A STRUCTURATIONAL APPROACH TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE:

EXPLORING IDAHO'S STUDENTS COME FIRST INITIATIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

This study embraces a structuration approach to explore how the staff at the Idaho State Education Agency (SEA) reacted to implementing a unique and sweeping K-12 education reform package commonly known as "Students Come First." By embracing a communicative perspective to studying change in public education, this study provides insights to how public sector employees at an SEA who work in a field governed by a unique set of features (politically-driven policies from elected officials and outcome expectations from the electorate), and who are driven by a passion to serve children engaged in changes that challenged their everyday understandings of how their jobs best supported educating students. Qualitative interviews exploring how the staff of the SEA understood and engaged in Idaho's education reform revealed tension-filled themes, revealing the complexities and consequences of implementing significant changes to the K-12 educational system. The tensions in the findings showed not only the consequences of the rules/resources provided by the Students Come First Change initiative but how staff rely in their practical consciousness to make sense of uncertainties associated with a significant change program. In particular, new rules and resources emerging from the change initiative were often in conflict with practical consciousness of organizational members. As such, this study offers several implications for scholars studying change from a structuration perspective and promotes more engaged dialogue among decision makers and those implementing change to promote more successful, less disruptive, changes in the future.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCO   Communication is Constitutive of Organization

SCF   Students Come First

SEA   State Education Agency

CHAPTER ONE: CHANGING PUBLIC EDUCATION

Concern about the well-being of children is ubiquitous in Western society and this stamp of concern is inexorably entwined in public education. When changes to public education are proposed, especially in terms of offering better ways to serve students, nearly all members of society have strong opinions and expectations of those working in the education system. However, how educational change initiatives affect adults working in the system of public education administration are often overlooked in favor of the attention paid to how changes impact students. Certainly, public education initiatives should be student-centered; however, how change impacts the professionals serving students is a critical consideration because the professionals are the ones responsible for implementing the change. This study examines the ways deeply held assumptions inform the meanings co-created among Idaho State Education Agency (SEA) staff responsible for implementing a large-scale organizational change policy in Idaho public education. Examining how organizational members negotiated the meanings of a change initiative that challenged deeply held assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning is significant and important because such a study can inform efforts to improve future change programs. Specifically, this study embraces a constitutive perspective of communication to explore how the staff at the SEA reacted to implementing a unique and sweeping K-12 education reform package commonly known as "Students Come First." By exploring how the staff of the SEA understood and engaged in the Idaho's education reform, much can be learned about the complexities and consequences of implementing

significant changes to the K-12 educational system and these findings might provide

insights for finding better ways to implement state-level education reform in the future.

The central focus of this study is to understand how the SEA staff grappled with

the changing policies, decision-making protocols, reporting structure, language, and

space provided for discussion associated with the Students Come First initiative while

carrying on the daily activities of managing public education in the midst of controversial

policy implementation. Further, this study will examine how the processes of 'grappling'

were influenced by beliefs about what is best for students and those who serve them,

access to information regarding the changes and the social interactions during the

operationalization of the change initiative. To engage in this project, I embrace

structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) as a way to focus on the tensions and interplay

between actions among SEA staff and shifting organizational landscape informed by the

meanings created as organizational participants sought to make sense of the uncertainties

posed by change. Specifically, the Students Come First change initiative was a

challenging endeavor for the SEA staff, due to reorganization, shifting roles and

responsibilities, new reporting structures, and intense demands for clarity and instructions

from the field. And these challenges exacted human costs in the form of frustration,

conflict, and divergent expectations of individual roles and responsibilities. The

metaphors of "fixing a plane while in mid-flight" and of "drinking from a fire hose" are

appropriate descriptors of the situation the SEA staff found themselves in during this

process. This study aims to explore how the SEA staff made sense of the complexities

associated with implementing this change program in order to promote more successful,

less disruptive changes in the future. The aim of studying this unique situation from a

communication perspective is to gain necessary insights that can offer useful guidance for reducing hardship and stress among change implementation teams in future change initiatives. Further, because a communicative approach to change deepens our understanding of the dynamic nature of human interaction, and how organization is implicated through interaction, the findings of this study direct attention on the communicative practices that can be improved when implementing change in the future.

The Challenges of Changing Public Education

Those involved in public education are ultimately concerned with what is best for students and these concerns are imbued with myriad assumptions about the best ways to teach, measure effectiveness, and allocate limited resources. The issues facing public education are complex and deep seated. Intense criticism accompanies most ideas for improvement as well as arguments to maintain the status quo. Regardless of the scale, changes in public education engage both supporters and detractors (to varying degrees). These tensions are compounded by the many different and competing opinions about how to best support students in reaching their potential and the overall role of public education. In particular, there are two divergent perspectives that make change to public education particularly challenging.

First, change initiatives aimed at improving education do not often account for factors outside the classroom. Many students in grades K-12 arrive at school with issues arising at home or in the community that influence their ability to succeed in the classroom. The practice of instruction, particularly regarding students in grades K-12 in public schools, is complicated when we acknowledge that students walk in the classroom door with issues from outside the sphere of the school's influence. For instance, consider

the area of social and emotional well-being. Many students face abuse, neglect, substance use, violence, bullying, harassment, and depression. However, the public education system, and teachers in particular, are driven to do the best they can within their scope of impact. Relational connectivity (in addition sound pedagogy and curriculum aligned to standards) is a pillar of effective instruction and cannot be entirely accounted for on standardized tests. In other words, influences outside the classroom are often related to success in the classroom, yet are not often the focus of educational reform efforts. Recognizing that many influences outside the classroom can impact a child's education rejects the notion that teachers have ultimate control over the learning abilities of their students. For instance, the social and emotional development of children requires interaction with trusted, caring adults; these needs cannot be provided by, or measured through, curricula or assessments (Vollmer, 2010). Changes designed to improve the education system, however, often fail to take into consideration these outside influences.

Second, most public education change initiatives focus primarily on student outcome measures with hopes of linking measures of student achievement with tax dollars spent on educational programs. Taxpayers and policy makers demand accountability and transparency due to the significant resources allocated to public education. This focus on outcomes puts pressure on tying funding to measurable student achievement outcomes (e.g., remediation, test scores, graduation rates,). As such, the effectiveness of instructional practices is often measured by student performance on standardized tests with policy aimed at incentivizing proficiency on assessments and sanctioning poor student performance. Because the goal of public education is student achievement, school districts focus on creating controls to address ineffective

instructional practices to assure students have an effective teacher in the classroom. These controls are governed by system policies typically focused on maximizing taxpayer return on investment, which includes limiting contractual agreements to extract activities peripheral to student achievement to assure the best use of public funds. With such a focus, transparency in school district business decisions is necessary to increase constituent trust in the system and equip concerned individuals with the information needed to challenge budgetary decisions. Additionally, to establish quality 21st century classrooms, the integration of technology in the classroom is a critical strategy to 'level the playing field' for student access to information, regardless of geographic isolation. Overall, to fulfill the charge of establishing a quality educational environment for all students, policy makers and elected officials are compelled to promote change initiatives that assert controls aimed at both increasing student achievement and making the best use of public resources (Neal, 1991).

The tension between prioritizing teacher/student relationships and promoting objective measures of student performance are not intended to serve as an exhaustive representation of the varied perspectives for ways to best improve public education; however, they do aid in framing general conflicts and guiding assumptions that contribute to the challenge of promoting change in public education. Resources are often spent on discovering what is best for students and how to make educational practices more measurable and accountable. Disagreements in how to best provide public education are often complicated by divergent stakeholder assumptions and frequently impede the adoption of new ways of thinking about ways to provide public education. How change initiatives enhance or disrupt the assumptions and beliefs of those administering the

public education system, for instance, is not a general concern for most public education change programs and represents a 'blind spot' for successful implementation. Attending to the challenges experienced by the administrative teams responsible for change implementation can lead to practices that have less disruption and increased commitment to change.

As such, this study explored an educational change initiative to learn about the challenges (and opportunities) those working in public education agencies faced when confronted with change programs that significantly challenged existing beliefs and assumptions about public education. Specifically, examining how Idaho's controversial Students Come First initiative was received and implemented by SEA staff may shed light on the interplay between action and structure in this specific instance. This study holds the potential to broaden understandings of how new ideas are received and practices are informed by large-scale educational reforms. This study was intended to deepen the scope of communication scholarship investigating public education by centering on the tensions between organizational members' deeply held assumptions and change. Additionally, the findings may provide useful insights to improve future large-scale public educational change initiatives by emphasizing the importance of recognizing and exploring imbedded beliefs and how change may disrupt, or align with these beliefs. Communication scholarship offers theoretical frameworks and language to express different ways humans make sense of the world around them and is a departure from traditional understandings of organization and change.

Idaho's Students Come First Initiative

The change initiative this study addresses is called Students Come First and was

introduced by the Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Luna, during the 2011

legislative session. This initiative represented the largest change in Idaho state education

policy and funding in the state's history. The Students Come First laws reformed several

significant aspects of managing public education. In particular, this initiative changed

labor practices by limiting teacher contracts to one or two years and required negotiations

be held in open meetings, instituted a pay for performance system for educators based on

student growth and achievement on state assessments, altered the funding formula for

schools to accommodate student interest in taking classes from multiple providers (school

districts, online platforms, etc.), and secured a mobile computing device (laptop) for

every student in grades 9-12 (Legislative Services Office, 2013). However, this proposal

was met with *both* vehement opposition and fervent support from teachers,

administrators, parents, and other stakeholders. Because the proposals were very

disruptive to the status quo, the scale and scope of Students Come First challenged

assumptions regarding what is best for students, those who serve them and unsettled the

normalcy of day-to-day practices of education at the local and state levels. The

controversial Students Come First initiative emerged from a series of discussions about

improving public education in Idaho. As such, contextualizing its origin is important to

understand the complexity that surrounded it.

Students Come First was informed by recommendations from a group of

education stakeholders in 2009, which included the Idaho Governor's office, the State

Board of Education, and the business community called the Education Alliance of Idaho.

The vision of the Education Alliance of Idaho is: "Idaho is a global leader, providing high quality, cost effective education to its citizens." Its accompanying mission statement reads: "Idaho's public education system is accountable for the necessary leadership, resources, capacity, and instruction to guarantee high achievement for all students" (Donnell & Lokken, n.d.). Calls for improving the Idaho public education system originated from the data available at the time and included a 46% college-going rate among Idaho high school graduates and a 40% remediation rate among those who go on to postsecondary education. The data presented a call to action and came with value judgments regarding comparisons, rankings, and college-going rates. The milieu of 'what counts' in public education is tied to what is measured (standardized test scores and college-going rates in this case) and is understood to enable students to reach their potential, and contribute to self-sufficiency and statewide economic development. We know how to measure student mastery of subject matter through examination; more difficult is measuring confidence, resilience, and grit in Idaho's student population.

From this view, we see the logic and urgency with which Students Come First was enacted through new policies. In particular, policies were introduced that would increase teacher accountability and pay based on student performance, broaden transparency around school district budgetary decisions, and provide students 21st century tools (mobile computing devices) to provide equal access to information, regardless of geographic limitations. The significance of Students Come First is represented through the new policies governing the system; as these mandates (extensive planning, new compensation structures, laptop deployment, asset management, contractual agreements, etc.) were required to fulfill the law's requirements.

From a traditional change perspective, Students Come First represents a rational

strategy to improve the student outcomes that we know how to measure. However, the

proposed changes specified in the legislation were met with heavy resistance – especially

among teachers. The Idaho Education Association (IEA- Idaho's largest teacher union)

led the charge to repeal Students Come First and one premise of their opposition hinged

on how the reforms would impact teacher-student relationships. Sherri Wood, the IEA

president at the time, offered the following in opposition to Students Come First: "we

know technology is a tool and it can't replace the guidance of a caring, competent adult

in the room" (Wood, 2011, p. 1). Here, we see Wood's inclination to favor the emergent

teacher / student interaction as among the most important factors in education, while

Superintendent Luna and the Education Alliance of Idaho focused on improvements

through policy and funding. As Superintendent Luna stated in a press release detailing the

highlights of Students Come First:

> We are trying to prepare Idaho students for the 21st century using a 19th century model. It doesn't make sense. What I propose today is a comprehensive plan that will change the system to match our current economic demands, and more importantly, to meet our students' needs. (Idaho State Department of Education, 2011, p. 1)

Preparing students for the 21st century means expanding the integration of

technology in the classroom and online coursework (as opposed to face to face teacher /

student contact time). The divergent perspectives between IEA President Wood and

Superintendent Luna represent some of the tensions that emerge in attempts to improve

public education.

