change initiative communications planning and implementation. The 16 interview participants were from various stakeholder groups, both internally across the campus and externally from partner organizations. Table 4 indicates the number of interviews in each stakeholder group and how many interviewees were in the same role at the time of the interview as they were during the change process. Each research candidate received an email invitation that included a statement outlining the purpose of the study (see Appendix C) and upon agreement to be interviewed, they received an interview confirmation email (see Appendix D). Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted in person or by telephone. At the beginning of each interview, the participant was given a consent form (see Appendix E) notifying them of the parameters of their participation and that names and titles might be used in the findings of the study. Extensive field notes were taken for all interviews, and in-person interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Table 1

Interview Participants

Role	Number of interviews	Number of participants in same role at time of interview
President	1	1
Trustee	1	1
Administrator	8	3
Faculty Leader	1	0
Staff Member	1	1
Student	1	0
Alumna	1	1
External Partners	2	2

Interview questions (see Appendix B) were written with a focus on understanding participants’ participation in and perceptions of the process of developing and determining the change initiative, participation in the development of and implementation of the communication plan, recollection and perceptions of communications, and thoughts on lessons learned.

Data Analysis

Key to the outcome of the project is the analysis of the data to extract meaning. As Merriam (2009) noted, the process “involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read” (p. 175-176). To manage the data, I organized documents, interview notes, and transcripts into what Yin (2009) referred to as the *case study database*.

I familiarized myself with the documents collected prior to the interviews. Prior to each interview, I also reviewed the research questions, the organizational-perspective conceptual framework, and the models of communications strategies. After each interview, I scribed notes on initial findings. Once the interviews were completed, I reviewed transcripts for accuracy, while reviewing the audio recordings, and aligned my post interview notes accordingly. I used

selective coding, which Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined as “(t)he process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p. 116).

Data were coded by categories determined *a priori*, according to the five characteristics of the organizational-perspective conceptual framework and the communications strategies outlined in five key studies (Armenakis et al., 1999; Goodman & Truss, 2004; Klein & Ritti, 1985; Richardson & Denton, 1996; Young & Post 1993), as discussed in Chapter 2 (see Table 2). From this coding, I looked for themes based on frequency of mentions and the relevance of responses to the research questions. This review yielded three emergent themes that I then reviewed using the lenses of the research questions and the organizational-perspectives conceptual framework. The three themes provided findings that corresponded to the research questions, with practical insights and actionable strategies to use in the communications in a change initiative. These themes demonstrate critical components to moving forward successfully, as perceived by the participants in this particular change process (see Table 5).

Validity and Reliability

Producing valid and reliable knowledge from research is a concern for all researchers. Merriam (2009) pointed out an additional concern: Research in applied fields should be done in an ethical manner because such research can affect people’s lives. To persuade readers of the trustworthiness of the research, Firestone (1987) suggested in qualitative research, that sufficient detail must be included to show the author’s conclusions make sense. To ascertain validity or credibility, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) posed the notion of supporting that the findings are credible given the data presented, I employed triangulation, crystallization, peer review, and member checks.

Triangulation, as discussed by Merriam (2009), is using multiple sources of data to compare and cross check. Interview data were collected from people with various perspectives, documents were reviewed, and videos of portions of the experiences described by participants were viewed. The term *crystallization*, used by Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), is a description of the process of gathering many sources, rather than the two to three common in triangulation. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) noted, “What we see depends on our angle of response—not triangulation but rather crystallization” (p. 963). Interview data were collected from participants internal and external to the institution, some who directly engaged in and some who tangentially participated at various levels and in various roles during the time of the change initiative investigated.

Peer review is a strategy where a colleague scans raw data and assesses the plausibility of the findings based on the data (Merriam, 2009). I used peer review with several colleagues with various experiences and expertise.

Member checking clarified misinterpretation of what participants said and identified bias from the researcher (Maxwell, 2005). This process helped round out my understanding of similar and opposing responses expressed by participants.

Reliability is the concern of the extent to which research findings can be replicated. Replicability can be problematic in certain types of research involving human behavior, as human behavior is never static (Merriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) were the pioneers of conceptualizing reliability as *dependability* or *consistency*. They suggested rather than being replicable, results must make sense given the data collected, and therefore be consistent and dependable. In constructing the research and interview questions, sample selection, data collection process, and data analysis based on the literature and models, the research design of

this case study could be used to investigate change communications in other change initiatives at other institutions.

Researcher Positionality

In relation to this study I embody three roles—researcher, engaged Converse College alumna, and higher education consultant. There is potential for lack of neutrality on my part as the researcher because I am an alumna of Converse College and currently sit on the board of trustees—though I was not a trustee as the change was decided, the communication plan was created, or during the plan’s initial implementation. Another consideration is that I work as a consultant in the field of higher education, advising leadership in similar situations to the one presented in the case study.

Conversely, my understanding and previous interactions with the college afforded me access to leadership and participants may have shared more freely with me interviews. Further my knowledge of the institution, the higher education industry, and higher education marketing allowed me to both question and listen for specifics that are particular to an institutional setting.

Being ever aware of these factors, I approached the research from my role as student and with a mindset of a curious researcher during the data collection. Throughout the research, I employed peer review to ensure objectivity and thorough inclusion of all data in the process leading to my findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the role and impact of communications in a change initiative and to identify practical insights on how to effectively use communications to navigate change. Using the organizational perspective of quantum paradigm as a lens through which to view the college's organizational environment in which the change initiative and communications occurred, interviews and documents were used to explore the role of communication in the change process.

A review of the literature on change models shows communication is seen as a key component of change, yet no definitive set of communications strategies prevail across models. Researchers seem to agree that leadership, from the most senior leader in the organization to all those with leadership responsibility, plays a vital role in planning and facilitating communication strategy and implementation. Ultimately, leadership must be accountable to communicate change and demonstrate how communication should occur internally and externally. There is agreement throughout the literature that the manner in which communication strategy, planning, and execution occur are related to outcomes of the change. The literature primarily examines change involving people as agents of and participants in change and recipients of impacts of the change. Informed by the foundational concepts presented in the literature, I analyzed the data to provide insights into communication planning, processes, and implementation tactics.

This chapter provides a description of the context for change at Converse College, the process to select the change to address the need, and the development of the communications

strategy and plan to announce the change internally and externally. This description is drawn from transcripts of the interviews and review of documents.

Also presented in this chapter are the three themes emerged from the analysis of the findings: (a) impact of presidential leadership; (b) necessity of partnerships; and (c) criticality of systematic end-to-end planning and monitoring. These themes show critical components of communication in moving change forward successfully, as perceived and reported by participants in this particular change process. The chapter concludes with a collection of lessons learned in the process of identifying the change, creating a communication strategy and plan, and implementing the change public announcement as shared by the interview participants.

Context for Change at Converse College

As a tuition-dependent institution, Converse College was aware that continual growth is necessary for success. The college had completed a strategic planning process that produced a 5-year strategic vision and plan (SVP). The SVP guided the college with various components of the plan being implemented over time. Annually, the plan was revisited to note progress, alignment with the current situation, and adjustments based on the parameters. A hallmark of the plan was to identify and enhance distinct features of the college's offerings and experiences for students, faculty, and staff. The college had moved along a positive growth trajectory by highlighting its distinctions that had increased visibility locally and regionally because of greater outcomes for faculty and student success, such as research contributions, winning competitions, and individual achievements. Leaders at Converse wanted to know how to sustain its growth and what would be needed for sustainability.

Understanding the need for a sustainable business model to move past the year-to-year existence of the college, the president determined the focus going forward should be on strategic

enrollment planning (SEP). This focus required a different type of planning process than an in which the college had engaged previously. Rather than an inside-out process of internal discussion and decision making about next steps, the process had an outside-in process, using external examination to understand the economic environment, market dynamics, competition, and desires of markets served. The president described the difference in the processes:

I think the SEP process from where I (sat) was . . . most significant and different in how it looked at what the outside world wanted from higher education, how that related to what our strengths were, and what we offered. . . We really started with a process of (asking), who are our students? Where are they coming from? Where are they going? What are their aspirations? And how do we do one of two things, or do both—How do we grow our market share in certain areas and how do we find new market share in other areas?

The SEP was an extension of the strategic planning work and aligned with the first strategic priority in the SVP, which was to maximize enrollment and net income. To launch this process, a committee was formed. The director of institutional research, assessment, and effectiveness explained, “It started with a very broad base of people that were involved in the strategic enrollment plan. The SEP (committee) was simply a very broad constituency where we (were) . . . really trying to get somebody from every area of the college.”

Initially, the focus of the SEP was more programmatic than pricing. At the beginning of the process, the college reviewed their programs and the market. Realizing the complexity of the reviews, the SEP committee made the decision to include an external partner. The project included a price-sensitivity study, a market-positioning study, focus groups with inquiry-pool students and parents, competitive analyses, and a review of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and other available pertinent data sources. The dean of the School of Humanities and Sciences recalled:

We did what I think is the smartest thing we could have done, which was to undertake serious and extensive research. Very few colleges, I think, would take the time, the trouble, and the expense, to do primary research. They would rely on secondary sources. We commissioned [our partner] to do primary market research in our main target recruiting areas. . . We brought them in to do. . . a programmatic analysis of our offerings in relation to the market. . . and a price-sensitivity study.