This change initiative, like many changes proposed to public education, was

controversial. In addition to the opposition, many supporters from the same sectors

emerged, contributing to heated debates, forums, opinion articles, well-financed campaigns and ultimately, a voter referendum to repeal the entire package. Students Come First catalyzed those invested in public education to engage in the discussion about what is best for students at a level not seen in the recent past. Significant change compels those who find comfort on the sidelines to engage in the debate and commit, to an extent, in the struggle to define what is best for students and the professionals who serve them. These tensions extend the conflicting viewpoints described earlier and were negotiated through communicative acts. How the staff at the SEA negotiated the profound tensions borne through Students Come First is a unique situation worthy of a deeper look to better understand how the controversy influenced its implementation.

The staff at the SEA was caught in the crosshairs of the passionate arguments around what students need to be successful. Many of the SEA staff served in schools as teachers and administrators themselves and struggled to manage the unexpected scrutiny, questions, and demand for information from the education field and general public. As such, the Students Come First initiative presented a complex scenario for people working in the SEA. Those working to implement this change initiative were faced with controversy from the public as to whether or not Students Come First would effectively improve the system whether they were supportive or resistant to the proposal. The significance of this study centers on identifying the underlying assumptions of those involved and how these assumptions manifested in discomfort, or excitement, relative to the change.

Having passed the Idaho Legislature during the 2011 session, Students Come First was implemented from the spring of 2011 and was policy until its repeal by voter

referendum in November 2013. In the aftermath of repeal, the Governor convened a Task Force for Improving Education, which included a broad range of stakeholders on both sides of the Students Come First debate. Ironically, many of the recommendations of the Task Force for Improving Education mirror proposals in Students Come First such as the provision of 'leadership bonuses,' an emphasis on technology integration in the classroom, and restructuring teacher compensation based on student growth on state assessments.

This study hones in on the process of SEA staff engaged in the challenge of enacting educational reform. I aimed to explore the ways those working to implement such a controversial change initiative met this challenge and made sense of the controversy. Ultimately, my interests are in providing an understanding of the role of communication in the complex reform processes and having this understanding serve as a frame for analyzing future change initiatives. In the context of this study, finding ways to do better requires gaining insights to how the members of the SEA made sense of the changes based upon their assumptions about what is best for students, how the ways SEA members' approached their work changed based on their understandings of the controversial policies, and how SEA members' actions in doing their work might have changed as a result of this implementation. Learning about these changes may provide insights into how to implement changes in ways that might reduce the stress, anxiety, and burnout among implementation teams during times of transition. The tensions between deeply held assumptions and proposals that disrupt these assumptions often rise to the surface during the process of change initiatives in organizations. Routines and patterns allow members to make sense of the organizational world around them (team meetings,

coffee breaks, decision-making processes, etc.). These routinized patterns (meaning-making activities) are often insufficient to manage the equivocation and tension that come with change, especially controversial, large-scale change. Investigating the process associated with what happens when normalcy is upended due to change and a 'new normal' is sought helps us understand member behavior in organizations and informs improved change practices. New routines and patterns often emerge to aid in clarifying roles, responsibilities, and expectations; and in turn, decrease stress, anxiety, and conflict. Inquiry into how those responsible for the successful implementation of the change initiative navigated the tension between taken for granted assumptions and new ideas that challenged these assumptions holds the potential to expand knowledge around how the constitutive nature of communication in institutions during broad policy changes represents a convergence of member interaction and structure both informed by each other. The emphasis of this research is on the importance of factoring in deeply held assumptions among change implementation teams when planning for future change initiatives.

The routines guiding system processes (day to day life in the organization), and the tools available for action (e.g., language, reporting structures, escalation mechanisms) are key components to understanding negotiated meanings for these are the mechanisms available for members to make sense to others. Organizational membership comes with expectations and requirements such as dress codes, adhering to the policy handbook, and recognizing the informal cues that guide action. Utilizing the tools available for action opens the door for members to assert change from within. Rather than focus solely on historical assumptions or new realities created through member action, I aim to recognize

both as defining features of organizational life. The structuration model reviewed in the next section and employed by this study views social action and structure as symbiotic and mutually dependent which allow for acknowledging both through a framework of fluid duality.

Studying Changes to Public Education

I currently work at the SEA and was employed with the agency during the implementation of Students Come First. My interest in this research arose by witnessing the significant challenges faced by those in the agency charged with implementing such a controversial educational reform package. Through this study, I hope to surface some unique aspects of initiating large-scale changes in the public education sector and gain useful insights into the SEA member's struggles to make sense of fundamental policy shifts in business processes, compensation based on performance, and the tools provided to students for learning. Specifically, I am interested in how SEA employees' deeply held assumptions influenced their understandings of a grand change initiative regarding instructional practices, funding, and guiding policies. This study reveals how individuals made sense of the change initiative and gained insights into the relationship between the meanings created among the members of the SEA and how these meanings shifted in ways that disrupted and/or affirmed existing beliefs about public education. This change initiative was challenging and disruptive to work practices at the SEA. As such, understanding how it impacted SEA staff is useful for learning how to better implement change in the future through understanding how taken for granted assumptions informed day to day actions.

As the former Director of Students Come First, I played a central role at the SEA during the implementation of Students Come First and observed (as well as experienced) a range of sense-making activities among my colleagues resulting in conflict, frustration, excitement, and commitment that culminated in a unique organizational climate not present prior to the change proposal. My position provided me access to key individuals involved in Students Come First implementation and during the change process I was concerned by the personal impacts of the work on my colleagues, and now I have the opportunity to include the same individuals in this change initiative case study. The confluence of my involvement in Students Come First implementation and graduate communication studies drives my interest in asking fundamental questions about the social actions of individuals immersed in disruptive innovation and how they make sense of organizational policy directives when taken for granted assumptions were challenged. Of particular interest in this research is how SEA staff negotiated existing beliefs and assumptions that informed their everyday practice with new ideas from the Students Come First initiative that challenged existing assumptions around public education. Inquiry around how language, personal experience, and understandings are drawn upon and recreated through member interaction provides insight into the process of organizational becoming.

Overall, the Students Come First laws represented a significant change to Idaho K-12 public education and serves as a unique circumstance to examine how invested individuals at the state level made sense of the changes proposed and enacted support, resistance, or indifference and the relationship between these actions and the social setting in which they took place. Embracing a communicative perspective to studying

change in public education, informed by structuration theory, can provide insights to how

public sector employees at an SEA who work in a field governed by a unique set of

features (politically-driven policies from elected officials and outcome expectations from

the electorate), and who are driven by a passion to serve children engage in changes that

challenge their everyday understandings of how to best educate students. In addition, this

study might further organizational communication scholarship by demonstrating how

examining an organizational change initiative through a specific theoretical lens can

generate new knowledge about human interaction and uncover ways to improve future

change initiatives. Change initiatives raise questions regarding how meaning is made

with the information provided, and how interaction and language facilitate the

incorporation of shifting expectations, roles, and responsibilities and in the process

transform the environment within which they occur. This study will shed light on some

key challenges of changing public education, and offer insight to incorporate better ways

to make change in the future. Broadening the implication of public education change to

include consideration around how members reproduce and transform organizations

through their actions is a new approach for the Idaho SEA and can inform communicative

strategies that increase engagement in the future to continuously improve serving

students.

The next chapter offers a review of literature relevant to this study. In particular,

to ground my study in communicative approaches to organizational change, I review

theories of the communicative constitution of organization, communicative approaches to

organizational change, structuration theory, and how structuration theory has been

applied to organizational change practices. I then provide a synthesis of this literature and

offer questions that guided this study of change at the SEA. Here I draw on the relevant

organizational communication literature that informed my theoretical approach to the

study of change at the SEA and explain my methods to exploring the relationship

between human interaction and the malleable construct of organization to conduct a study

of change at the SEA.

CHAPTER TWO: COMMUNICATION, CHANGE, AND STRUCTURATION

THEORY

This study of change at the SEA is grounded in a communicative perspective to change and structuration theory more specifically. In this chapter, I review literature on communication and organization, communication and organizational change, structuration theory, and organizational change as approached from a structuration theory perspective. The literature included in this chapter provides a communicative perspective to change that complicates modern ideas about organizing, explicates the dynamic nature of human interaction in organizations, and asserts that social interactions constitute organizations. These perspectives offer explanations for how members actively transform organizational life through interaction rather than assume organizational policy and procedure regulate all aspects of member life or that organizations exert agency on the members within it. Understanding organizations are constituted through member interaction opens up new possibilities for re-conceptualizing how organizing happens and how change occurs. This literature provides a background for understanding how organizational features, such as policy and legislation, are made real through social actions among members and inform what life is like inside the organization.

Furthermore, I review key principles of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) with a focus on aspects of the member action / structural symbiosis in relation to organizational change. This review of literature focuses on how both member interactions (actions) and structures (rules/resources) contribute to the constitution of organizational

constructs and member meaning-making. In particular, new concepts in organizational change theorizing often incorporate both the micro (emergent) and the macro (structural) as mutually dependent, and through fluid dependency establish and transform organizational reality.

Overall, this review of literature provides a strong communicative focus to organizational change that embraces structuration theory as a way to explore organizational change at the SEA that departs from traditional concepts such as 'organizations as frozen containers' and 'management as all controlling' in a way that allows for alternative questions to be asked. The following review of literature provides a foundation of ideas that will inform my approach to studying the SEA activity during the implementation of Students Come First.

Communication and Organizations

Many communication scholars have focused attention on organizations. Mumby and Stohl (1996) argue for the legitimization of organizational communication as a discipline and seek to carve out a space for this scholarship in academe. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) initiated a perspective of organizational communication as a cultural performance by encouraging the investigation of organizational phenomena beyond the study of systems. In particular, they emphasized studying varied cultural performances as constitutive of organizations. Additionally, Deetz, Tracy, and Simpson (2008) explored the relationship between organizational member thoughts and feelings and their impact on work quality during transitions. This research has challenged many of the prevailing ideas about the relationship between communication and organization by providing new insights into how communicative practices are constitutive of

organization. In particular, communicative approaches to organization challenge traditional assumptions about organizational constructs such as power and control, and focus on communication as a meaning-making activity. Combined, this research promotes a communicative constitution of organization (CCO) perspective that uniquely informs the study of organization.

Traditional conceptions of organizations identify with order, managerial control and prescriptive functions and are the dominant approaches to organizational constructs (Jian, 2010). These ideas have created and replicated systems that embrace order and efficiency as essential to 'ideal organizations' that can be asserted and controlled by executives and managers. These ideas have been reproduced through much of the traditional study of organization and have emerged as taken for granted assumptions around how high-performing organizations function. However, the reproduction of restrictive protocol suppresses alternatives and 'fossilizes' how interaction is operationalized over time. As Boje questions: "Who gets to write and read strategy? How are reading and writing linked to power? Who is marginalized in the writing/reading process?" (as cited in Barry & Elmes, 1997, p. 430). Communicative approaches challenge the ways organizational strategy has been conceptualized by emphasizing the value of member involvement in organizational planning and disrupting the assumption that management is all controlling. Specifically, communicative approaches complicate how the exertion of power emerges in organizations by explicating how the language and history of the organization creates unspoken boundaries within which member interactions take place. The denial of new ways of talking or thinking about organizational functions, often emerging as conflict, reifies existing power structures.

Thus, traditional organizational concepts limit our understanding of how members are able to work together to create organizational reality.

Communicative approaches challenge assumptions about member interactions by positioning them as defining features of organizing rather than peripheral activity. Emphasizing the co-creation of organizational life through member interaction challenges the normalization of empirical science and the drive to attain objective knowledge of phenomena that was brought about by modernity in the mid-20th centuries (May & Mumby, 2005). Efforts to establish stability and predictability have been problematized by new understandings of the dynamism of human interaction. In particular, communicative approaches highlight member co-creation of organizational reality, while acknowledging the limitations of reality-making activity at the same time. Tsoukas and Chia (2002) recognize this complex duality in their research around how organizations are rooted in relationships and founded upon the history and language made available to members. Shifting assumptions from organizations as static and management-controlled to constructs defined by the dynamism of member interaction opens new ways to research and understand the importance of communication in generating organizations.

To illustrate the idea that member interaction constitutes organizations consider how the tenor of member interactions (whether uplifting or toxic) has a contagion effect in social systems. Organizations represent a compilation of multiple realities and the actions of one influence the perceptions of all. Thus, the construction of organizational reality can be understood as generated by the collective enactments of the members. Acknowledging that each member's actions imprint on the organization and inform the reality created widens the scope of how we come to understand the social construction of

reality. The organizational 'world' is created through individual members selectively perceiving, cognitively rearranging, and socially negotiating reality (Weick, 1979). Examination of members 'selectively perceiving' their environment implies agency in choosing what to pay attention to. The self-fulfilling prophecy is conjured here; a person assuming nobody in the organizational likes them can be expected to project this belief during interactions with others by demonstrating aloofness, suspicion, hesitancy to trust, etc., and thereby create their own reality. Indeed, organizations are made manifest by the narcissism, hubris, altruism, dedication, and selflessness of the members that occupy the space and express these interpretations of the organizational world together. Related to this study, I will explore the underlying assumptions that result from the emotions and understandings that inform action.

Key considerations for organizational members interested in vitality and longevity include providing space for member interaction and conflict, establishing open flows of information and accommodating different ways of thinking. The common denominator connecting these phenomena is the process of meaning co-creation, which, at its core, is communicative. Member interaction is referenced as generative of organizational meaning-making by a number of organization scholars including Barrett, Thomas, and Hocevar (1995), Ford and Ford (1995), Barry and Elmes (1997), Heracleous and Barrett (2001), and Jian (2010). If we accept the assertion that organizational reality emerges through member interaction, then examination of what informs interactions is a critical point of focus for those interested in maximizing the valuable contributions of organizational members.

Those embracing a communicative perspective to organizing challenges the way language has been understood as simply enabling the transmission of information by exploring how language constructs organizational reality. Linguistic patterns in organizations do more than facilitate information exchange and communicative scholars have complicated traditional models addressing the role of language. For instance, Barrett et al. (1995) explain: "these linguistic patterns reinforce and are reinforced by what we have come to know as bureaucratic activities" (p. 358), and "the dominant assumption in these models is that managers have the capacity and control to achieve rational adaptation to environmental demands for change" (p. 353). Note the assumption challenged in this previous quotation; if managers can rationalize demands for change, then all members will come to the same conclusion. Developments in organizational communication studies have evolved from systems defined by management prerogative, policy, and standard operating procedure manuals to member interaction as the defining feature of organizations (Anderson, 2005). These communicative approaches to organization challenge the assumptions of historical practices, focus attention on the ways communication constitutes organization, and broaden the scope of inquiry into organizing practices.

Communicative approaches challenge the way we think about communication; rather than a linear transmission of messages from leadership, the day to day communicative acts of members cumulate to constitute the organization itself (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). The focal point is how meaning is created among the individuals within the organization. The dynamic nature of human interaction requires more than a sender, message, channel, and receiver of messages to account for the complex variables that

result in workplace morale, job satisfaction, values, and perception. To assert

organizations are constituted through the communicative acts of members acknowledges

that individuals create their own meaning through interaction and are active players in

shaping their own reality and the cultures they inhabit. The communicative approach

emphasizes the process of the reproduction and transformation of organizational

constructs. The meaning made through interaction goes beyond the sharing of

information; engaging with others generates new meaning, which literally shapes the

organization. Member interaction is at the heart of understanding organizational

constructs and realities.

For instance, optimistic members may view a new policy as rife with possibility,

while the cynic may view the same regulation as overreaching and 'more of the same'

top-down control. If organizational reality is comprised of member interaction, then the

life experiences and everyday interactions of the members involved contribute to the

constitution of organizational reality, and implicate individual historicity and human

social interaction as constitutive of the organization itself. Social action is informed by

the individual members (with their unique assumptions, perceptions, and cultures) doing

the participating and culminates in defining the unique organizational worlds they

inhabit. The process of organizing elicits the assumptions of the individual(s) trying to

help the rest of the team make sense of something. If an organizational practice is framed

as positive (based on the assumptions of those doing the framing), members will be more

likely to embrace the upside. Conversely, if the negative aspects of organizational life

monopolize the discussion, members are likely to approach it with skepticism. From the

Chief addressing the team at an all-staff meeting to light banter around the water cooler,

all member talk contributes to the scaffolding of organizational reality. This means that

members have the capability and competence to successfully organize themselves around

a vision, whether positive or negative (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). As organizations

are created, maintained, and transformed through communication, the language and

actions imparted in this process manifests in organizational reality. We cannot disregard

the influence of the individual on organizations and these compelling new ideas are

evolving to provide more elegant and comprehensive explanations around the process of

organizing than traditional understandings. Exactly how this process works is the interest

of those invested in the communicative approach to understanding organization.

Researchers contributing to the communicative perspective challenge assumptions

that describe organizations as static and assert organizations are comprised through a

dynamic process of communication. Literature embracing this perspective offers

alternative viewpoints of organizational strategy by disrupting the assumption that all

members hold the same interpretive framework regarding decision-making (Taylor,

Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996, p. 3). Traditional conceptions of power are

challenged by asserting discourse is power-laden rather than transparent, neutral, and

accessible (Deetz, 2003). Language is highlighted as a resource to generate member

identity and also produce, reproduce, and transform collective identity structures (Kuhn

& Nelson, 2002). And arguably, the most influential idea of the communicative

perspective is that social interaction produces and sustains knowledge (May & Mumby,

2005). The essence of the communicative perspective is reframing the focus from

inanimate objects (policies, meeting agendas, and formal agreements) to how these

objects are acted into existence through member interpretations and the interactions

informed by these interpretations. The communicative approach assumes social activities represent multiple meanings. Organizations are constituted through shared understandings and a "dynamic playing out of relationships where identities and roles get negotiated" (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 3). The constitution and re-constitution of social structures manifest through the reproduction of social practices through time; hence, current social structures are informed by historical practices. The dynamic, regenerative process of organizing described through this literature has recently been coined communication is constitutive of organization (CCO) (Ashcraft, Kuhn & Cooren, 2009).

CCO researchers seek to tease out the relationship between member interaction and organizational features seen over time. For instance, McPhee and Zaug (2000) explore how communication generates social structure in their four flows perspective and affirm the need to account for the persistence of organizational patterns in society by invoking "a limited version of functionalism" (p. 8). The idea of a functionalism-"lite" is useful in recognizing, and naming, organizational similarities (meeting structures, decision-making models, position classifications, etc.) produced through time and space. To be clear, positing that "organizations are a social form created and maintained by manifestly and reflexively reifying practices of members" (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, P. 8) does not negate the existence of patterned behavior. McPhee and Zaug's (2000) four directions flow link organizations to their members through language and reflexivity and thoughtfully describe the interconnectedness of member activities and organizational structure. This framework explains the processes and provides vernacular to define the generative features of organizations and describe how they are reproduced through communication.

Heracleous and Barrett (2001) contribute to the CCO turn in their examination of daily communicative actions and their impact on deep structures as "not only enabling information exchange but also as constructing social and organizational reality" (p. 755). Indeed, the work of constructing organizational reality through member interaction is bound by the power of tradition and the constraints of language, and re-conceptualizing organizing in the views proposed compels an acknowledgement of member perception, language and action. Heracleous and Barrett's (2001) affirmation of communicative actions, as both political and influential in structural configuration, represents a redefinition of how organizing is understood. The interpretative schemes of the individual represent the "psychological frames" (p. 758) that contribute to the cognitive structuring of the organization. Uncertainty is the yeast in the bread of organizational becoming and leaders should go beyond what stakeholders say and seek to understand the deeper values and assumptions they hold to incorporate these perspectives in earnest.

How organizations are conceptualized is an important starting place for researching organizational change initiatives. The ideas presented thus far break away from concepts of organizations as stable, objective entities apart from the people within them and explores the relationship between communicating and organizing. The CCO view sees organizations as ongoing processes of social interaction, with particular interest in interpretation, language, and meaning-making. CCO disrupts attributes of organizational stability and efficiency as ideal by asserting that making room for different ways of understanding contribute to the vital organization. For absent communication, in the form of social interaction, organizations cease to exist. Having set the CCO stage by drawing on literature explicating how developments in communication research

challenge traditional ideas on organizations, I now turn to a discussion about communication and organizational change. Those embracing CCO perspectives provide new ways to understand the role communication plays in reproducing and transforming organizations.

Communication and Organizational Change

Many embracing a communicative constitution of organization (CCO) perspective have also explored the topic of organizational change. This research offers an alternative relationship between the ideas of communication and organizational change. To assert member interaction creates the organization implies all members contribute to the construct of the organization and that change is negotiated through communication. Understanding individuals as creating and maintaining organization through communicative actions informs new ideas about how organizational change works.

This way of thinking challenges traditional approaches to organizational change especially in regard to understanding disagreement, opposition, and misunderstanding as interactions to be avoided, managed, and solved to expedite a return to normalcy. As Barrett et al. (1995) argue, issues of organizational language and historical 'embeddedness' are sites of tension and resistance to change. This assertion implicates typical change practices as influenced by a yearning for a conflict-free workplace and views disagreement as a broken cog or dysfunctional apparatus that hampers the overall effectiveness of the organization, or, organization as nothing more than the sum of its parts, some being high functioning and some being broken (Wheatley, 2006). These "mechanistic" assumptions of organizational functioning tend to focus change practices on addressing perceived deficiencies through repair, sanction, or the silencing of differing

opinions. However, CCO perspectives appreciate disagreement (especially during times of change) and thus view conflict as generative of meaning and influential to how the organizational reality is created, whether acknowledged by management or not. This idea has implications on organizational practices regarding disagreement, the thoughtful reclamation of conflict is an untapped repository of dynamic knowledge.

Those embracing a CCO perspective to the study of organizational change focus on change as an inherently communicative practice. For instance, Ford and Ford (1995) describe change as a fundamentally communicative action and recommend focusing the study of change on the "types of conversations that managers use to create, sustain, focus and complete change" (p. 541). Conversations, not policy or new funding, are the site of possibilities for change and are the precursors to policy and budget decisions. However, the barriers to the change conversations Ford and Ford describe rest in the static, or fossilized, language and history of the organization (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Member interactions, commonly played out through discourse, represent a co-experience and generate knowledge of the organization. As members socialize, dominant forms of interaction emerge that normalize certain behaviors and language while marginalizing others (Nonaka, 1994). It can be difficult to imagine new realities or discuss radical ideas when organizational talk is tethered by historical language and the ways of doing business are replicated without question because it is assumed that historicity defines organizational reality. This is not to say organizations should be re-created from the ground up in every meeting; it is to say that careful reflection and deliberate attention paid to the language chosen to describe organizational work empowers members to actively shape their surroundings.

Those studying organizational change from a communicative perspective also challenge dominant assumptions about change as a tool of management to use in response to an identified dysfunction or as an external force with finite beginnings, endings and as accompanying executive expectations that the 'change prescription' will render the organization healthy. For instance, Barrett et al. (1995) critique these dominant assumptions of organizational change and management control by calling for "the construction, maintenance, and deconstruction of meaning among organizational members" (p. 353). Although such research advocates for change as an ongoing process made manifest through member interaction, these perspectives focus on how management should frame change, rather than approaches that encourage member contribution.

Others who embrace a communicative approach to change focus attention on change as emerging from conflict by re-conceptualizing the nature of organizations and how they adapt (on an ongoing basis) to emerging demands through reflexive self-structuring (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). For instance, some acknowledge that the nature of change is disruptive and often manifests in organizations through conflict among its members. Such approaches to change are intentional about maintaining openness to conflict (Deetz, 2003). A healthy, thriving organization is far more than the absence of conflict; in fact, the ongoing acknowledgement and space provided for conflict contributes to successful human systems. If we accept the assertion that the same assumptions that created the suppression of new ideas cannot adequately address them (Wheatley, 2006), then questioning deeply held beliefs when exploring organizational change is merited. These approaches to organizational change challenge the modern

organizational virtues of stability, predictability, hierarchy and executive prerogative encapsulated by Deetz (2003) as a taken for granted 'code' of organizational homogeneity. However, if organizations seek to maximize internal resources (member contribution), then meaningful engagement of all those who serve in the organization is required to fulfill its promise.