To design a course of action based on the findings from the analysis, the SEP committee, comprised of administration, faculty, and staff, created workgroups for programs, marketing, pricing/affordability, and financial aid to explore options to strategically grow enrollment. The workgroups were used to bring forward ideas to maximize enrollment and net income. Each workgroup was charged with looking at options to address the two desired areas for growth through the lens of their focus. Ideas put forward by each workgroup had to be in alignment with the college's mission, address the then-current model, and position the college for short term-success with probability for sustainable, longer-term success. A member of the SEP committee, the director of admissions, recalled:

I think it made sense that through the SEP . . . everything (every idea) had an opportunity. If you had an idea, if there was something that we needed to look at, this was the opportunity to bring that idea to the table so that we could really take it through the business model process and really see if it is going to hold water.

Key outcomes of the analysis were (a) Converse had the growth opportunities aligned with their distinction in the undergraduate population; (b) competitors of Converse were local and regional public institutions; and (c) affordability came in the form of pricing and annual increases over the four years to graduation internally. The critical issue that came to the forefront from the analysis was affordability. The perennial concern of price and affordability was heightened by the external environment of the 2007-2009 recession and continued to be of primary concern for students and parents. The primary research done in 2012 by the external

research partner captured in their analysis the continued importance of affordability for students and parents in choosing a college to attend.

The president guided the work of the SEP committee and its workgroups by pushing committee members to change the ways they thought about Converse's role in the world and to identify options that would have major impacts. Workgroups sought to find useful options for consideration by the committee. After reviewing inputs and proposals from workgroups, the SEP committee agreed to pursue affordability. The vice president for institutional advancement described this pivotal point in process:

We get the market study. The market's telling us that we're overpriced. And so those 15 people [the SEP committee], we start to build a consensus around, one, we've got to go down [in price]. Two, we definitely have to change dramatically how we structure our financial aid profile, which would take a lot of work, and three, we started to coalesce around a range.

Once this focus was decided, the affordability workgroup became the single working group to provide a proposal for strategies to drive short- and long-term success.

The affordability committee, relying on the analysis and working closely with the research partner, dove into pricing and value as components of affordability. Examination of the price sensitivity study's data yielded several realizations. The most striking realization was Converse was not fully aware of the dynamics of the populations they served. Insights from the price sensitivity study indicated that when students chose an institution other than Converse, it was most often due to price and affordability, and the study indicated local, public institutions were their biggest competitors. The SEP's examination of institutional finance data supported a tuition reset as a top strategy to meet the college's short- and long-term goals.

As the affordability workgroup settled on a tuition reset, the workgroup was narrowed to four internal employees and an external research partner to dig deeply to determine the right

pricing to align with student populations and the chosen target markets. The internal group members consisted of the vice president for institutional advancement, the vice president of student life, the director of institutional research, assessment, and effectiveness, and the director of admissions. The group members represented key functional areas, more specific knowledge of different stakeholder groups, encompassed different expertise, and even held different points of view about what the definition and best delivery of affordability would look like for the college. The external research partner acted in a consulting capacity helping with analysis, running pricing models, and bringing additional outside perspective to discussions. One workgroup member recalled, “[The president] tasked us to. . . bring her a plan that would work and would radically change the whole structure of Converse.” Even with the small number of participants, it was critical varied perspectives and views were represented. The director of admissions shared the vice president of student life “initially was probably the biggest naysayer of the group. By the end, [she] was certainly one of the biggest cheerleaders of the [tuition] reset.” The vice president of student life said, “Our core [work] group had passionate and animated conversations because of our trust. It may have looked like arguing to outsiders, but it was our process.”

Given the sensitive nature of the work on the proposal for a tuition reset, workgroup members signed nondisclosure agreements (NDAs). The president knew broad knowledge internally or any external knowledge of discussions could have an adverse effect on the planning and positioning of the college and could be a denigrating blow to the institution’s reputation as a quality and desirable choice for students. NDAs made it possible for the college to explore options, control the narrative, and capture the marketing impact of the change.

The workgroup dug deeply into the idea of a tuition reset to understand its feasibility and implications. The committee ran models at different price points, tried to break each model,

considered all stakeholders involved (e.g., prospective students, current students, parents, faculty, staff, administrators, alumnae/i, community), and considered short-, medium-, and long-term effects. During this review of stakeholders, it became clear a critical group was student-athletes, due to the impact a tuition reset would have on athletic scholarships and the potential perception of athletes and their parents about the student athlete's perceived value based on the scholarship amount; therefore, the athletic director was added to the workgroup. The majority of the work of the workgroup occurred over a 6-month period, during which they met as a whole in weekly meetings, ad hoc in pairs and triads, and sought outside input as needed. The research partner joined meetings monthly, either virtually and in person. Given the nature of the conversations, meetings were confidential, and the majority of interactions were face to face and in private spaces.

Parallel to the workgroup focusing on the task of creating a working model for a tuition reset, the president educated the board of trustees through plenary sessions at board meetings, sharing articles, and providing detailed data on the higher education market as a whole and Converse in particular. Data were shared as information and without conclusions. The education of the board included preparing them with the information needed to receive the coming proposal for the transformational change. The president described this process:

It was important . . . how we communicated . . . why we needed strategic enrollment planning to our board of trustees. All along, this was happening on campus, but all along we were also working together to make sure we presented our board of trustees with information that made them aware and more knowledgeable about what was happening with us and how it fit in with higher education trends in general. It was important to make sure that the folks who would ultimately have to make the decisions . . . understood why, and then also were kept abreast of some of the ideas that were coming up.

After more than four months, the workgroup had created a proposal that would meet all criteria set by the president and addressed the two goals of maximizing enrollment and net income. The president presented the tuition reset proposal to the board of trustees who ultimately approved it. Though the board had been prepared for this discussion through the president's educational process, the conversation was heated. The president described the event:

We did have some pretty heated conversation . . . with the board. [They asked], can't we just wait? Can't we wait to see what everyone else does before we are a leader? Actually, there was a seminal moment in the board meeting . . . where I basically said, "If you don't vote for this now, then I am not the right president for Converse College. I believe passionately in this being the right thing to do." A trustee asked, "What do you mean? You're telling us you're going to resign if we don't agree to this?" I said, "I'm just telling you; if you don't agree this is the right thing to do, then I don't think I'm the right president."

Once the tuition-reset change initiative had been approved by the board of trustees, the workgroup brought in additional internal and external partners for implementation planning. Internally, the vice president of enrollment and marketing and the director of media and public relations joined the group to lead the communications strategy and plan efforts. The vice president of enrollment and marketing shared as the implementation planning began:

We knew it [implementation] was going to have to be done exceptionally well in terms of communication. I took a step back and said, "Wow, we are doing this [tuition reset]. Now what?" I began to think about all the steps from A to Z to make Z a really happy place to be.

Understanding the complexity of implementation and the criticality of its success, the workgroup knew they would need partners to complete the process successfully.

A key area critical to implementation requiring a partner was marketing and public relations. The vice president of enrollment and marketing identified and vetted several agencies and along with the president decided on a marketing agency partner. The agency chosen had worked with other institutions implementing a tuition reset and also limited their work to a

selective clientele. The president shared, “[The agency] wanted to make sure we were doing [the tuition reset] from a position of strength versus as a way to try to jump start enrollment.” A first action of the agency was to connect Converse with another institution they had helped successfully launch a tuition-reset initiative. Several workgroup members reported how invaluable the conversation with the experienced institutional partner was for insight in process and outcomes.

Based on comments from participants the initial focus in communications was the messaging. The vice president of institutional research, assessment, and effectiveness stated:

One of the things we knew, in other words we were going to have to address, we knew we had gotten into a very unclear world. Most people don’t understand higher education finance. Most people don’t understand scholarship and discount rates and all these other pieces. We knew the communications piece was so important. We knew going out with this [initiative] that we would have to be so very clear. Misinformation or even misperceptions could really ruin [it]. The thing that we always hammered home was we didn’t call this a “tuition reduction,” rather a “tuition reset.”

The initial way the agency worked collaboratively with the college was in the branding refresh effort to identify messaging that would capture Converse and effectively communicate who they were. Returning to the Founders’ Ideal for the college, looking at the current market for higher education, and with focuses on current stakeholders and targeted market segments, the college landed on a tagline of “Voice, Value, Vision.” Crafting the brand was key to positioning Converse for the roll out of the tuition reset and for recruitment going forward. Arriving at this brand and tagline was a collaborative effort with a large amount of ideation and input from the college. All those involved in the change process understood how important it was the college was making the change from a position of strength and knew from watching other institutions roll out similar initiatives that having a solid message and keeping on message was critical. For the initiative, the message was “It’s the right thing to do.” Articulating the point of view of the

college was the foundation of the communications strategy. Once the key message was decided as the cornerstone of communications strategy, the logistics of internally and externally communicating the initiative were crafted.

While the overarching goal of the strategy was to build buy in across all stakeholder groups, the details of the communications plan were specific to stakeholder groups. With the refreshed brand and the initiative message identified, the team identified all stakeholder groups and the vice president for enrollment and marketing noted:

What our [agency partner] did for us was to help us understand the enormity of the communications effort and the variety of constituents that needed our attention. What we were able to do then, was to figure out what had to happen and how to tailor our messaging to all those . . . different constituencies.

The constituencies identified were the board of trustees, alumnae/i, faculty, staff, students, parents, student-athletes, prospective students, prospective parents, the Spartanburg community, peer institutions, and the higher education community at large. For each constituency, a profile was created including information on their perspectives, needs, desires, communications styles, and most usual communication methods and modes. Aligned with these profiles specific tactics to share the information needed in timely and effective manners were identified for each group. The director of media and public relations shared, “We were very thorough and thoughtful. We really left no stone unturned when it came to how to reach different audiences.”

The tactics across audiences included conference calls for the board of trustees and alumnae/i champions; videos for use internally and externally, sharing the brand and the initiative message; a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document; talking-point documents specific to different audiences (i.e., trustees, faculty leaders, alumnae/i champions, staff leaders); customized letters for each student and their parent/s; live and virtual forums for questions and dialogue for different audiences (i.e., faculty, staff, students, parents); emails to alumnae/i; press

releases to local, regional, and national news outlets; and social media (Facebook and Twitter) for Converse community members and external audiences. The creation of individual documents, artifacts, and items of collateral was a collaborative effort between the college, the agency, and other design and print partners. Throughout the preparation for the announcement and roll out of the initiative, confidentiality was critical. Each partner was informed about the initiative and the need for confidentiality of the work prior to the public announcement. The confidentiality was stipulated in contracts as they were given their task to accomplish whether it was creating a video, designing marketing collateral, or printing materials.

After determining tactics, creating the collateral, and assigning responsibilities across the internal team and partners, a timeline for rolling out the announcement was created. Participants reported that it was important to Converse to control the message and its release. Knowing what had gone well and what had not for other institutions doing similar tuition change initiatives, timing the release of information to different audiences was critical to a successful roll out. The director of media and public relations recalled:

[We] carefully thought through who needed to know what and when. We asked ourselves questions like, “Why does it matter that alumnae hear this within 30 minutes of students being told?” and “Who should hear first and how much time can be between groups?” We were keenly aware that social media changes everything. One Tweet, it goes viral, and everyone has heard. With one president and many groups to inform over a short period of time, deciding on what went out when, how the announcement to groups would occur, and when to make information public through a press conference and on our website were all critical decisions.

Based on the work done to understand the audiences, a timeline was created by the implementation team at Converse, along with the marketing agency partner. Three days prior to the public announcement, it was decided the board of trustees, the alumnae/i champions, and specific campus leaders would be informed and prepared through conference calls the day prior to the public announcement. The alumnae/i champions were sent an embargo notice about the

information prior to the call, and each participant had to confirm their agreement to the embargo prior to joining the call. At the same time, a select group of faculty leaders, staff leaders, and student leaders were informed, so they could have time to digest the information and be prepared to help various audience groups the day of the announcement. The director of media and public relations met individually with the major news outlets in the area to prepare them for thorough stories at the announcement. The evening prior to the announcement, an embargoed press release was shared with a group of news outlets. While the director of media and public relations shared that she was aware that this was a gamble, the implementation team believed and the marketing agency partner advised that it was important for the news to be spread broadly.

The activities led up to the actual day of the announcement, which was planned meticulously, starting with the president making the announcement to a meeting of the full faculty and staff, where she received a standing ovation. Next, the president made the announcement to the students, and then the press conference was the public forum for the announcement. A part of the planning for the day was to have a variety of audiences represented at the press conference, including trustees, alumnae/i, faculty, staff, students, and visitors. The campus was hosting a group of high school guidance counselors for a luncheon, and this group was asked to join the press conference to provide the press with another pertinent group for reactions to the announcement. As the announcement was occurring, part of the team was sharing the announcement, the video, and other information about the initiative on social media and live on the college's website. The director of media and public relations noted:

We anticipated hard questions so did draft lots of talking points for different groups. One thing we didn't anticipate was the traffic to our website. It crashed for about an hour but we got it back up quickly. That was a good problem to have.

The morning of the public announcement, individual, customized letters were hand delivered to the campus post office for each student. Each customized letter outlined the current financial aid package and out-of-pocket costs and the new financial aid package and out of pocket costs after the tuition reset. The same information was emailed to parents. The director of institutional research, assessment, and effectiveness reported:

That level of detail was crucial. That's something we learned from [our institutional partner] to present [students] with a message that shows them precisely where they were before the reset and where they are after the reset. It still took a lot of conversation afterwards for people to understand.

In the week following the public announcement, forums, email addresses, phone numbers, and staff office hours were made available as avenues for further information, feedback, questions, and dialogue. Some of these offerings were used and others were not.

Themes

The interviews provided rich information about the events and perspectives of the participants. The interview participants shared thoughts and perceptions of events from the initial SEP meetings through the tuition-reset initiative roll out and observations of others with whom they engaged. Three themes emerged across the interviews: (a) impact of presidential leadership; (b) necessity of partnerships; and (c) criticality of systematic end-to-end planning and monitoring (see Table 5).

Table 5

Finding Themes

Theme	Key Actor/s	Findings	Implications for Practice
Impact of Presidential Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on mindset shift beyond just gaining acceptance of change created, articulated, and embodied bold and impactful vision • Educated stakeholders on issues causing and effecting change—provided information and data without conclusions or a point of view • Created an inclusive environment—invited, welcomed and included all points of view • Garnered unified support of the board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President should possess and articulate a clear vision • President should focus attention and energy on mindset and cultural issues of the change to initiate and drive process • President gains support and trust through showing conviction, educating, and engaging each stakeholder group
Necessity of Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Committee Members • Internal Team Members • President • Board • External partners—firms • External partners—institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used Confidentiality—controlled information in discussion phase • Utilized non-disclosure agreements (NDA) • Specified contract items to be confidential • Sought specialized expertise with internal partners • Sought multiple and opposing points of view • Added appropriate additional participants to process in each phase • Included key constituents throughout process for progressive buy-in • Leveraged expertise and experience of external partners while the institution retained and owned final decisions • Commissioned primary research • Consulted institutions with similar experiences • Partnered with firms possessing specific change marketing and PR expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and utilize specialized expertise during the change process for input in decision making, planning, and implementation • Manage key information in an intentional and timely manner by use of confidentiality agreements • Balance control and transparency of information through lenses of timing and stakeholder group needs and concerns
Criticality of Systemic End-to-End Planning and Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Committee Members • Internal Team Members • External partners—firms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully profiled stakeholder groups—including perceptions, concerns, needs, goals, and consequences • Created and delivered change message • Began change from position of strength • Aligned mission, brand, change message • Created solid/singular change message • Made single message relevant to each stakeholder group • Planned for and monitored risk factors actively • Prepared for breach of confidentiality specifically during change planning process and media announcement embargo • Dedicated staff to plan, engage, and monitor social media platforms • Planned and staffed forums for multiple stakeholder groups to address questions and create dialog 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and attend to messaging from initial discussions through full execution • Identify and profile all stakeholder groups, align message versioning and delivery mode to each group • Continually monitor and actively attend to stakeholder groups progress in receiving, understanding, and accepting message across platforms

Impact of Presidential Leadership

Throughout the process, from deciding on the change to pursue to the creation of the communication plan and implementation, interview respondents highlighted the critical impact of the president's leadership. While leadership was exhibited in multiple ways by the president and other members of the team, from the committee who brought the change proposal to individuals guiding the plan development and roll out of the tuition reset, all interview participants mentioned the president's strong leadership as foundational throughout the process. Participants reported instances where she showed conviction and courage, particularly with the board of trustees, actively reached out to multiple stakeholder groups asking for and listening to their thoughts and opinions, and held the SEP team to delivering a transformational and substantive change in line with a set of mutually agreed-upon criteria. The vice president for enrollment management and marketing noted, "Without a visionary, change like this is unlikely. I don't think that visionary actions come by committee. I think the vision comes first and that is what [the president] definitely was—a visionary."

A noted starting point initiated and driven by the president was an intentional mindset shift. The president shared:

I do think that's really important . . . to have both a change mindset and a growth mindset. I do think our sector can tend toward fixed mindsets. Trying to unhinge them from that fixed mindset of what a professor does, what a student does, what an administrator does to really rethink the dynamic that makes higher education as an institution successful.

She challenged the members of the SEP committee to take on growth-and-change mindsets to be open to possibilities, look at things differently, and leverage data to explore possibilities for supporting a sustainable model as a tuition-driven institution.

The president served as a guide and a participant, rather than dictating and controlling the process. She saw her role as two-fold:

One was the role of being a member of the committee, not guiding the discussion, so that other talent, perspectives, and input could be valued and make important contributions. The second role was to push back. It was to ask a lot of questions, probably to be provocative. I asked for more data in some areas, in others I asked questions like, “How?” “Why?” and “Tell me more.” It was in some ways my role to provoke. More than once I pushed back saying, “That doesn’t work. It doesn’t meet the criteria we need it to meet to make this a transformative and substantive change. If we’re going to do this, we’ve got to go all in.”

From the onset of the SEP work and committee, interview participants reported the president set the context of being open to possibilities with all ideas and suggestions being welcome and worthy of exploration. After many ideas were voiced and collected in the large SEP committee, she split the large committee into working groups to take different ideas through the business model process, pressure testing the ideas to see which ideas were viable.

During the winnowing process, the president played two roles—a SEP committee member and holding the committees accountable to providing data to determine the viability of ideas. Once affordability became the chosen pathway, the president handed the task of vetting ideas to a subcommittee of four, who were charged to bring a proposed solution to the larger SEP committee. Once she gave them this charge, she stepped back and let them work together, with regular check ins, where she asked provocative questions, pushed them to create a bold solution, and was a partner and champion in the process. The vice president of institutional advancement recalled the president’s unfavorable reaction to an initial solution brought by the subcommittee that did not fully meet the criteria: “[She] tasked us to go back and bring her a plan that would work and would radically change the whole structure of Converse.”