The compelling aspects that CCO brings to understanding organizations and change is a rethinking of order, a value for uncertainty, and the power of social interaction to engage and catalyze new meanings among those participating in organizational change. The balance between embracing new ways of understanding and relying on organizational history is an important contributor to organizational realities during times of change. Existing organizational constructs provide the roadmap for transformation, for it is within the a priori domain that transformative work must occur in the continuous process of reshaping organizations. Extending the literature presented thus far, I will now explore one theory in the CCO domain that emphasizes communication as constitutive and goes on to describe the duality of action and structure without giving primacy to either. The idea of action / structure duality promotes a seamless view of organization, rather than specific flows or examining structures for homogeneous norms described in other CCO theories, structuration theory focuses on the actions, precursors to actions and processes of organizing. Structuration theory provides a useful way to see how transformative work occurs and the possible constraints that may impede its progress.

Structuration Theory

Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) is one theoretical approach that has informed some researchers interested in communicative approaches to organizational change. Researchers embracing communication as constitutive of organizations recognize that action and structure are dependent on each other (Ashcraft et al., 2009). This research shows how action requires a social structure within which to act, and that structure is created by the interactions of those within it. A tendency of the CCO perspective is that some scholars focus their attention on the "macro" aspects of organization such as structures or large-scale systems of meaning while other scholars focus attention on the "micro" aspects of communication such as interpersonal relations or local practices of talk. However, organizational communication scholars embracing a communicative approach to change often want to avoid the problem of conceiving of communication in only "macro"/"micro" binary terms (Kuhn & Nelson, 2012). As such, some scholars interested in not conceiving of communication in either "macro" or "micro" terms focus on the complex ways member interactions represent a generative "dance" of knowledge creation, which translates into organizational knowledge (Cook & Brown, 1999). In particular, structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) offers a useful entry point for communication scholars interested in organizational change by directing attention to the complex interplay among organizational constructs (norms, rules, policy, efficiencies, structure, etc.) that emerge over time and space, and how member interactions generate constructs. Structuration explores the conditions that lead to the reproduction and transformation of social systems. Rather than view 'structure' as

separate and apart from membership, structure is a collectivity of interactions (Giddens, 1979).

Structuration theory, introduced by Giddens (1984) bridges the gap between structure and action by analyzing the duality between the two in an effort to reconcile the divergent research agendas involving a priori constructs and the emergent day to day enactment of organizational social life. Giddens' assertion that social interactions, in adherence to the rules of social life, enact and reify (or resist) the settings in which they take place balance the micro and macro perspectives. Systemic forms emerge through space and time by reproduced social practices that imbed structural properties on organizations. By way of highlighting the complexities of human interactions, Giddens explains that the consequences of action, regardless of the intention, are subject to the interconnectedness of actor relationships. The social practices enacted through time and space (which produce and reproduce structures) are the unit of analysis for structuration theory. Grasping structuration theory requires explicating the main tenets of this theoretical perspective. If social interaction produces structure, then examination of the members doing the interacting is merited to understand how the individual is conceptualized from a structurational perspective. The following sections review these aspects of structuration theory in terms of discussing the constructs of "action," "structure," and power relations.

<u>Action</u>

Structuration theory recognizes agency in terms of capability (Cohen, 1989). Rather than describing agency as individual intent, capability is its mark. For instance, if I intended to cook a delicious fillet of fish, but burned it to a crisp instead because my

experience with charcoal grilling is lacking, my agency is evidenced by the outcome

rather than my desire. Additionally, I could have acted otherwise and undercooked the

fish, thereby sickening my family. The execution of an act and the ability to act

otherwise, whether intentional or not, comprise agency (Cohen, 1989). The *awareness* to

act in a certain way in a certain situation for an intended outcome infers an actor has

'knowledgeability', which is an understanding of the conditions and consequences of day

to day life. A toddler playing in the street does not have knowledgeability of the dangers

moving cars pose to the human body. Knowledgeability is the situational awareness to

align actions with intended outcomes. For actions to make sense to others, individuals tap

into the common knowledge stock of social situations (represented as structures) based

on experience and understandings. This process requires the corralling of language and

history to assert a situated action; an action appropriate in the context in which it is

perpetrated. Thus, agency is the capability to act and is fueled by knowledgeability,

which is developed through the ongoing experiences of day to day life (Giddens, 1984).

Conceptualizing agency is more complex than knowing what to do, making sense

to others and the ability to act. A deeper look requires investigation of how individuals

get to this point. Learning from the past implies thinking about what was known at the

time, what was done (or not done) and the resultant outcome. Reflexive monitoring, of

self and others, informs individual actions in social settings (Giddens, 1984). The

routinized, day to day activity of life provide constant input for reflexive monitoring,

primarily through discursive acts, and is imbedded in the practical consciousness that

informs actions and understandings. According to this perspective, practical

consciousness is the information repository for navigating social situations, and coupled

with habitual activity (routinization) comprise the recursive nature of social life. We know how to 'go on' every day through reflection upon our experiences even though our understandings may not be discursively expressed. Consider a recent encounter with an acquaintance, during which you felt an immediate connection with the individual. Although you may not be able to describe exactly why the connection occurred, you know it when you feel it. This, in addition to implicit information (such as language), builds the repository of practical consciousness and drives actions. Sometimes described as memory traces, actions are driven by the residual memories of previous experiences and provide a roadmap for what to do in certain situations. The complexity and dynamism of human interaction is touched upon when discussing practical consciousness; in addition to being recursively informed, practical consciousness speaks to the deeply held assumptions about the world an individual possesses. All members operate with bias, or with taken for granted assumptions that color perception, decision-making, and action. These examples of tacit knowledge are the repository of an individual's practical consciousness (Giddens, 1979).

In contrast to discursive consciousness, which infers the verbal expression of the knowledge repository that enables one to meaningfully engage in social life, practical consciousness emerges through deeply held assumptions and beliefs. Why choose one action over another? Why react to a certain situation in one way and not another? Practical consciousness is a concept that accounts for unspoken understandings about how organizing should work based on the experiences and beliefs of the individual and aids in investigations of conflict and stress in the workplace. Contradicting taken for granted assumptions about what children need to be successful in school (for instance),

and the outcomes of disrupting the practical consciousness of an individual or group is of interest in this study of organizational change in public education. Thus, practical consciousness is a prime motivator relative to member action, and by extension, the organization.

Agency is an intricate matter. Appropriately identifying the freedom and constraints human agents experience in making choices can be complicated the minute any idea is offered on the matter, but it must be attended to. Structuration theory hones in on the ability to act, the experiences that inform the action and the context in which it takes place. These building blocks are tied to social practices ordered through time and space; which is to say, social action is not created, but recreated through individual expression. This process of social practice re-creation provides a unique lens to understand how structure (the reproduction of structural principles through time a space) emerges, and is at the heart of structuration theory.

Structure

According to structuration theory, structures are socially enacted. Absent the knowledge that informs how human agents go about their day to day activity the concept of structure is impossible (Giddens, 1984). A policy is simply an outcome of human conversation placed on ink and paper and is enacted when individuals act in accordance to it, or 'act it' into existence. Of particular interest for those embracing structuration perspectives are the principles surrounding similar social practices that emerge over space and time, which contribute to systemic forms. Further, according to structuration theory, a structure is comprised of the rules and resources that enable members to meaningfully interact and navigate their organizational reality. Drawing on rules and

resources allows members to be intelligible (the ability to make sense of the organization around them, and make sense to others). Rules refer to principles or routines that guide action, and both constitute meaning and are represented through the sanctioning of social conduct. These are the generalizable practices that contribute to organizing processes and allow members to go on day to day such as start times, reporting requirements, or work flow. Resources can be personal experiences, language, education or mastery of subject matter individuals use to navigate their surroundings and intelligibly communicate with others. Rules and resources are ways to understand structural principles and empower the transformative capacity of members. Discussion of how human agents negotiate daily activities inevitably reverts to the generalized capacity of the individual to respond to, and influence, a variety of social situations. This negotiation is dependent upon awareness of the rules and resources at hand, which simultaneously tether the agent and provide avenues for change. These features of structuration may appear to constrain agency through choice limitations; however, structures allow space for the transformation of imbedded systemic practices through time. Existing rules and resources are the currency for actions and words to make sense in an organizational context (intelligibility), whether reproductive or transformative of structure.

     Poole and McPhee (2005) encapsulate structuration theory as "…the system itself as the product of human actions operating through a duality in which structures are both the medium and the outcome of actions" (p. 175). Asserting that a system is both the medium and outcome of action complicates traditional assumptions of organizations; and in so doing, asserts an evolutionary step on organizational communication scholarship. The focus of structuration theory is the social practices reproduced through time and

space (Giddens, 1984). Social practices are brought into existence through member interaction, which implicate individual member's lived experience. Humans draw on the past to inform present-day action, this reflexive process is ongoing as today's experiences may shape tomorrow's actions and culminate to reflect an ever-emerging organizational reality.

<u>Power Relations</u>

Regarding power relations, those embracing structuration perspectives see power in terms of resources being leveraged through the dependence between subordinates and superiors, and empowers subordinates to 'act otherwise' depending upon their access and skill in wielding the resources available. This way of conceiving of power is described as the dialectic of control (Cohen, 1989). Managers are not all-powerful; power in social systems must be continually enacted to exist. "Power within social systems which enjoy some continuity over time and space presumes regularized relations of autonomy and dependence between actors and collectivities in contexts of social interactions" (Giddens, 1984 p. 16). Power is thus conceived in terms of the "regularized relations" that reproduce expected (historical) positions, discourse, and actions intelligible to the organization as it has been. Within this context, the resources available to reify existing structures are also available to those who envision the possibilities to transform the structure in a different trajectory. The dialectic of control draws upon, and challenges structural rules and resources at the same time. This description of transformation implies time and persistence (as opposed to the immediacy of revolution) and viewing organizational change from a structuration perspective focuses on redirecting the actions

of organizational members in ways that reshape the rules and resources that comprise the organizational structures, creating possibilities for unfamiliar ground to become a reality.

Structuration and Organizational Change

Informed by structuration theory, scholars interested in organizational change have attended to the duality of structure and member action as a way to understand and engage in organizational change. Specifically, when organizational members draw upon the rules and resources during their day to day practice, the system is reproduced, or transformed. From this perspective, language is an important resource for organizing. For instance, Heracleaous and Barrett (2000) highlight language as far more than information exchange but as constructive of organizational reality and a symbolic process central to establishing and maintaining shared meanings associated with organizational change. Understanding organizational change entails exploration into the routinized language practices of knowledgeable members. Exploring the intersection between tacit knowledge applied in the context of social situations (practical consciousness) and rules and resources aids in understanding organizational reproduction and transformation (Giddens, 1979). Studying change then involves investigating the relationship between deep practical structures, which infer dominant assumptions about organizational reality, and surface-level communication, which provide visibility into why change can be disruptive. Daily communicative actions are driven by members' interpretive schemes and are framed by practical consciousness. The deeper levels of assumption and belief in members contribute to language choices throughout the work day and are context dependent. When context is predictable, or the same as yesterday, these actions are routine; however, when the assumptions driving the routine are disrupted, member

understanding of organizational reality is reflexively questioned. To clarify this point, Giddens (1984) references a study in which participants were instructed to perform 'deviant' acts in a social setting, which disrupted the intelligibility of discourse and shook the sense of ontological security of the subjects. The barometer of member conduct is grounded in routine based on a set of historical assumptions about membership in the organization. Therefore, one way to characterize organizational change can be the abrupt insertion of unfamiliar rules (such as formulated laws or regulations) and new resources (different language describing organizational vision and purpose) that are incongruent with the existing, generalizable social practices through which members negotiate daily life. Having established rules are resources are given life through interaction, it should be said that even the perception of new organizational principals influence the interpretive schemes of members.

A study of change from a structuration perspective entails understanding the assumptions about organizational reality imbedded in deep practical structures, reflexively linked to members' practical consciousness, and identifying how change poses contradiction or tension to the existing routine guided by these assumptions. This type of analysis provides a window into why a proposed change may cause disruption and offers cues to ameliorate this by re-situating how members can imagine organizing in new ways.

In the context of organizational change, an important arena of analysis is the interpretations of organizational reality members express through their interactions. For instance, Heracleous and Barrett (2001) offer a structuration approach to organizational change that recognizes how change takes place at both the micro level of "surface

communicative actions" as well as the macro level of "deep discursive structures" (p. 756). This approach to organizational change complicates the structure/agency duality by viewing actors as "purposeful, knowledgeable agents, both enabled and constrained by discursive structures" (p. 756). Such a structuration approach focuses on the constitutive quality of communication and also highlights how social practices are both enabled and constrained by organizational contexts. Structuration approaches to organizational change are thus useful because this perspective places organizational change in a "continual dialectic" (p. 758) between the micro level communicative actions of change agents and the macro level structures of organization.

Relative to the co-creation of organizational life, this continual dialectic focuses attention on negotiations, and re-negotiations, of reality-making enacted in ongoing communicative processes of organizing. Never pre-determined or finished, organizational reality shifts with every interaction among its members; as such, communication is a defining feature of organization (Ashcraft et al., 2009). Clearly, language choices bind our ability to articulate how organizational change happens as it is often talked about as a point in time rather than an ongoing process. Organizations are always changing; neither static nor stable, organizing is accomplished through the communicative acts occurring within it (Kuhn & Ashcraft, 2003).

Many researchers have acknowledged, and extended, structuration theory's explication of communication phenomena in organizations. Heracleaous & Hendry (2000) delve into how the structuration perspective contributes to understanding how malleable interpretive schemes are as members perceive new or different causal relationships through experience; how interpretive schemes inform action; and how

interaction contributes to structural properties. From an applicability perspective, structuration aligns with many theoretical approaches to understanding organization; this usability is borne from the ideas and concepts accounting for the micro and macro discussed previously. For instance, interpretive schemes are comprised from a member's stock of knowledge (generated through reflection) and are the drivers of discursive structures, initiated through communication and can reproduce or challenge these structures. The utility of duality helps link individual interpretive schemes with discursive structures (or, language choices used across an organization to describe reality) and offers a conceptual framework to describe structure as enacted and reproduced by members.

As such, during the times of change, the reproduction and transformation of structural principals is brought about by member action, not as isolated events, but through a continuous flow of conduct (Giddens, 1979). Organizational stability and change can both be conceptualized as members drawing on rules and resources to make sense of their surroundings (knowledgeability) and to make sense to others (intelligibility). The point of individual struggle is when rules and resources contradict one's practical consciousness; when members question their own knowledgeability of the organizational reality. As all members perceive organizational reality through their own unique bias, this point of struggle varies by member, and, at the same time is informed by the interactions among members as they collectively seek to establish norms on a continuous basis. The ongoing effort to establish tacitly agreed upon norms feed the ontological security of the membership; this is the essence of structuration theory and emerges through member interaction. Therefore, change is the renegotiation of organizational reality through continuous interaction.

In the context of this study, I investigated member interpretations of organizational change and the preceding experiences that rationalized (or helped make sense of) these interpretations. This query aids in understanding motivations for action and the reproduction (or transformation) of social practices contributing to ontological security. The relationships between ontological security-seeking actions and the organizational rules and resources available help us appreciate the staying power of historical practices and the process of organizational change through member action.

Studying Emergent/Structural Duality

The grounding of this literature review is based in research focused on organizational communication, communication as constitutive of organizations, and structuration theory in the context of organizational change. I account for the traditional understandings of organizational functioning, the 'breaking away' of these understandings through the incorporation of how member interaction contributes to organizational reality, the interplay between "macro" features and "micro" practices, and how the process of member 'grappling' with ingrained assumptions when they are disrupted serves as a process of reconstituting the structure itself (change). Based on structuration theory, Students Come First could be seen as potentially shaking the ontological security of SEA members, and how their ensuing actions sought to make sense of the change. The choice of actions taken in response to the change varied and contributed to a very different work environment than existed prior. Access to the rules and resources available at the SEA to make sense of Students Come First was not sufficient to satisfy member equivocation, which resulted in frustration, stress, and a not-knowingness of member roles in the organization. Driven by equivocation, member

interaction takes on new characteristics to regain the ontological security mentioned above. I used a structuration perspective to understand how members of the SEA made sense of the change and how this grappling contributed to reshaping the organization.

As such, the following questions guided the exploration of change in this study:

1. What were the consequences of new rules and resources introduced at the SEA as a result of Students Come First?

2. How did SEA members rationalize their actions during Students Come First implementation?

Responding to these questions required qualitative research methods to learn about this change initiative from members of the SEA who participated in the Students Come First implementation. The following section reviews the methods I used to gather and analyze interview data as well as analysis techniques to respond to these guiding questions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Because qualitative research methods are well suited to investigate interpretations, meaning-making, and member interaction, I used a qualitative research approach to engage in this study of the action / structure duality among the SEA's Idaho's Students Come First change initiative. This study's research design was approved by Boise State University's Institutional Review Board and the approval letter is included in the appendix. In particular, by embracing tenets of the CCO perspective and structuration theory as a lens to understanding organizational change, I gained insights into the ways members of the SEA negotiated a new reality through communication during the implementation of Students Come First. Although structuration is typically associated with understanding organizational stability, I see it as a valuable context to study change because the language and ideas it presents can explicate change as well as stability. As such, a qualitative approach was useful to gain insights to participants' interpretations of the rules and resources available and their related actions associated with the Students Come First educational change initiative. Interpretive research methods aim to capture participant understandings of the study's context, and emphasizes how participant perspectives are emergent through discourse (Keyton, 2006). Answering the research questions posed in this study required talking to those involved in the Students Come First initiative to explicate inter-subjective meanings, or, how members of the SEA co-constructed their experiences of Students Come First.

Qualitative research is well suited to capture complex communication phenomena because explicating subjectivity, rather than objective measurement, is a meaningful way to investigate the social construction of meaning. Qualitative research methods focus on interpretive processes and include field interviews, focus groups, and collecting stories or ethnographic studies (Keyton, 2006). Qualitative researchers resist the idea that there is one 'absolute' truth and seek to understand the multiple perspectives of individuals around a common topic or event. Often serving as the direct collectors of data, qualitative researchers rely on discourse, either written or verbal, to draw out the unique perspectives of participants because their subjective interpretations are the heart of creating new understandings about human communicative acts.

The aim of this study was to provide an explanation around how the members of the SEA came to understand and interpret communicative experiences from their unique perspectives as members of the SEA within the context of implementing a controversial change initiative. Using an interpretive lens to explore how the experiences of SEA participants associated with the Students Come First initiative helped respond to the guiding questions of this study. Participants accounting their experience with Students Come First through interviews are the actions that produced the data for this study.

In particular, this research study sought to understand the meanings and interpretations among members at the Idaho SEA to gain insights into the relationship between member interaction and the organization within which they occurred during the implementation of Students Come First. Attention to the duality of structure and consistent focus on meaning-making processes required an interpretive research method to understand the inter-subjective construction of the SEA environment during Students

Come First implementation. In the following sections, I will review my methods of data collection, provide a description of interview participants, describe the interview guide, and the qualitative analysis techniques I used to engage in this study of educational organizational change.

Data Collection

The data I used for this study consists of interview transcripts and field notes. To collect this data, I conducted in-field interviews and took field notes before, during, and after interview sessions with the participants of the SEA. The action of interviewing participants are the focus of analysis for this study, for these guided conversations were intended to illicit a personal, individualized account of how the change proposal impacted each participant. Field interviews are designed to capture the participant's understandings through a combination of guided questions and open conversation; when the researcher is equipped with contextual knowledge and specific terminology issues and themes can be drawn out to capture a robust repository of data. Field interviews are loosely structured to provide the flexibility to allow participants to tell their story in their own way eliciting their own words and thus documenting authentic feelings, concerns, and aspirations (Keyton, 2006). Policy, like organizations, are acted into existence, as such field interviews with members can capture participants' understandings of their lived experience (their unique subjectivity) in their own terms and provide insights into how participants interpreted the changes occurring around them. Social systems are expressed through the routines of daily life and when change disrupts routinization, members seek venues to make sense of the 'new' world they inhabit through interaction with others. As such, the most fruitful approach to understanding each member's unique perspective and

interpretation of change is through asking open-ended questions about their experiences and capturing their responses. Accordingly, interviews designed to invite participants to tell me their story about what the change meant for them offered a good method for data collection. The interview questions of this study represent a series of inquiries aimed at eliciting interpretations of what enabled meaning-making, how underlying assumptions informed reactions to change, how members co-created organizational reality through interaction, and how the organizational reality shifted throughout the change.

In addition to interviews, I took field notes before, during, and after interview sessions. Field notes document observations about the non-verbal communicative cues of participants during the interview and may include the interview setting, participant eye contact, fidgeting activity when certain questions are posed, expressions of discomfort or resolve, smiles or frowns, and hand gestures. These can be clues that support, or contradict the discursive data collected and can paint a more robust picture of the participants' lived experience than language alone. Although not intended to 'see through' a disingenuous verbal response, field notes can produce valuable data for fully understanding unique perspectives and aid in reflecting individualized meanings of the communication phenomena being studied.

Interview Participants

The study included eight individual narrative interviews, identified by a network sampling strategy, which entails identifying participants who meet specific criteria that will provide the most informed and diverse set of data for analysis. I believe eight interviews offered a data set sufficient to draw conclusions due to the number of players responsible for the change initiative implementation (a total of approximately 20). As

such, interviewing eight people included close to half of those involved in the implementation processes. I interviewed SEA members who worked at the SEA prior to and during the changes so they can reflect on differences in work life resulting from the changes. Thus, the participant profile for this study includes those employed at the SEA least six months prior to the implementation of Students Come First who remained on staff at the time of its repeal. Including those on staff before the change initiative who remained on staff after offers an important pre / during / post perspective around the substantive impacts to organizational life brought about by the change initiative.

I identified potential candidates for participation through a network sampling strategy. A network sampling strategy involves identifying individuals who fit a specific profile with unique experiences to best inform the research study and inviting them to participate (Keyton, 2006). When a sample of potential appropriate participants is identified, prospective participants were recruited in person by me using a recruitment script as a consistent guide. The recruitment script detailed the purpose of the study, what was being asked of the participant, the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality, contact information if questions arise and instructions if the member agrees. Study participants were asked to engage in an interview lasting 30 to 60 minutes, which provided enough time for participants to tell their story but was not too long that the interview created and imposition and possible barrier to participation in the study. Prior to an interview, each participant was asked to sign a consent form describing the rights of participants and signifies an acknowledgement that the information they provide can be used in this study per Boise State University's Institutional Review Board criteria.

Interview Protocol

When individuals agreed to participate, I scheduled interviews with each participant. The locations of the interviews were left to the discretion of each participant and included an office setting or an offsite location (coffee shop, restaurant, etc.); the purpose of this decision was to maximize participant comfort with the interview process, and encourage participants' feelings of confidentiality. My approach in conducting the interviews was informal and relaxed. Using the interview guide as a map for each discussion, my goal was to understand how meaning-making, interactions and rules, and resources influenced each participant's understanding of the SEA and their role in it relative to Students Come First.

Interviews followed an interview guide, with probes for each question designed to identify how participants made sense of Students Come First (e.g., what resources aided sense-making?), what aspects of the change challenged deeply held assumptions (e.g., what aspects of Students Come First made you uncomfortable and why?), which meaning making-activities contributed to understanding the situation (e.g., what interactions were seminal in co-creating a new organizational reality?), and how organizational rules constrained, or fluctuated to accommodate day to day dilemmas. Key interview questions included:

- Tell me your story about Students Come First and your role at the SEA. What did you do to make sense of Students Come First?

- What about Students Come First contradicted or supported your understanding about what students need to learn?

- What organizational changes emerged as a result of Students Come First?

- How has the organization changed since Students Come First?

The probes and follow up questions accompanying the interview questions provided a consistent guide to dig deeper if the initial response to the question was vague or unclear. The interview guide was designed to facilitate a deliberate conversation focused on understanding each participant's unique experience during Students Come First implementation and how interactions with others and the organizational surroundings influenced their experience.

The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. The transcription of the interviews occurred as soon as possible after each interview so details were fresh and nothing was lost. The transcriptions were the primary data source for this study and having the interview conversation written down allowed for multiple reviews to fully comprehend each participant's perspective and aided in categorizing themes across interviews. In order to ensure anonymity of the participants in the study, pseudonyms were provided for each participant when transcribing and are included in Chapter Four. During the interviews, field notes were documented on pen and paper during the interview to record non-verbal communicative cues such as meaningful pauses, fluctuations in tone, or impassioned responses. My interpretations of reactions aided in understanding each participant's emotion regarding their reactions to organizational change. The use of pen and paper reduced the impersonal barrier of typing on a laptop.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts and of my field notes provided insights to the structures (rules and resources), actions (reflections of actions), and changes to either of these in the terms used by interview participants (and thus of the

overall organization). After completing the interviews and transcribing the conversations, the data was initially coded to identify themes related to resources contributing to meaning making, member co-creation of organizational reality, and shifts in organizational features related to Students Come First. The coding method I used entailed categorizing the data with a label for a set of emergent excerpts, ideas, themes, or examples that were similar. The categorization process allowed for organizing responses across interviews to ascertain similarities, or anomalies relative to the research questions (Keyton, 2006). This initial analysis and coding exercise was designed to gain insight into each participant's perspective and bracket responses in categories informed by structuration theory such as rules, resources, reflexivity, and practical consciousness.