Two board members reported throughout the process of working toward a transformational solution, the president concurrently worked to educate the board of trustees. She

did this through providing them with articles about the state of higher education and issues institutions of higher education, particularly small liberal arts colleges, were facing. The information was provided without any conclusions. The purpose in providing the information in digestible amounts across time was to educate the board on issues in the higher education marketplace and for Converse, so they would be equipped to make the decision on the coming change proposal. The president explained:

[It] was really important how we communicated with our board of trustees. How we made them aware of what the changes were with the higher education marketplace. All along this was happening on campus, but all along we were also working together to make sure we presented our board with information that made them aware and more knowledgeable about what was happening with us and how it fit in with higher education trends in general. We really wanted to make sure that the folks who would ultimately have to make the decision . . . understood why, and then also were kept abreast of some of the ideas that were being discussed.

Several participants noted that sharing more information about the institution and the higher education industry in general necessitated a change in the frequency and type of interactions with the board and the structure of the board meetings. Readings were introduced to the board on a periodic cadence and in preparation for the on-campus meetings. Readings were selected by the president to provide a broader context for issues about which the president wanted them to think. This was a shift from a focus on committee meetings and sharing updates during those sessions to plenary sessions where “everyone heard the same message, and it was mostly data related to Converse and the higher education world at large changed the entire meeting structure to be more strategically focused on Converse in a higher [education] marketplace,” explained the president.

Knowing the proposed change was bold and preparing the board with information to help them be more comfortable in making the decision to invest in the change was another example of

the president's leadership as a change agent. Planning and executing steps with internal and external partners, specifically with the board, drove the approval of the board.

The president displayed courage by sharing her conviction the change was the best and right path for the college, and she stated before the board at a meeting that if the board did not agree to move forward on this proposal, she was not the right president for Converse. The board chair commented:

We had confidence in [the president] and her leadership style. She provided us with research, educated us, did planning, and had delivered wins in the prior years. Her conviction and being "all in" gave the board confidence to be 100% behind the initiative and her.

The director of media and public relations shared the response by the faculty and staff, as the president made the first announcement to them in a town hall the day of the announcement:

The response that [the president] got when she told the faculty and staff was a standing ovation. That was a perfect testament. I think it was a combination of "Wow, this is a great thing, and we support it," along with "Thank you for making a big leap, a bold move, and doing something that is clearly going to change the course for us. Thanks for being the leader that we want to follow."

As a result of leadership actions and behaviors, interview participants from the staff, faculty, and board all expressed trust, confidence, and a sense of shared purpose with the president. These relational connections enabled them to approve, participate in, and plan for and implement the change of the tuition reset.

Necessity of Partnerships

Throughout the initiative, from planning to implementation, partners were included in the process for their expertise and insights. Partners included internal and external partners. Internal partners who participated at different phases and on different committees and workgroups were from different functions and levels of the institution, and external partners included a research

firm, an institution who had engaged in the same change initiative of doing a tuition reset, and a higher education-focused marketing firm.

From the beginning of the initiative, the president included a variety of points of view, expertise, and experience in the original SEP committee. When the original SEP committee agreed that of 15 vetted ideas, the price and affordability stream was the most viable, a smaller subcommittee of four people was appointed by the president, including the vice president for institutional advancement, the vice president of institutional research, assessment, and effectiveness, the vice president of student life, and the director of admissions. Because of the sensitive nature of the conversation and the uncertainty of the initiative, members of the subcommittee signed a non-disclosure agreement or NDA to keep the discussions confidential until they decided on the pathway to take. The director of admissions explained:

We tried to keep it confidential because we felt like, one, we really didn't want it to get out if we were not going to do it, and, two, if we were going to do it then we really didn't want it to get out until we had planned and were ready to make a big announcement and roll out everything with a specific message.

The vice president of institutional advancement commented from the advisors at the institutions who had previously done a tuition reset, "the recommendation was loud and clear: Keep it tight. Do not lead it because the further you go out of the food chain, the more likely it is to get leaked. And then, you miss your marketing impact opportunity." The confidentiality request and requirement was for internal participants and external partners who participated in any phase of the initiative from exploration to implementation.

The workings of the subcommittee were described by members as including analysis of data, perspective sharing, and debating of various possibilities with each person taking views interchangeably to fully explore ideas, similar to a classroom debate. The four members and the president reported the vice president of student life played an important role in discussions of the

subcommittee because she was initially not an advocate of lowering pricing, and she was a proponent for the opposite idea of positioning for prestige, which would include raising tuition and aligning with a different aspirant set of institutions.

The group met in a variety of settings, including group meetings in conference rooms weekly, closed-door paired discussions, and phone calls and in-person meetings with the research agency. Meetings were often in locations other than a subcommittee member's office so as to have neutral ground and fewer disruptions.

As the work progressed, additional members were added to the subcommittee based on expertise needed. As discussions surfaced the effects of a tuition reset on athletic scholarships, the athletic director was included in the conversations to understand and consider the viewpoints and needs of student-athletes.

After the subcommittee had presented the proposal to the president, and she agreed it was the right one to put before the board, other members who would be involved in planning the communication strategy and plan for the announcement and implementation were added to the work group. Additional members, including the chief financial officer, the vice president for enrollment and marketing, the director of media and public relations, and the director of financial aid became active with the subcommittee at different phases as their expertise was needed. As each member was added, they agreed to the confidentiality request and signed NDAs.

With an awareness of the potential reactions and the importance of buy-in of stakeholders, a group of faculty members were convened prior to the public announcement of the initiative. "The decision was made that we needed to tell a small group of faculty because we needed to test faculty reaction," shared the head of the faculty senate. She continued:

We brought together about 12 faculty members, very carefully handpicked on a Friday afternoon and said to them, "You're going to be privy to some

information that is being released Monday and you can't talk about this to anybody." We picked people that we knew could be trusted. We selected from across disciplines, with some being more senior faculty, some younger, fairly new faculty, and others somewhere between those two groups. We wanted to get a read on who were the skeptics, what kind of questions they would ask and what they would say. This would help us be more prepared.

Alongside internal participants who contributed in the phases of the initiative, external partners played critical roles. Early in the SEP committee work, the college's ongoing research partner was engaged to provide programmatic analysis of the college's academic program offerings in relation to the market. As the discussions continued the partnership expanded to additional research studies. The dean of the School of Humanities and Sciences explained:

We did what I think was the smartest thing we could have done which was to undertake serious and extensive research. Very few colleges I think would take the time, the trouble and the expense to do primary research. They would rely on secondary sources. We commissioned [our research agency] to do primary market research in our main target recruiting areas with both prospective students and prospective parents. . . One of the keys was that [our research agency] worked with us on the actual design. They didn't just bring a packaged research study to us. [Collectively], they did modeling for the programs, primary research for the price sensitivity study, and curated secondary research that was oriented to both of these studies.

Beyond research design and study completion, the agency subject matter expert (SME) participated in SEP committee meetings and then with the subcommittee, as they analyzed data and worked toward a proposal. When tuition pricing became the focus, the SME worked alongside the subcommittee to run models with various price points to determine a workable solution that would meet the president's criteria. Throughout the process, the SME worked closely with the college and played several roles. The SME explained:

Our previous relationship with the college was foundational to us being able to help them with this process. Having both an understanding of the college and a core trust between us, we were able to work with them to design research, conduct the study, deliver the results, help them analyze it, and make a decision on a bold plan. During the process I played several roles. I was a defacto member on the SEP committee and each of its workgroups.

Once the subcommittee began its work, I met with them weekly, sometimes by phone and at other times face to face, and was facilitator, devil's advocate, advisor, and coach. Along the way I also played the role of educator to help various stakeholders from the SEP committee to the board better understand the research, the current climate in higher education, and build their acumen in some very complex topics and models so they could make best decisions for the college. My primary partner in this education role was the president. We almost acted as a tag team in this education process.

A second category of partners consulted were other institutions who had implemented the same change of a tuition reset or reduction. The subcommittee reviewed available information, contacted, and connected with several institutions who had announced and were implementing tuition price changes. Multiple institutions were reviewed to get a broad picture of the possible implications and outcomes. Some institutions were seeing positive results, some were seeing negative results, and one other was still early in the implementation phase though seeing promising indications for their first incoming class at the new price point. From this set of institutions, the college focused ongoing conversations with the institution seeing promising indicators. This institution openly shared their process, planning, communication strategies, and marketing agency partner. The president commented the greatest value they provided was “advising on strategies—communication strategies, roll out strategies, and how-tos.” The dean of the School of Humanities and Sciences shared:

We received invaluable help from the people at [the partner institution]. They were about a year and a quarter ahead of us. They were just about ready to see what would happen. They couldn't tell us that it had worked for them. They could only tell us it looked good. It was trending positively, but they had not yet seated their first class after the reset. . . . What they could do was to share their communications strategy with us, and the agency with whom they had worked. They were very open and helpful. What [the institution] told us and I think they were right . . . is that if you try to do this from a position of weakness, you'll fail. You will not have the resources to pull it off, because for a number of very complicated reasons, it does take at least several years of relatively strong performance to have the resilience to make it work.

A third key external partner in the process was a marketing firm. Based on the recommendation of the partner institution, a marketing firm was selected to create and implement the communications plan. The college engaged the same firm who had worked with the partner institution for two key reasons: (a) they had experience on this specific change from working with the partner institution, and (b) they had the conviction of the importance of the right positioning of the change initiative. They believed the reset had to come from a position of strength and not as a way to jump start enrollment. The alignment of philosophy led to the president's statement about the marketing firm: "We really wanted to work with them. We felt they were the right firm, and the right fit for us for this [initiative]."

As a partner in the process, the marketing firm brought expertise such as strategy, branding, creative, writing, advertising, public relations, social media, new media, and traditional collateral development and channel execution. The vice president of enrollment and marketing stated, "What (the marketing agency) did for us was help us understand the enormity of the communications effort and the variety of constituencies that needed our attention." She also pointed out the importance of the president and the team involved with the change understanding, believing, and supporting the importance and criticality of communications in the tuition-reset initiative.

Working collaboratively with the marketing firm was critical and maximized outcomes on the college's conservative communications budget for the initiative. While the firm provided expertise and guidance in the process of messaging, those from the college involved in the change, specifically the marketing and communications team along with the subcommittee and president, shared how important it was for them internally to really know who the college was and its essence. The creative work of the firm was helpful as a starting point for the college to

craft the brand message and the message for the initiative. The president articulated this critical component of ownership of the message: “We probably more than most other colleges take deep pride and ownership in our messaging. We’re very intentional about that. We think it makes a big difference.”

The CEO of the marketing agency, who participated throughout the process, confirmed the college had a “collective sense of self which helped to inform their intent in the initiative and how to best put forth a message of why it was being done.” In the collaboration, college implementation team members took on tactical components, and the marketing agency focused on advising and areas where the college had less experience or depth of reach, including training front-line staff members who would be responding and communicating to stakeholders, new media channels, and procuring additional coverage through regional and national media connections, with a focus in the higher education industry. In reflecting on the many moving parts and components of the communications strategy, planning, and implementation, the director of media and public relations stated, “I do think it was very important to have partners. I don’t think we could have done this without partners at all.”

Criticality of Systematic and End-to-End Planning and Monitoring

Throughout the process, from the first SEP committee meeting to the day of launch with the public announcement, detailed planning was foundational to the overall process. The president recalled:

[Our communications team was] very thorough and thoughtful. They created an incredibly comprehensive roadmap that meant we weren’t trying to think about everything all at once. Creating a huge project plan spreadsheet to document first this, then this was invaluable to keep us on track.

A central focus of the planning was the consideration of what effects the change initiative would have on internal and external stakeholders. These considerations permeated discussions

throughout the process and the focus on effects intensified during the phase of creating the message and planning for the announcement. The vice president of enrollment and marketing explained in partnership with the marketing agency, they worked to identify all stakeholder groups and “what we were able to do then was to figure out what had to happen and how to tailor our messaging to each of those individual and different constituencies.” To understand the needs and concerns of these different groups, focus groups of students, faculty, staff, alumnae/i, board members, and community members were convened. Data collected from focus groups informed targeted and relevant messaging for each group and greater understanding of the communication channels, which would most likely reach each group. A marketing profile was created for each stakeholder group, including demographic descriptions, perceptions, concerns, needs and possible consequences.

Though stakeholder group profiles were used as the lenses through which to prepare the delivery of the message of the change, the marketing agency advised and the Converse marketing team agreed on four considerations applied in the development of the central message: (a) start from a place of strength, (b) have a solid and singular message, (c) align the message to the mission and brand of the institution, and (d) be consistent in the delivery of the message from all sources and in all mediums.

The president’s launch of the SEP process and appointing the SEP committee was a next step of an intentional focus on the overall SEP that centered on the college’s distinctions. The president shared, “We had grown in visibility, grown in outcomes, started to grow in enrollments [with year-over-year double-digit increases], but we hadn’t seen the increases that we thought were possible.” The forward motion in these areas for the college provided a record of progress on which to craft a message that the change indicated a proactive choice rather than a reactive or

defensive choice. Stepping into this change provided an opportune time to revisit the college's brand. The director of media and public relations described the timing for the rebranding:

[Our marketing agency] helped guide our rebranding effort because they advised us that when communicating such a big change it was really an opportunity to rebrand the institution as a whole in terms of thinking, risk taking, making bold moves, being visionary, not being afraid to take the lead and step out and do something different for higher education.

Through a collaborative process with the marketing agency, which included research using focus groups of stakeholder groups and iterative discussions with the subcommittee and marketing team, the resulting tag line chosen for the rebranding was "Voice, Value, Vision." Once the decision to do a tuition reset was confirmed, the messaging discussions had focuses on two key statements: the college's Founder's Ideal and the new rebranding. The Founder's Ideal brought forth a key statement of educating students "to see clearly, to decide wisely, and to act justly" (Kibler, p. 100). Considering the economic, social, and physical contexts of the current and prospective students, the message about the reason for the tuition reset evolved to be articulated as "It's the right thing to do." The vice president of enrollment and marketing described how this became the solid, singular message for the change:

We all believed it. . . As we rallied around the communications message and method, we rallied around the formula that we believed would work. It was modeled to work. More and more and more people started to say, 'This is powerful, this is exciting, and we're a part of something tremendous.' I think the only reason anyone felt good about the exciting and the liberating part of the tuition reset was we all believed it was right. It was right to say, "It doesn't really cost this much to come [to the college], so we're not going to charge you that much."

Multiple participants noted that once this resonating message was determined—*it's the right thing to do*, it became the central focus for all communications and educational sessions with internal stakeholder groups and was incorporated in all external communications to be released on and after the day of announcement. These communications including the president's

launch day announcement speech, the videos available after the announcement, website and social media copy, and printed collateral.

While the key message was central and common, it was delivered in a customized way to each constituent group with the consideration of their perspectives, concerns, and needs. The dean of the School Humanities and Sciences provided an example of the customized messaging for one constituent group, the students:

We created a letter for every new and returning student that contained information specific to her. The second page of each letter had two columns. One [column] showed what would happen [the cost] in the old model for the student with her package [aid and scholarships] and the second [column] showed what would happen [the cost] under the new model. We said any student who wants can keep the old, but, of course, it will cost you more. I thought it was a brilliant move because what it did was to force people to confront image versus reality.

Being consistent in the message was easiest with communications created and delivered by the team members who were part of the change initiative. Providing consistency of message through others from internal college community members, such as faculty, staff, students, and board members, was less certain or controllable. Key considerations for the human factor of the sharing of the message were how to educate and prepare champions each stakeholder group and then to provide appropriate resources to all stakeholders for understanding and sharing the change initiative. To address this concern, various types of resources were created to provide information and support those who would be sharing the message, including FAQs, fact sheets, talking points documents, data from the research, the presentation shared by the president, videos, collateral pieces, website links, one-page documents that could be shared, and messages for sharing through social media.

Once the messaging was determined and customized for all stakeholder groups, specific messaging was created for the champions –board members, key alumnae, key faculty, key staff,

and student leaders—who would be sharing the message about the change to various stakeholder groups, the next consideration was timing. There were three timeframes or phases in the initiative—short term, medium term, and long term. Short term included all planning up to and including the day of the announcement; medium term encompassed the day of announcement to the 1-year milestone; and long term began after the 1-year milestone. Timing considerations included three main components: (a) determining who needed to know what information at what time, (b) confidentiality of information by those included in planning and preparations, and (c) responsiveness to stakeholders’ needs and concerns in a timely manner. An overarching concern was the potential impact of social media. The director of media and public relations described this planning process:

We were very thorough and thoughtful. We really left no stone unturned when it came to how to reach different audiences and really thinking carefully through who needs to know and when. Why does it matter if a student hears it, then alumnae/i know it within a thirty-minute window? We knew that social media changes everything. One tweet, it goes viral and then everyone has heard which can be huge . . . and can incite anger instead of excitement. We really thought through the intricate details.

To manage risks, NDAs were used as early as the SEP subcommittee and were used with all vendors up until the day of public announcement. The vice president for institutional advancement recalled from the beginning, the subcommittee working on the business model for the tuition reset had been asked to sign NDAs, and though a few additional people were brought in when expertise or resources were needed, it was closely “controlled who was in the room.” An additional tool utilized was an embargoed announcement to the media. This type of press announcement provided information about the College’s change, yet requested the confidential information not be shared until the publishing date, which was indicated on the announcement. The director of media and public relations described her angst: “As I hit the button to send the announcement, I remember holding my breath because all it would take was just one [media

outlet] to miss the ‘embargo’ at the top, and word would be out before the announcements started the next day at noon.”

The embargoed announcement was sent at 8:00pm the evening before the scheduled announcement. A minute-by-minute agenda began at noon the next day. The president began the roll out of the public announcement with a faculty and staff meeting. Next, she announced the tuition reset to the student body, and the final live announcement component of the day was the press conference, which included a group of high school guidance counselors who had been hosted on campus for a luncheon and then invited to join the press conference for the announcement. Multiple interviewees reported the extensive planning, practicing, and preparation for the public announcement schedule. The criticality of successfully executing the plan for that day was paramount in all the participants’ minds.

Parallel to the schedule of the president delivering the announcement live to different stakeholders was the work of the communications team making live the specific content about the announcement on the college’s existing website, making live a specific section of the website dedicated to the announcement, with content and a professionally prepared video, and announcements on social media platforms (i.e., Facebook and Twitter). Within a 24-hour period, each student had a personalized letter explaining each pricing model—the old and the new—and what it meant to them individually with their financial aid, scholarships, and personal responsibility. The letters contained the old and new options, side by side for comparison, and allowed students to choose between the options. The letters also provided students and parents resources for asking questions and included the schedule for forums to hear further details about changes for the institution and for them individually. The schedule for alumnae/i forums were

made available immediately following the announcement and began to take place within the same week.