This initial pass at the data was followed by an axial-coding, which links categories together in a meaningful way. Axial coding involves identifying the inter-relatedness of responses across interviews and aids in recognizing themes and collapsing responses into similar categories. For instance, all responses related to member interactions were combined in an attempt to paint a picture of interaction informed by multiple perspectives. Axial coding occurred until all the data relevant to the research questions were categorized.

This type of categorization allowed themes and patterns to emerge; explicating the tension-filled relationships between themes can provide a new perspective to gain deeper understanding about change and the co-experience of living a change at the SEA. Categorization also brought to light anomalies that contributed to answering my guiding research questions. When appropriate, as determined by information such as acronyms or references to situations not likely known to those outside the organization, I engaged in a

process of interpretive coding of the responses to make sense of any organizational

jargon that might render meanings difficult for an outsider to understand, such as

providing a description of the SEA's escalation process if it is referred to in "an

interview." Interpretive coding was useful in deciphering esoteric information to help

make sense of patterns, themes, concepts, and propositions to those unfamiliar with the

social context within which the study takes place (Keyton, 2006). This interpretive

process involved a reading, and re-reading of the transcripts until each study participant's

perspective is thoroughly understood, organizing responses to answer the research

questions posed and analyzing each category through a structuration lens grounded in the

assumption that communication is constitutive of organization.

An original total of 9 individuals fitting the participant profile were asked to

participate in this research project. All but one agreed to participate without hesitation; a

combination of time limitations and concern about confidentiality led to one prospective

participant declining the invitation. As such, 8 interviews were conducted between

February 11, 2015 and March 6, 2015, and ranged from 22 minutes to 48 minutes. All

participants read and signed the consent form approved by Boise State University's

Institutional Review Board and the recorded interviews were transcribed as soon as was

possible after the interview took place, and in concert with the field notes, comprise the

data informing this study. In general, participants were interested in this research project

and eager to participate. The combination of field notes and transcripts reflect a general

satisfaction of participants to be heard: to have an opportunity to reflect and debrief their

thoughts, concerns, and aspirations about Students Come First. Uniformly, the field notes

inferred reflection, confidence, and an emphatic sense of 'knowing' during interviews; as

if to say: I am glad you asked because I have a valid perspective. Cues that led me to this conclusion included extended pauses prior to responding to a question (deep breaths, an eye gaze upward or closed eyes, nodding and tapping of a finger on the table, fingers crossed in contemplation), and while answering questions raised or louder vocal tones, pointing of fingers and karate-chop motions with one hand. The theme of being heard, or having voice, will emerge again later in this thesis as an important component of generating support for any change initiative.

Embracing My Role

This study explored the changing roles among SEA staff designed to facilitate Students Come First implementation to better understand the relationship between member action and structural fluidity. This study also investigated the assumptions and meaning-making enactments of participants that informed their actions and the organizational impacts of these actions. I currently work at the Idaho SEA and played a central role in Students Come First implementation and have unique insights into who should be included in this study due to their involvement in the change initiative and which questions will elicit data to best answer the research questions posed. The interview guide consisted of many broad questions intended to minimize leading questions based on my own assumptions about the change initiative. When working to implement Students Come First, I was (like many research participants of this study) both surprised by the changes and excited by an expanded ability to meet student needs. I saw benefits for teachers and students by individualizing instruction through technology and incorporating innovative instructional practices like flipping the classroom (students view 'lectures' online at night and do homework with the help of the teacher and other students

during the school day). However, I also felt concern about how the changes emerged and had questions about their impetus. I was genuinely conflicted and focused on maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks. This study is the result of my desire to learn more about how others reconciled these challenges and uncertainties during the implementation of this significant change initiative.

It is important readers understand my perspective because this influenced my interactions with subjects and my interpretation of the data. While conducting this study, my aim was to better understand how this change initiative influenced the organization and SEA participants and I embodied a sincere desire to find ways to improve how other change initiatives are implemented in the future. I paid deliberate attention to explaining my goals with this project to subjects and implored them to speak honestly and from their hearts. My impression is that these efforts paid off due to the impassioned responses to my interview questions. I didn't perceive anyone 'holding back.' My experiences at the SEA during the change initiative helped me gain unique insights not readily available to other researchers because I was equipped with information and institutional knowledge to drill down specifics and ask meaningful follow-up questions that are inaccessible to an outsider. Based on my involvement at the SEA and the professional relationships I have with many of the research participants, I was uniquely positioned to get the right people and ask the right questions to generate new knowledge about the Students Come First experience at the SEA. I took my role of qualitative researcher seriously in terms of being open to the ideas and voice of the participants. As such, I was aware of the risks of me embracing the researcher role, which included subject's questioning my motives, nudging questions in a direction that aligned with my assumptions, and inadvertently omitting

questions that may have revealed negative feedback about my role in Students Come First.

I intentionally omitted details regarding the specific criteria of research participants in this chapter to protect anonymity. By detailing the positions or responsibilities of the participants included in this study, it would not be difficult to connect these to an identity. To clarify the goal of the interviews and exert transparency, a script was read prior to every interview articulating the purpose of the study, the right of participants to cease involvement at any time with no recourse, the fact that this study is wholly separate and apart from official SEA business, that the interviews and discussions will be recorded (and deleted upon thesis completion), responses are confidential and anonymous and that SEA management is aware of the activity and approved this study.

Change is a struggle for most organizations and is especially challenging for public education. Studying how change is understood, talked about, and implemented with knowledge of existing philosophical tensions regarding the change is a ripe avenue for understanding how to improve change practices in the future. In particular, studying how change influences or is influenced by the members of the organization itself is an important way to improve change. Improvement, in this context, connotes a healthy interplay between member engagement in the process of change initiative implementation and the rules and resources designed to facilitate engagement. Grounding this study broadly in a communication as constitutive of organizations perspective, and specifically through structuration theory, offered a special circumstance to expand knowledge around how employees reconstituted the SEA during Students Come First implementation

through the process of member action. Thus, this study helps us learn more about how,

through grappling with new expectations and demands, members gain understanding of a

change initiative and how a new organizational reality was co-created into existence at

the SEA.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The findings of this study present several salient tension-filled themes about the

Students Come First change initiative that help provide responses to the guiding research

questions presented in Chapter 2. These findings also offer new ways to conceptualize the

barriers to, and opportunities for, change at the SEA. The themes that emerged through

the data analysis process described in Chapter 3 include articulations of: 1) what is good

for public education, 2) exclusion from information and decision-making processes

related to change, 3) technology integration in instruction, 4) the governance philosophy

of the SEA, and 5) the value of time related to systems change. The data indicate a

number of tensions within these themes, which fueled frustration and excitement for the

change program; for the study participants as a whole, it was hard to both participate

fully, and completely resist Students Come First. The tensions within these themes reveal

both the consequences of new rules and resources introduced at the SEA as a result of the

Students Come First initiative and how the members of SEA rationalized their actions

during the changes.

What Is Good for Public Education

The most salient theme across the data was strong statements about what is good

for public education. The tension between private sector strategies and the dynamic

nature of serving students played a main role in the disagreement about whether or not

Students Come First would help, or impede the education of Idaho students. As Maria

stated after a moment of quiet contemplation with eyes cast upwards as if remembering a

specific instance: "At one point I was surprised by some in the SEA who threw up their hands in a meeting because they either did not know what to do, or they disagreed with what was being asked of them. Couldn't they see that we could do a lot to improve school for kids?" Maria viewed the new requirements placed on teachers and administrators as good for students. Similarly, Juan offered the following while tapping the table with what appeared to be impatience:

> When I saw initiatives (such as Students Come First) around improving teacher quality, I liked them because it was a core initiative I saw the private sector use every day- the education sector doesn't seem to ever adopt. Every workforce should have a primary goal to get better every year. During Student's Come First implementation I saw passive resistance; people talked about doing things but did not do things. In many cases it was because they did not want to and in others it was because they did not have the skill set to execute.

Juan's comment relates the idea that teachers need to continuously improve their skills to maximize student potential. Further, his comment is challenging education to adopt what works in the private sector to improve teacher's skills. Specifically, his 'passive resistance' remark revealed his frustration around why those in the public education sector are tentative about adopting private sector practices. Juan views teacher improvement as a key strategy to student achievement and couldn't understand why other's didn't agree.

Whether lack of skill sets or disagreement with the Student's Come First vision, participants excited about the change expressed frustration with the lack of action among adults to implement the initiative successfully because Students Come First represented an opportunity to change the public education landscape to benefit students. As participant Maria put it: "…growing up and going to school in my home town in Idaho, I was bored and frustrated by how slow the system was- really, one size fits all no matter

how bored students were." This participant's experience as a student in the system clearly informed her excitement about the possibilities for current students just like her. Maria was hopeful about the aspects of Students Come First that supported teachers to be more flexible and better serve each individual student. In the context of new requirements for teachers and administrators required by the change initiative, Juan summarized his view on why adults in public education are challenged to adopt private sector practices by saying: "…the people at the SEA were very nice people. Teachers are nice; we want nice people to be with our kids. Management is not necessarily always nice." The implication here is that meeting strategic objectives and project milestones is not always a function of being nice – if a member lacks the drive or skill set to get the job done, discipline often follows in the private sector. Juan's comment highlights an interesting tension. The private sector leverages increased productivity through project management and operational efficiencies, which assert pressure on members to perform. Public education involves children, who walk in the school door with influence from home and community and teachers cannot be pressured into cultivating meaningful relationships. The process of developing healthy teacher / student relationships cannot be prescribed and mapped out on a finite timeline. Consequently, those who expressed concerns about Students Come First rejected the assumption that increased student outcomes can be 'managed' into fruition through incentives or sanctions for teachers and administrators as is common practice in the private sector, evidenced by the following section.

Other members concerned about Students Come First expressed frustration as well, but from a different vantage point. For instance, Celeste stated with emphatic voice: "I am not here to battle the people I serve. I am here for them to say: thank God you

showed up. That's the role I want to play." This participant drew on her experience

teaching students and the challenges that come with each unique student; and that the

SEA is at its best when it offers a service of support and guidance rather than monitoring

adults on their compliance to new requirements. Astrae offered the following in reference

to one of the projects associated with Students Come First: "I was fitting square pegs into

round holes – philosophically it was a lot of time and money spent in the wrong

direction." The 'wrong direction' is a reference to populating purchased test items into an

instructional software platform that did not align with standards; the focus was on

increasing the numbers of test items (high numbers represented success) rather than the

quality of the test items. This is a concrete example of what is valued in the private sector

(output) versus what students need to progress academically (quality items aligned to

standards). Concern about the resources spent on the initiative contradicted what some

members thought was the best use of funds to support teachers and educate students.

Others concerned about the change initiative were unnerved by the impact on SEA

personnel, Simon said: "That's the biggest item; I remember selfishly thinking; how will

it affect what my staff and I are charged with?" Rather than a philosophical contradiction,

workload and the human resources available to complete the work were pragmatic issues

Simon identified. Significant work was required at the SEA and local levels to satisfy the

demands of Students Come First and this comment touches on the feasibility of stressed

out staff taking on more work. This tension was made most pointedly when Celeste was

direct in her critique of Students Come First and its origin: "My honest first impression

was here is another non-educator with no education background whatsoever, coming in to

solve education for the rest of us." What is best for students and the people who serve

them include leaders and policy makers that have background in the field for Celeste. Strong beliefs about the role of public education in Idaho, how public education should change for students, the risk of over-working staff, and the relationship between the SEA, local districts, and the qualifications of the leader promoting change culminated to frustrate both supporters and resistors of the change initiative.

The interview responses reveal disagreement about what positive change means for education. Based on the interviews, those with personal experience of frustration about the lack of flexibility in public education and experience the private sector saw the changes as improvement over the current system because expanded access through technology and asserting private sector ideas would move student learning in a positive direction. Those with experience as teachers or administrators saw the landscape differently and believed that overly-prescriptive mandates impeded the complicated, highly personal process of supporting students to succeed. Understandings of how to 'go on' day to day in the private sector contrasted the rules of public education. Causal relationships between actions and outcomes are why the proponents of private sector practices were excited about Students Come First. For them, the resources to make positive change included funding for technology and bonuses for increased student achievement whereas those who disagreed valued support and guidance more than incentives and sanctions. Fundamentally, the tensions exposed the differences in what it means to 'go on' day to day in the private sector versus public education. The rationalization for serving children and succeeding in the private sector emerge from fundamentally different perspectives. These tensions reveal learning to be a highly individualized process and those concerned about the change initiative did not buy into

the idea that systemic incentives and sanctions would meet the needs of all students and the adults that serve them.

Access to Information and Decision Making

The second most prevalent theme that emerged from the data was a feeling of exclusion from needed information and a desire to participate in the decision-making processes about the change initiative. Having passed the legislature, SEA members were eager to better understand what Students Come First entailed, and how to access related information and the decision-making process that informed the change. In response to questions about what most helped members make sense of Students Come First, Juan said: "mostly the SCF meetings – dedicated meetings for the project. A number of communication documents published were helpful." Similarly, Astrae stated slowly, as if accessing memory files that have not been recalled for some time: "I remember there being banners behind the front desk, some promotional materials we were all given to pass out…there were lots of leaflets and brochures and things like that describing the plan." And Maria offered:

> My main source of information was the legislation that governed the change. I read, and re-read the bills to get a good grasp on how they worked together. We had tons of meetings to talk about how they all worked together. Many changes occurred; initially the SEA was reorganized into divisions that aligned with SCF.

Fiona summarized these comments succinctly when she said: "There was a lot of reorganization in the message and it seemed like, from the point that SCF was introduced that there was, whether you liked it or not, it was a unifying focus. It was one of the few things I think over the years that really had been consistent." Ramona echoed this sentiment when she said: "My many conversations with the key folks at the SDE really helped me figure out SCF and what it meant." Overall, the language provided in the

legislation, the materials the SEA produced based on the legislation, SEA reorganization and the formal / informal conversations aided those members interested in learning more about Students Come First.

However, as evidenced by the next series of excerpts, member accessibility to these resources and involvement in decision-making varied, which contributed to equivocation about the changes and what they meant for some, and frustration for others. Astrae pointed a finger in the air as she sternly said: "[Students Come First] had been brewed and cooked, in the back room because all of a sudden it was there. All of a sudden you came to work one day and there was all this promotional material… it was hatched and sprung on everyone." This theme of feeling excluded from the decision-making process was common among a number of participants. As Celeste put it in a raised voice: "If I perceive you are doing something to me, you are going to have a hard time convincing me you are doing this for me." And Ramona's comment exemplified this sentiment when she stated:

> The information was not taken all the way down to the administrative level so
> they [administrative assistants] are left there trying to explain to people when they
> get a phone call and they don't have a clue… it almost became like a two caste
> system- ones that know and ones that don't know.

Not knowing, in this case, involved lacking access to the language of the changes, and the dialogue that led to the changes to begin with. Juan characterized SEA member familiarity with the changes in the following way: "In many cases the tools and philosophies within SCF were new concepts for people. Think about team building and the storming, norming and forming processes. SCF did not allow for these processes to occur, it was a flash cut." This particular thread of interview data complicates ideas for improvement. How does a leader reasonably include all team members in decision-

making? Ramona offered the following on this topic: "Even if your [the leader's] decision is not what they want, it gives them [members] the fact you valued what they had to say, you took into consideration their ideas, that matters." Maria said: "I did not like or understand the staff tension, why were they so confused by the vision? Maybe because I was used to the changes and they did not have the time to acclimate." Expressing a similar idea, Fiona stated: "It sure would have been nice to know about this before it went out. To be part of the discussion to help inform or shape it." And Celeste added: "I thought it [SCF] was something being done to people and not for." Maria went on to say: "Goes to show, process matters." Process means the inclusion of a broader range of SEA staff members in the construction of the legislative changes imbedded in Students Come First, some members were part of these discussions and some were not.

An interesting comment emerged related to this point, which speaks to the importance organizational members hold in being included in the conversations that generate new policy. Carmela stated: "I may want this change; I may think it is good for students, but unless I get to choose for myself I will be skeptical. I want to decide for myself if it is good for students." The 'process matters' comment is significant because there is implication that some members had access to resources (or information) that others did not. So, while language and materials were produced to help members understand what the changes meant, exclusion from the origin of the changes generated the most consternation. SEA members see themselves as subject matter experts and not being consulted on an initiative of this magnitude invalidated their expertise, hence the frustration. A piece of data related to this point was offered in response to how the SEA changed after Students Come First was repealed; Celeste said:

> Yeah, there is a shift, they are using committees…there is the Governor's Task Force for Education and they are coming up with the same recommendations as SCF. Just goes to show you people want to feel like they are part of the conversation whether people at the SEA or people you serve. It seemed like there were committees everywhere.

Clearly, this statement reinforces the value of process for members and demonstrates an organizational learning based on the experiences of Students Come First; committees are an open, public mechanism to generate ideas and capture a broad range of feedback and are a common practice to ensure everyone's voice is heard.

Overall, the interviews among the members of SEA reveal a tension between agreeing and disagreeing with the changes, and involvement or exclusion in the change design. Members are interested in being valued, which manifests in a desire to be included in decision-making and having open access to the information that frames one's job responsibilities. This theme in the findings reveals how the Students Come First change initiative left some members of the SEA excluded from information that impacts the service the organization provides and individual feelings of being blocked from opportunities to participate in decision making resulted in frustration and a tacit message that management knows best and staff are to do what they are told. When it comes to designing educational services for children, the tacit rules include collaboration and collective problem-solving because drawing on multiple perspectives and disciplines are the resources required to best meet the dynamic and fluid needs of students. In contrast, the rationalization for the change design and the dissemination of information came from a management-centric perspective with an expectation that all SEA would agree with and follow executive direction. These findings show how decisions are made, practice is informed, and information is shared in the private sector contrasts with how those in

public education collaborate to meet the unique needs of students. This contrast seemed

to serve as rationalization for supporters as well as detractors.

Technology for Learning

A third prevalent and quite tension-filled theme that emerged from analysis across

the data was about technology integration in the instructional environment. While

somewhat related to the first theme about what is good for public education, it is worth

separating and highlighting as technology was a tenant of Students Come First and many

research participants had strong opinions on this topic. As discussed in Chapter 1,

Students Come First included the provision of a mobile computing device for every Idaho

student in grades 9-12. Two competing views emerged on this aspect of the change

initiative and touched upon beliefs about what is best for students, one being that

computers were proposed to diminish or minimize the role of the teacher, the other being

that technology is an avenue that must be leveraged to establish equity regarding student

access to information throughout the state. On the topic of technology integration in

instruction, Carmela stated:

> I understood it [technology] was a very powerful tool for teachers. However, I [as
> a principal] would fight against teachers abdicating their responsibility to still be
> the captain of the ship for kids by saying I'll [teachers will] send them [students]
> to the computer lab; I [as a principal] would say no, this is just a tool for you. I
> was excited about the technology piece.

Some participants were able to envision how technology might enrich the learning

environment and they saw potential for technology improving education. However,

others expressed concern about the idea of technology for every high school student,

feeling it is challenging to implement and maintain. Regarding the SEA's Information

Technology (SEA IT) responsibilities for the deployment of devices for students, Fiona

mentioned, "How are they [SEA IT] going to deal with the technology? The IT department can't deal with what we already have." This criticism was founded upon the breadth and depth of existing responsibilities of the IT department and their challenge to meet existing expectations at the SEA, let alone the significant demands of Students Come First. Others were concerned for reasons other than lacking the capacity to implement what Students Come First called for. Celeste touched on how online classes may seem like a great benefit for rural schools to offer their students more choices in subjects, however this direction may have unintended consequences:

> If a course is offered online, there is no incentive for a school to have their own teacher offer that course. Having staff teach the series of courses in a subject area allows for cross-grade collaboration. Districts are weakened and they are at the mercy of someone else that they don't have that internal talent that their other teachers can feed upon.

The experience of school districts dismantling department staff (math, science, English, etc.) because online classes could serve as a replacement drove the concern about technology in this case. Others expressed negative attitudes about technology because it would not benefit students' education. The experiences of participants appeared to be a main driver of member excitement, or hesitancy about Students Come First. Simon, while interlocking his fingers below his chin, calmly offered:

> I think there was some misconceptions over what this (laptops for high school students) was going to cost and some nervousness from parents who were not digital natives, who were not comfortable with technology, fearing what their child was going to do with this device.

The concern about student access to inappropriate material on the state-issued laptop was mentioned in the qualitative interviews and was a common theme during Students Come First implementation. Protecting students from harm is a priority for

educators and the thought of the state facilitating access to pornography or online

predators through laptops drove resistance. Juan reflected on this topic and offered the

following:

> Analytically, intellectually, to me it made gobs of sense. Centralized purchasing of computers makes all kinds of sense, many organizations do it (scale of economy). But they [SEA management] missed the emotional part, and, in some cases the communication styles miss the 'people part' of organizational change.

What may make sense from an analytical, business perspective, the central

purchasing of laptops for high school students to leverage a scale of economy and

establish statewide consistency in student access to information does not always translate

to those with concern for students. As mentioned in Chapter One, people are very

invested in the well-being of children. One needs to make more than a business case to

convince teachers and parents that an initiative providing a laptop for all high school

students is free from risk, or that the risks have been reasonably ameliorated.

Participant articulations of this theme revealed how SEA members were

conflicted as to whether or not the integration of technology in instruction is helpful or

destructive. Interestingly, both extremes were presented and revealed as salient by

participants. The tension that emerged was that technology would either level the playing

field to access for students or it would provide the rationale to dismantle teaching staff

because instruction could be offered online. The articulations of this theme revealed

tensions among private sector assumptions (the private sector benefits from it so why

shouldn't public education) and public sector assumptions (students need a live, caring

adult to guide their learning). Neither perspective about technology for learning

acknowledged a common ground view that recognized both as beneficial for students.

Technology was seen as a critical resource for student achievement for some involved in

the change initiative; however, others bristled at the potential of computers taking the

place of humans to serve students. Fundamentally, the tensions between human resources

and technology resources coupled with conflicting assumptions about how public

education can best provide students what they need to succeed academically informed

how research participants rationalized their support or resistance.

<div align="center">**Governance Philosophy**</div>

A fourth salient tension-filled theme emergent from the data was contradicting

ideas about the governance philosophy of public education in Idaho. This theme exposed

deep tensions around control. The differences between *local control*, an idea that local

jurisdictions (school districts in this instance) know best what is needed for those they

serve and that maximum flexibility in decision-making should be deferred to those

closest to the student level and *state control*, an idea that offers a leveraging of scales of

economy and uniformity in instructional quality that truly meets Idaho's constitutional

mandate of equal education for all, contributed to disagreement about the best way to

govern public education. Juan opined the following on this topic while making small

karate-chop motions on the table between us:

> The foundation of SCF was that the state makes the decisions, so the assumption
> was that the state was in charge and that was in opposition to the general concept
> that was Idaho is a local control state. There was a conflict between the generally
> accepted governance and the implementation governance [of Students Come
> First].

This was a well-articulated framing of tension behind Students Come First; Juan

further explained how state-level decisions complicate life at the local level:

> I [as a school district] must perform my task as a district. I cannot rely on a state
> entity that's led by a state official due to the frequent changes in directives
> [guaranteed turnover every four or eight years]. The new superintendent comes in
> and says no to one-to-one devices [laptops for every high school student], I am

screwed, my students are screwed, so there's a lack of long-term operating plan that will codify to protect the districts… districts didn't have a choice but to fight it [Students Come First] because they have been through administration changes so they knew at some point the current administration would be out and change would occur. They [school districts] can't hitch their wagon to an organization that changes that quickly.

Juan summarizes how problematic it becomes when operating rules shift abruptly and touches on how, through reflecting on past state-level initiatives, districts are understandably hesitant to exert significant time and effort in adopting new practices when their longevity is in question. It's a bold statement to say school districts didn't have a choice but to oppose Students Come First for these reasons. Students Come First presented a challenge in this context for many at the SEA. As Fiona said:

> There are certainly economies of scale when you look at purchasing equipment or providing services at a state level…one standard framework makes it really easy to say this is what we [Idaho] is doing as a state. We'll [school districts will] say we want local control, but when push comes to shove do we really want to pay for it and make the decisions? Because if we do we are accountable.