There were plans for social media content, proactive engagement, and monitoring. Keeping control of the narrative in this medium was of concern to the implementation team. Prior to the announcement, Facebook and Twitter were monitored to confirm information had not leaked. During the day of the announcement, these platforms were monitored to watch reactions of stakeholders and to keep on message by providing information and correcting misinformation. The original social media team consisted of two professionals on the communications team who laid out the plan, created content for the platforms, and periodically monitored for leaks. The director of media and public relations explained the difference in the team beginning with the announcement:

We brought in three other social-media-savvy people who were on campus, not part of any particular team, just people we knew were really good in this area, and we had them on special assignment for a bit over 2 weeks following the announcement. They were our eyes and ears. They compiled lists of things to retweet that were really interesting or just impressive because of who had originally tweeted the comments. They were also looking out for angry posts and bringing those to our attention so that we could decide when to respond, how to respond, or make the decision to not get dragged into an online debate which was being well informed or moderated by some of our champions we had engaged and trained.

Half the interviewees mentioned concerns about the effect of social media and the potential for it derailing or negatively influencing the reception of the message about the change. Interviewees reported careful planning, specific staffing, and conscientious monitoring were put into use, and they believed these actions aided the ability to control the narrative of the change message, leaving them with a belief that social media was a useful channel for sharing information and understanding reception of and reaction to the change message.

Lessons Learned by Participants

The last question asked of all interviewees was for them to share their lessons learned from the process and their participation in the process. While responses varied, all responses fell into four categories, with three of these categories aligning with the themes: (a) presidential leadership; (b) planning; (c) partners; and (d) human behavior.

In the area of presidential leadership, one interviewee shared that he believed most faculty wanted a president who leads, not just follows trends, and another interviewee stated visionary actions do not come by committee: The president's vision must come first.

Aligned with planning, interviewees noted that using smaller committees forwarded action, and large committee work was not effective and stalled or delayed progress. Two interviewees suggested long-term planning should extend past the first year, and a commitment to investment in human and marketing resources for a longer period would deepen awareness of the change and support its success and sustainability.

Concerning partners, one of the partners interviewed commented on how the college having a strong collective sense of self informed decisions. Several interviewees from the college shared the insight that one should listen to the expertise of partners yet own the final decisions. Further, she stated in reflecting on the process, while the partners in the process brought needed expertise in certain areas, the overall team at the college were more capable to handle more tasks in specialized areas than they may have thought themselves to be.

A fourth area of lessons learned centered on human behavior. One interviewee shared her greatest lesson learned was balancing standing her ground with staying open to conversation and being willing to be wrong. Another interviewee shared she learned how important it is to allow people to sort through information and feelings, allowing time and space for people to share

opinions. Two interviewees reported they had not anticipated that many students would share their individual letters with each other, leading to the observation by these two interviewees that it would have been beneficial to staff for and allow more availability of time for individual, face-to-face conversations for students to help them fully understand implications for them personally. Lastly, perceptions of some athletes, top scholarship students, and parents of being valued less because of smaller scholarship dollar amounts in the new model was a larger issue than anticipated. This led to a key learning for one interviewee who had not anticipated so strong a reaction and suggested having more individual conversations, instead of providing the written information in a letter to each student, may have helped deliver those messages and retained some students.

Summary

Investigating the role of communications in this change initiative yielded three themes that explained how the College used communications throughout the process, how it interacted with decision making and planning, and the impact it had in the execution of the announcement of the change. The emergent themes—(a) impact of presidential leadership, (b) necessity of partnerships, and (c) criticality of systematic end-to-end planning and monitoring—provide insight into the vital role communications plays in a change initiative and what communications looks like throughout the process from decision-making to implementation. These themes are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Though historically higher education has been no stranger to change, today institutions face constant challenges as they strive to deliver on their missions. In an environment where internal and external forces continually bombard institutions, change is a necessity rather than a strategy for many. Understanding the role of communications in the change process, from deciding on the change to implement to sharing the change internally and externally, is integral to ongoing operations of institutions. The purpose of this study was to understand the role and impact of communications in a change initiative and to identify practical insights on how to effectively use communications to navigate a change process.

To explore the research questions, this study used a single-case study of a liberal arts women's college to examine actions involved in deciding on, planning, and announcing a major change at the college. Findings and insights included review and analysis of data collected from conducting 16 interviews and examining 62 documents. During this analysis, three themes emerged that address my queries of the role of communication and its impact in the change decision, the process of creating the communication strategy and plan, and how the strategy was implemented. These themes are: (a) impact of presidential leadership; (b) necessity of partnerships; and (c) criticality of systematic end-to-end planning and monitoring. From the case study arose practical lessons learned about the role of communication in decision making, creating communication strategy and plans, and implementation tactics. The findings provide considerations and tactics not dominant in the current literature, including partnerships, use of

NDA, balancing control of information with transparency, and risk management planning with monitoring to mitigate negative impacts of social media.

The findings from the study and the three themes that emerged are presented in the previous chapter. Through the lens of the quantum paradigm, three key areas of literature informing this study, and in the context of the four research questions, this chapter contains the discussion of the findings, presents implications for practice, and suggests recommendations for further research.

Discussion of Findings

Viewing the findings of this study through the lenses of the quantum paradigm (see Table 3), communication plan strategies (see Table 2), and the human resource perspective of communicating change revealed areas of alignment and areas of divergence. In the areas of divergence were two unanticipated findings reported in this study. One finding was the perceptions and responses of some student athletes and their parents. The second finding was the almost instantaneous sharing by some students of information. This information ranged from incomplete general statements to information that was specific to their individual situations. Learning about perceptions and actions in this particular change initiative brought to life the usefulness and deficiencies of the models used as lenses.

From the quantum paradigm lens, the president exemplified an understanding of what Zohar (1997) suggested, “leaders who want to initiate real change processes must become aware that they have been acting out of a paradigm [mindset or framework] . . . and that they must get to a point where they can feel the reality of an alternative paradigm [mindset or framework] (p. 25). The president initiated this particular change process both with an awareness of the mindset at that time that small, incremental change was the norm and the realization that she needed to

articulate, possess, and drive the alternative mindset of transformational change as a necessity to move past just surviving to having the possibility of thriving as an institution.

In this case study, many of the organizational characteristics indicated the function of leadership as it is typically demonstrated in the quantum paradigm (see Table 3). As Rost (1993) describes the diffusion of leadership throughout the organization in a quantum organization, this type of diffusion of leadership at the college could be seen as the SEP committee began its work. While leadership started with the president laying out a vision, she then stepped back into a participant role with the subcommittee taking the role of leading in the creation of the change recommendation. Beyond the initial vision of the president, the college's culture was collaborative within the institution and with invited external partners.

Throughout the process, decision-making was more democratic than dictatorial. Rather than the decision power being held only by the president, there were multiple data inputs and points of view from various sources and participants evident in the process informing the identification of and decision on the change to pursue. This aligns with Zohar's (1997) view of power from a quantum perspective as being about dialog, not debate; about respect, not control; and about cooperation, not competition. In addition to institutional structures that provided positional power to the president, she earned additional power through her sharing of control and her conviction of vision. She specifically garnered additional respect and further trust in her ability to drive forward and deliver the change with the board when she staked her position against their support. The leadership communication style seen in this change was aligned with the quantum paradigm characteristic of sharing information widely, unidirectionally, and empowering people with information (Stephenson, 2005), though this style was modulated throughout the process with considerations of timing in sharing information. Using NDAs to

guard the message and process kept necessary interactions of divergent views and expertise productive rather than becoming unwieldy and extending the decision-making and/or planning process.

Evidence from the interviews and documents review exemplify suggested communication plan strategies from the studies cited in Chapter 2 (see Table 2) and provided two additional strategies. One additional strategy was the application of risk management with the flow of information, considering who should know what information when, and the control of the narrative, particularly in regard to the influence of social media. The second additional strategy was the use of NDAs to control the flow of information. The NDAs emphasized to participants the seriousness of the commitment to fully exploring and pursuing all possibilities in response to the identified need and circumstances and the level of accountability expected. Further the jointly subscribed to NDAs facilitated an environment of open, free, and productive discussion throughout the process both internally with team members and with the external partners. They also enabled control of the narrative by including more partners and resources in the planning and preparation process. This helped ensure a singular message and well-thought-out step-by-step plan for sharing information customized for each stakeholder group was in place and utilized by all parties involved.

Shaw (2006) observed change is about emotions, often heavy emotions, because people give up something known for the unknown. In this study, multiple examples of attending to emotion surfaced. One example was considering each stakeholder groups' perspectives and needs, collecting data, noting information in profiles, and developing strategies to address as many needs as possible. Another example was individualized letters with customized information for each student and their parents, providing details on the old model and the new

model and its impact. Coupled with these personalized letters were options for live discussion online, town halls, and one-on-one conversations with college staff. Gilley et al. (2009) described the importance of approaching change from a person-centered perspective which was evident in this study from the earliest stages of the change process. Beginning with the SEP committee, consideration for the way individuals reacted to and navigated change was seen in actions such as sharing of information in multiple ways, allowing time for processing data and points of view, and opportunities for all voices to be heard. In the educational process about the institution's financial models, faculty and the board were allowed time for individuals to receive, digest, question, and understand the overall and personal implications of what was being shared and the change that was being pursued.

An unanticipated example of heavy emotion mentioned by Shaw (2006) was the reaction of some student athletes to their athletic scholarship amounts being lowered in the new model. While the new model required a lower dollar contribution by the athlete to attend the college, the lower scholarship amount in the new model created for some students and their parents a perception of misalignment with their belief of their daughter's athletic talent's worth. Certain parents were particularly vocal and even shared with college staff that they were not comfortable saying their daughter received a smaller scholarship award than children of friends who attended other institutions. Their focus was more on the amount of the scholarship, not on the actual cost to attend. The athletic director raised a concern that lowering scholarship amounts may create a perception for the student and/or her parents of being less valued for her athletic talent. While this issue was included in the marketing profile created for the student athlete stakeholder group as a potential concern, it was not originally seen as a major concern. The actual response to the individual athletic scholarship adjustments showed that this potential concern was more

prevalent than expected among the student athletes and their parents. Given the criticality of having full team rosters and the possibility of such concerns arising, a better strategy to mitigate this perception risk could have been planned. Presenting each athlete with the information in person rather than by just providing letters may have produced a better reception of the information by the student athletes and their parents.

A second area of unexpected behavior was the almost instantaneous sharing by some students of both general and individual information. On the day of the public announcement, students began texting and posting on social media during the president's announcement of the change before information had fully been presented in the student assembly. As they texted what caught their attention as big news—a 43% decrease in tuition—some did not listen to the explanation or details of the change. Engaging with social media while the information was being shared and not fully listening to all the information provided caused a lack of full and clear understanding of the impact of the tuition reset for some students. Therefore, as they received their individual letters they did not understand fully, and some felt they had not been given the full truth when their individual contribution requirements were not simply reduced by the 43%. This led to some expressing frustration and creating their own narrative rather than utilizing available and offered forums, whether individual or group, to ask questions, get clarifications, and more fully understand. Additionally, some students shared their personal letters with other students to compare changes in scholarship amounts and the revised amounts for which each student was responsible. Because these letters included information specific to each student, simply comparing numbers without understanding the dynamics of each student's situation caused a variety of reactions and emotions, ranging from confusion to anger. Producing customized letters for each student was an appropriate tactic to help the students receive and

absorb the correct information. Not partnering the letter with a personal delivery and discussion proved to cause resistance to the message for some students and lack of understand and acceptance of the message by others.

Role of Communication

Research Question 1 was: What role did communications play in identifying and deciding on the change to implement? Findings from the study suggest communications played an integral role throughout the change decision process. Initial communications started with the president crafting and articulating a vision and sharing that vision collectively and individually. At this early stage, communications from the president were the initiator or call to change. Because of her willingness to step back from being central in the process to acting as a guide and point of accountability for the workings of the sub-committee, communications functioned as the tool or conduit through which ideas and information were shared, data was analyzed, and a change recommendation was determined and delivered. Attention by the president and other participants to creating an environment for open, engaged, and dissenting discourse, allowed individuals to feel respected, heard, listened to, and free to change their minds. This type of environment facilitated communications through multiple mediums—face-to-face conversation, phone calls, email, texting, and file sharing—which surfaced ideas, tested models, produced a change recommendation, and built trust, excitement, and commitment to the change. The NDAs carved out spaces for conversations needed to explore options yet provided security for exploration. Attention to the content and the process of communication enabled the subcommittee to identify, pressure test, and present change recommendation with a high probability of success.

Unexpected was the attention to balancing between controlling communication of information involving highly charged or provocative topics and issues with openly and

transparently communicating information about the process and progress of pursuing the objective of the overall initiative. Often during change initiatives institutions focus on full transparency and decide to share all information. Being fully transparent can provide opportunities for slowing down processes, potentially complicating issues, or creating factions of participants within the process who hold particular points of view and specific solutions they champion to the exclusion of collaboration and participation in collectively designing and choosing a best solution. Whether by design or happenstance, the communication path chosen by the college proved beneficial to the change process.

Communication Strategy and Plan Process

Research Question 2 was: What was the process by which Converse College created the communication strategy and plan for the major change (tuition reset)? Interviewees reported once the change was decided, identifying internal expertise and skills available and additional expertise and skills needed led to vetting and securing partners. Some partnerships, such as speaking with institutions who had implemented tuition changes, working with a research firm to produce primary research, and talking with a marketing agency that had previously partnered with institutions navigating tuition changes began during the process of determining the change. While gathering input, such as data from stakeholder focus groups, rebranding messaging and design suggestions, creative marketing ideas, and new marketing channel proposals, team members from the college maintained the confidence that they knew who they were and what made them distinctive as a community and institution. The participants from the college kept the final decision power rather than allowing partners to strongly influence the message and communication strategy. Curating expertise from internal and external sources, the college

created a project plan that captured specific strategies, their timing, owner, and resources needs, then tracked the status of these tasks dynamically.

The college utilized partners for the information gathering, creation of the message, and development of the plan. They could have more fully exploited the resources of the partners to manage and engage in more operational tasks such as creating collateral, contacting press outlets, and arranging public relations opportunities. In this case many of these tasks were handled by internal resources whereas employing partner resources could have provided additional capacity for internal team members to work in other more individual and personal areas in the plan such as one-on-one meetings with students and parents.

Communication Plan Components

Research Question 3 was: What communication strategies were included in the communication plan? Documents and interviews provided information on the key components in the plan. Foundational to the plan was a brand refresh exercise that provided data gathered from the stakeholder groups and core messages about the college's distinctions. The communications plan for the change included a singular message ("It's the right thing to do"), relevant messages and channels for each stakeholder group, specific timing for release of information, support for stakeholders in understanding the impact of the change for them individually, and a process for continual monitoring for message integrity. Overarching considerations in the plan included sequencing of components, financial and human resources needed to implement the plan, timing of developing and launching components, and relationships between components and the ability to deliver the change message. Each component contained multiple tactics, some of which were typical, such as admissions collateral, videos, and billboards, while others were less typical, such as advertising on Pandora

radio, the guidance counselor luncheon, and a letter from the president to the president of the United States.

The plan included great detail in preparing for, socializing, and formally announcing the change. Prior to the public announcement time was spent with various stakeholder groups in activities such as educating the board on general higher education environment and the college's specific circumstances, financial model training with the faculty, and focus groups with various stakeholder groups to understand perceptions and needs. The day of announcement was highly orchestrated and scheduled minute-by-minute. Beyond the roll-out of the change and its public announcement, plans to shepherd the students, parents, faculty, staff, alumnae/i, and community through the change process lost specificity. The specifics of the plan did not extend to the start of the next academic year and fell short of fully supporting the implementation and leveraging the impact and opportunity brought with the change. Participants mentioned on reflection that the marketing and communications plan and efforts should have been more specifically designed and fully funded for up to three years past the announcement and initial implementation of the change. This could have provided a stronger foundation for continued success and optimized the investment in the change.

Implementation of Communication Strategy and Plan

Research Question 4 was: How was the communications strategy and plan implemented? The implementation of the strategy and plan began when the board voted to support and implement the change. Various streams of work occurred concurrently up to and beyond the day the change was publicly announced. Sequencing so many tactics while holding to a singular message being delivered in customized ways to different stakeholders proved to be a complex process. Central to implementation was executing each tactic well and on a predetermined

schedule. Further monitoring feedback from stakeholder groups as each received, deciphered, questioned, acted upon, and passed along the message was critical. Monitoring began subsequent to the planning and roll out of the change message via a detailed, almost minute-by-minute schedule over a 24-hour period. Multiple support resources including online information, special forums, and college staff were available concurrent to the public announcement to respond to stakeholders' questions and feedback. The public announcement was followed by roll out of the new messaging, new admissions collateral, training for admissions counselors, continued engagement with stakeholders, and tactics to create visibility for the college and the initiative locally, regionally, and nationally.

Implications for Practice

Though limited to the investigation of a single change process at a specific institution, this study provides insights that a variety of institutions may find helpful in change processes. These practical implications for practice are based on the interview responses, document review, my observations, and my experience in the field. The following practical insights are offered in alignment with the three themes that emerged from the study.

Impact of President's Leadership

Any change begins with a vision. For institutions, this vision must come from the president. To be most effective it should be specific, believed, and clearly articulated in a way that includes and engages all stakeholders. The leadership of a president exists in an organizational structure and culture that can enable or hinder the ability to drive the vision to fruition.

Understanding, being attentive to, and focusing energy on the mindset aligned with the vision is critical. If the mindset of the institution is aligned to the vision, the president must

verbalize and bring to attention this mindset. If it is not aligned, then it is critical to acknowledge the starting mindset and then articulate the desired mindset, with a charted path to the new destination. Using language that is understandable, believable, and attainable initiates and drives the change process. Education on the vision and change needed to reach it, coupled with engagement of members of stakeholder groups, can be used to gain support and trust for the president's ability to move the institution to and through the change successfully.

Necessity of Partnerships

Undertaking a change often includes a high level of complexity. To navigate complexity, it is essential to identify the expertise needed, assess the expertise internally available, and pinpoint the expertise that must be acquired. Given that changes can move institutions in unfamiliar directions, partnerships—internally across the institution for expertise and externally for information, skills, expertise, tools, and resources—can provide a full range of capabilities to inform, plan, and implement effective and impactful communications throughout the change process. Establishing partnerships early in the change process to support decision making on the change and to assist in communication planning and implementation increases the likelihood of desired outcomes. Throughout the change process, being intentional and vigilant, managing the flow of information, and determining who needs to know what information and at what point in time can enable the process. Nondisclosure agreements (NDAs), internally and with external partners, are a useful tool to create spaces for open discourse that allows for investigating without risking losing control of the narrative. Employing transparency at the appropriate level keeps as many stakeholders as possible informed about the progress of a change initiative without providing incomplete or inaccurate information. Balance of control and transparency can be challenging, yet it can be navigated by acknowledging the nature of the information shared,

whether it is in-process or final, and allowing feedback mechanisms for stakeholder groups throughout the change process.

Often, planning occurs after the decision of the change recommendation. Planning should begin at the inception of the vision for the change and then broaden to include participants and components as the process proceeds. Embracing planning, from the initiation of the change idea to the imbedding of the change in the culture and processes of the institution, is critical. Determining and being attentive to the articulation of the message, from its inception as the president's vision through its evolutions to delivery, allows for a productive and cohesive process.

Identifying and profiling the stakeholder groups early provides context to shape messages in alignment with perceptions, needs, and language that will garner input and support, as the change process proceeds. Integrating a mechanism for monitoring the progress of receiving, understanding, accepting, and passing on the message for each stakeholder group is foundational to positioning a change for success. Monitoring should include multiple platforms, have triggers for actions to address communications not aligned with the narrative, and include resources to address deviations as they occur.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings from this study of a small, liberal arts, women's college and their use of communication during a change initiative confirm some findings from the literature on the quantum organizational structure paradigm, communication in change models, communications strategies in change, and the human perspective of change; provide some specificity to the use of communications in an institutional setting; and offer additions to the literature on communication strategies. Dynamics that are more prevalent today than the time during which the change in the

study occurred provide opportunities for further study. These dynamics include perceptions of constant change, instant broadcast mediums, and demand for transparency.

Given that change is a constant in institutions, further study on skills and resources needed to equip faculty, staff, and students to understand, create, and navigate change could inform ways to integrate change into the culture of institutions. At some institutions, there are permanent offices of change management. Research to better understand the design, workings, and impact of on-campus resources to aid in all aspects of change management could inform how institutions can continue to best deliver on mission and stay relevant.

In an environment where online platforms for communication and social media platforms have proliferated, with various market segments or stakeholders using different platforms for different purposes for limited amounts of time, further research into the impact of this category of communications on the change process would be informative. During this study, participants expressed concern about the lack of control over messages on social media and the possible impact these types of instantaneous messages could have on the overall messaging for the change initiative. This concern drove a decision to require key participants and partners to sign NDAs and to include active risk management, such as allocating resources to monitor channels. Beyond point in time research in this area, the creation of a database from the ongoing monitoring of platforms with a profile of users for each platform could inform institutions where to invest resources to have an impact with a chosen audience when sharing information. Having a resource to indicate who engages with which social platform for what type of information could help in planning communications in a change initiative. Though some parts of institutions regularly apply risk management and contingency planning, further research could help to extend these tools into communications in institutions for ongoing operations and change initiatives.

A prominent component in this study was the balance of information flow oscillating from closely held information with only a few participants to full transparency with all stakeholders. Understanding the levels of transparency and how to balance control of information with transparent sharing during different phases of the change process could aid institutions in effectively and efficiently navigating change, particularly at public institutions who are affected by sunshine laws or freedom of information legislation.

Conclusion

Change is prevalent in institutions of higher education. Being prepared to identify changes to pursue and navigating them skillfully is important for sustainability and success for institutions. To continue to be relevant and have the ability to best deliver on mission, it is critical for institutions to understand the role and effective use of communications to track changing perceptions and needs of an institution's stakeholders. This dissertation provides insights into the role and impact of communications in a change process and practical insights on effective practices to be utilized when selecting a change, planning for its implementation, and executing the communication of the change. As the need for change continues to evolve, so too will the role and impact of communication in the change process.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Converse College Documents

1. Reset and Rollout Timeline and Responsibilities
2. NAICU Enhancing Affordability: New Affordability Measures at Private, Nonprofit Colleges and Universities: Academic Years 2013-14 and 2012-13
3. Toward a Realistic Conception of Postsecondary Affordability (Working Paper)—Baum & Schwartz
4. Converse Reset Embargo Press Release
5. Prospective Student Survey DRAFT
6. Price Reduction Examples
7. What's It Worth—Carnevale, Strohl, Melton
8. Goals and Considerations
9. Sample Letter
10. Budget Projection Model 3
11. Case for Price Repositioning
12. Affordability SEP Action Plan Worksheet-March 6-Short Term Strategies
13. Enrollment, Discount, Revenue to Share
14. Business Plan Affordability
15. ERMS Tool
16. Converse REV Tuition Reset Training Booklet
17. Nondisclosure Agreement 08-2013
18. Converse Tuition Reset Fact Sheet V2
19. Budget Projection Model 2
20. Business Model Reset
21. Institutions Conducting Resets
22. Affordability SEP Action Plan Worksheet-March 19-For Admissions Processing
23. Short Term Initiatives for Consideration by Affordability Work Group
24. Enrollment, Discount, Revenue
25. Tuition Trajectory
26. Sally's Revised Lawlor Timeline 2
27. Sticker Price Comparison
28. Ongoing Rollout Strategies
29. Tuition Repositioning
30. 2013 Institutions at 20K Tuition
31. Internal Rollout Slides
32. Tuition Modeling Tool
33. Converse Affordability Working Group Creative Minds Model
34. Converse Tuition Reset Talking Points
35. Case for Sustaining Price
36. Affordability Work Group Notes 02-14
37. 15 Year Tuition Trajectory
38. Budget Projection Model 1
39. Pricing Survey Revised
40. Internal Rollout Slides OOS Athlete
41. 2014 Freshmen by Average Net Revenue
42. Tuition Savings Over Four Years V2
43. SEP Marketing
44. Reset Rollout Timeline
45. Tuition Trajectory
46. Competitors Projected Over Time V3
47. Price Sensitivity Analysis Presentation TP1
48. Affordability Workgroup Remodeling Minutes 03-12-13
49. Affordability Articles-Tuition Guarantees
50. Tuition Changes and Cohorts 12-13-12
51. Master Talking Points 09-03-13
52. Master Talking Points 08-21-13
53. Internal Rollout Slides Level 2 Athlete and Full Pay
54. Price Sensitivity Analysis Presentation 12-03-12 Corrected
55. Short Term Initiatives for Consideration by Affordability Work Group 02-8-13
56. Price Repositioning Comparison
57. Strategic Plan-Approved 2007
58. Converse College website- www.converse.edu (announcements, media, video, social media links)
59. Web-Tuition Reset-Media Coverage and Notable Mentions
60. Web-Tuition Reset-Media Kit
61. Web-Tuition Reset-FAQ
62. Web-Tuition Reset-Fact Sheet

Appendix B: Individual Interview Question Guide

Change Planning

1. How did the process begin? Why?
2. Who was involved in the planning process?
3. What considerations did the group include?
4. How did communications work in the planning group?
5. How were outcomes prioritized or phased?

Change Initiative Communications Planning

6. How was the communications plan created?
7. Who was involved in the development of the communications plan both internal/external?
8. What were the primary objectives of the communications plan?
9. What was the central theme or message you were hoping to communicate in the plan?
10. What were the mediums chosen to communicate the plan and which were most effective?
11. Who were the target groups for the plan?
12. What was the frequency or timetable for the plan?

Implementation

13. What was the overall strategy for implementing the communications plan?
14. What was the timetable for implementing the communications plan?
15. Who managed the implementation of the communications plan? Who else was involved?
16. What role did leadership play in implementing the communications plan?
17. What factors, hurdles, or challenges were you concerned about?
18. What lessons were learned in the process?

Appendix C: Interview Invitation Email

Dear Participant:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Jim Hearn in the Institute for Higher Education at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled Mobilizing for Transformation: A case study of change communications at a liberal arts women's college. The purpose of this study is to explore change communications. We obtained your contact information from Converse College. You are eligible to be in this study because you participated in Converse College's strategic planning and further the communications planning and/or execution of the strategic plan between 2012 and 2014.

Your participation will involve an interview in person at Converse College or by phone and should only take about 60 minutes. As the case study will be named as Converse College, your name and title may be used in the study.

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact me at xxxxx@uga.edu, 571-XXX-XXXX or my major professor, Dr. Jim Hearn, Institute of Higher Education, at 706-XXX-XXXX.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Julie Staggs

Appendix D: Interview Confirmation Email

Dear XXX,

Thank you for your agreement to participate in this research study. You have been included as a member of the Converse College community to participate in this research project that examines communicating organizational change in higher education. This research will explore how liberal arts women's colleges, namely Converse College, designed and implemented a communications plan to share its organizational changes.

This interview is part of my dissertation research and is part of the fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Higher Education Management at the University of Georgia Institute for Higher Education.

The interview will be on the campus in (location) at (time). Our conversation will last approximately 60 minutes. As we discussed, the case will be identifying Converse College as the institution for the study and your name and position will be used as you have agreed to participate.

Our session will be recorded to help me better remember your interview responses. The audio files will be destroyed once transcribed. During the study, only my faculty advisor and I will have access to the audio files and transcripts, and all information will be stored in a locked file or password-protected computer.

My sincere appreciation for your participation in this research. If you have any questions about this study, you can contact me at xxxxx@uga.edu, 571-XXX-XXXX or my major professor, Dr. Jim Hearn, Institute of Higher Education, at 706-XXX-XXXX.

Thank you,

Julie Staggs

Appendix E: Consent Form

Dear Participant:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Jim Hearn in the Institute for Higher Education at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled Mobilizing for Transformation: A case study of change communications at a liberal arts women's college. The purpose of this study is to explore change communications. We obtained your contact information from Converse College.

Your participation will involve an interview and should only take about 60 minutes. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. Your decision to participate or not will have no bearing on your employment or evaluations.

The results of the research study may be published, and your name or any identifying information may be used.

The findings from this project may provide information on change communication development and execution in higher education. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact me at xxxxx@uga.edu, 571-XXX-XXXX or my major professor, Dr. Jim Hearn, Institute of Higher Education, at 706-XXX-XXXX. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 212 Tucker Hall, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By continuing with this interview, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

Thank you,

Julie Staggs