The accountability relates to the previous section regarding access to decision-making in that if SEA members are held accountable for new decisions made at the state-level they want to inform those decisions. Astrae offered the following on the topic of local control:

> You'll get off the phone with someone who says get out of my face, don't decide that for me; and then someone calls and says tell me what to do, begging for guidance. It's where we [SEA members] live, and you get used to it.

SEA members are frequently expected to play dual roles (state vs local control) and the change initiative represented a clear point of delineation-when it comes to Students Come First, the state is accountable so the state makes the rules. Like school

districts, SEA members understand the life-cycle of elected leadership; Juan offered the following on this topic:

> Those at the SEA know they have a 4 or 8 year assignment (the election cycle of Idaho's Superintendent of Public Instruction). At some point they have to go back to the districts to work. They cannot afford to irritate their future employers; so as far as the current administration at the SEA wants them to adopt the new philosophy, it's not in their best interest.

For members of the SEA, knowing how to maintain long-term employment in the public education sector in Idaho entails maintaining positive relationships with prospective future employers. Students Come First clearly disrupted this routine and it is important to recognize the disruption itself (regardless of its direction) put SEA members in the untenable position of either supporting the change in deference to their current employer (the state superintendent), or resisting the change in deference to potential future employers (local school districts). The state vs local control debate is rife with complications, it comes up every legislative session in Idaho and Students Come First served as a magnifying glass to observe these tensions on a very concrete level.

The participants' articulations of this theme show a significant tension between local and state control. Specifically, the tension about governance at the local or state levels emerged in the Students Come First change initiative when a state solution was presented to address local issues. This theme shows how SEA members felt that school districts understood their students and when a state-level decision is made it was significantly disruptive of the local ways of serving students. Conversely, the tension in this theme reveals how SEA members recognized challenges when local services vary widely: students in one district may not have the opportunities those in other districts are afforded thereby creating an uneven playing field. Overall, this theme about governance

philosophy reveals the tensions about top/down vs bottom/up change and who is best to initiate and implement change. The rules for how decisions had been made in Idaho public education were flipped with Students Come First. Specifically, control shifted from local school districts to the SEA. Those opposed to the change seemed to rationalize their actions based on this loss of control and decision-making ability while supporters were vindicated by the idea that all students would have access to the same resources (technology in particular).

The Value of Time

A final theme about time emerged across the data, and although it was not articulated as frequently as the other themes in the qualitative interviews, it is worth highlighting. The tension revealed that time-bound expectations of program effectiveness in education are not often realistic. This theme emerged at the conclusion of every interview when I asked participants how the SEA changed after Students Come First was repealed and the responses focused on the concept of time related to systems change emerged. For instance, Simon offered this perspective on how the SEA changed post Students Come First:

> You can get some programs to step up, and then it's just a matter of time before others will follow. The reality is that previous administrations will not get the glory or benefit of the programs they implement, that will be inherited by current administration. Things take time.

Simon articulates the sentiment that systemic change takes time. If an education improvement idea is initially seen as misguided and through time, after experiencing the benefits for students, the same idea may be viewed in a different light. A poignant statement of this perspective was offered by Maria: "Tom (Luna, state superintendent during Students Come First) led boldly, paid for it dearly, but in the end changed the

conversation about how we do better for kids in Idaho." Maria acknowledges the value in changing the conversation; given the previous statements about the Governor's Task Force for Education and other committees emerging after Students Come First we see evidence of this assertion. The passage of time allows for reflection on what worked, what didn't, and how we do better in the future.

The SEA members' articulations of the need for change to take time reveal a tension between the need for change to take time and the expectations for immediate outcomes. Further, this theme reveals how implementing such a large change initiative is problematic in a system as complex as public education in Idaho. Election cycles and legislative sessions, rather than the dynamic process of educating children, often serve as the time-marker of successful programs. In particular, this theme reveals how the fast pace of the Students Come first change initiative did not consider the time it takes to get students to improve on standardized tests, which involves a complex multitude of factors such as the quality of the teacher, the curriculum, the instructional environment, and parental involvement in their child's education. The theme of time calls attention to how a child's growth and development is a difficult thing to map out, let alone a classroom of students or a state full of students and how specific programs or initiatives are held responsible for success or failure is often rhetorical and political. The resource of time and the assumption that increased student achievement could be significantly impacted through the rules of Students Come First revealed a tension in expectations. Specifically, actions of participants seemed to be rationalized based upon the promise of how incentives, sanctions, and tools for learning would impact test scores; or the experience of

how difficult it is to meet the dynamic needs of students and that a one size fits all approach does not take into account the unique support each child requires to learn.

The process of organizational change involved with Students Come First, with its messiness and casualties, viewed through a qualitative research project grounded in communication provides a fresh perspective to better understand how organizational members make sense of the shifting world around them. In particular, the themes emerging from the data in this study reveal tensions between beliefs about what is good for public education, being excluded from information and decision-making, the role of technology in learning, governance philosophy, and the value of time. The data revealed fundamentally different assumptions about each of these themes and expose the differing views of interview participants.

The themes, and the tensions within them, provide useful insight to the research questions guiding this study and offer clues as to how we improve engaging members of an organization, understand their concerns, and navigate the underlying tensions that result in organizational member resonance or dissonance with a new vision. As such, the findings and the tensions emerging within the various themes provide responses to the research questions for this study.

Response to Research Questions

After the themes above were identified, each theme was reviewed in terms of structuration theory in an attempt to respond to the guiding research questions for this study. The data revealed divergent assumptions about what is good for public education, access to decision-making and information, instructional technology, governance philosophies, and how long it should take before programs demonstrate effectiveness.

The research questions were crafted to uncover and understand how tensions originating

from different assumptions impacted organizational members.

A structurational approach to studying change involves investigating the

relationship between deep practical structures, which infer dominant assumptions about

organizational reality, and surface level communication, which provide visibility into

why change can be disruptive. This entails understanding the assumptions about

organizational reality imbedded in the rules and resources, reflexively linked to members'

practical consciousness, and identifying how change poses contradiction or tension to the

existing routine guided by these assumptions. The practical consciousness of the research

subjects varied based on their experience and presented a range of perceptions about

whether or not Students Come First was good for Idaho's public education system. The

extent to which members were included and aware of shifting rules and resources varied,

and led to both the disrupting and bolstering of member ontological security depending

on whether or not one was knowledgeable of the changes or was taken by surprise. The

technology component was clearly an unfamiliar resource to some participants and a

critical tool to aid students for success in the 21st century for others. The governance

discussion contradicted the prevailing surface discursive actions of local control and the

timing issue complicated aligning outcomes with programs or individuals. Deep practical

structures reproduced through time imbed organizational norms about purpose and

function of the organization and this study unveiled how Students Come First challenged

some dominant assumptions about the purpose and function of the SEA.

As such, the findings presented in the previous section provide useful insights into

how, in structuration concepts, the consequences of new rules and resources and the

rationalization of actions played out at the SEA during Students Come First. In particular, deeply held understandings and beliefs about what public education is charged to provide, and how to continuously improve this service complicated the collective imperative about what it means to 'do better.' The findings of this study reveal how the practical consciousness of each SEA member is uniquely different. Member reflections around how new language and operating decisions impacted their organizational reality relates to the first research question of this study:

<u>Research Question 1</u>

The first research question for this study asked about the consequences of new rules and resources introduced at the SEA as a result of Students Come First. The findings reveal that new rules and resources elicited a number of tensions borne from research subjects' understanding of their role at the SEA and what students need to be successful in school. Additionally, it became apparent that two perceptions of rules and resources were in play simultaneously: those based on the change initiative, and those existing prior to the change. The content and manner through which new rules and resources were introduced resulted in a divided SEA; many subjects questioned their place in the organization relative to the change and rattled the ontological security that comes with understanding one's role. As described in Chapter Two, the words used to describe organizational functioning are a key element of member knowlegdeability. Knowing what to do in social situations is informed by many factors such as experience and reading social cues, and comes across primarily through language. Discursive expression is far more than sending and receiving messages; language provides a framework to help make sense of social situations and is a fundamental medium in the

co-construction of organizational reality. Language is a resource for members to understand and negotiate the terrain in which they operate. As such, the findings of this study show that Students Come First was accompanied with a slew of new phrases and ideas that some members viewed as helpful, as one participant said, "[Students Come First language] was one of the few things I think over the years that really had been consistent"; while others expressed frustration at the abrupt introduction of the new language. As another participant stated: "All of a sudden you came to work one day and there was all this promotional material… it was hatched and sprung on everyone." Member resistance also arose as a result of new expectations and a different organizational structure related to the change initiative demonstrated by comments such as, "If I perceive you are doing something to me, you are going to have a hard time convincing me you are doing this for me." Perceptions of why rules and resources are shifting matter in terms of member adoption, particularly when they contradict prevailing routines and the deep practical structure in the organization. Additionally, the difference between the *time* members had to generate knowledgeability about the changes (some were aware of the changes and for others it was a surprise) is a core factor in the perceptions members had about Students Come First. New language and ways of talking about teacher accountability and student achievement were suddenly presented as the way business is done when Students Come First emerged. Furthermore, a new organizational structure, positions, job responsibilities, and meeting agendas came about to accommodate the decision-making Students Come First required.

As such, one clear consequence of the new rules and resources brought about by the change initiative was the time members had to acclimate, or make sense of,

organizational adaptations to accommodate the new laws. The themes, and tensions within the themes, demonstrate consequences of the short amount of time to adjust to this change. For instance, the theme about being excluded shows a desire to participate in strategic conversations and the members that felt excluded from this process expressed frustration. Per structuration, reflexivity is a process that draws on the past to inform present action and when unfamiliar, or unexpected rules and resources (or the perception of new rules and resources) emerge members can struggle to regain ontological security relative to their place in the organization. This is precisely what the findings reveal. For example, one member said: "In many cases the tools and philosophies within SCF were new concepts for people. Think about team building and the storming, norming and forming processes. SCF did not allow for these processes to occur, it was a flash cut." The technology, the decisions based on state control and the assumptions about what is good for public education, was a 'flash cut' for many members who did not have opportunities to reframe their interpretive schemes to accommodate an organizational reality based on Students Come First. One research subject seemed to understand why her counterparts were frustrated by saying: "Why were they so confused by the vision? Maybe because I was used to the changes and they did not have the time to acclimate." Indeed, if members co-construct organizational reality through interaction, then members must be afforded opportunities to makes sense of new ideas and the assumptions behind them through discourse.

An additional consequence of the new rules and resources arriving from the Students Come First initiative was crystalized in the discussion of influence in decision-making and access to information. Participants articulated varying degrees of influence

on what Students Come First entailed; those that played a role in crafting the laws governing the changes were knowledgeable about what was coming and expressed frustration at their counterpart's hesitancy. The hesitancy was borne, in part, from a perceived de-validation of member expertise. One interview participant summed up her angst by asking "Why wasn't I consulted?" Once the decisions were made and the change was codified through the legislative process, access to information describing the changes was a barrier to increasing member knowledgeability as revealed in the tensions between exclusion from decision-making and a desire to participate in decision-making. The variance in access to information was described by one participant as effectively creating a 'caste system,' which exemplifies the problems when all members don't have access to the same resources and don't understand the rules.

Overall, the consequence of new rules and resources from Students Come First proved to be disruptive and generated resentment among most members. When member access to new language and influence in decisions that directly relate to their role in the organization are curtailed, equivocation abounds. As revealed in the tensions within the themes above, the disruption manifested when members felt constrained by rules and resources they did not contribute to, agree with, or understand. How does one 'go on' throughout the day when what it means to 'go on' abruptly changes direction? The data indicate new job responsibilities, new language describing the SEA mission, new tools for instruction, and the surprise of a new direction induced equivocation. SEA members made sense of the changes based upon their assumptions about what is best for students and this changed the way they approached their work based on their understanding of the controversial policies. The routines guiding day to day life in the organization and the

tools available for action are key components for understanding negotiated meanings for these are the mechanisms for members to make sense to others. When understood routines and tools transform into something unrecognizable, members either question their value to the organization, or they question the new direction. Clearly, not all participants were comfortable with the decisions made regarding education technology, state control usurping local decision-making, and other assumptions imbedded in Students Come First. The change agitated members because it brought into question their perception of the SEA, what it stood for, and its relationship to the field (local school districts). Member understandings of their role and responsibilities in a change initiative are predicated on knowing what the changes are, and ultimately being included in the decision-making process because it grounds member knowledgability regarding the rationale behind the changes. The language accessed in organizational settings can be described as 'stocks of knowledge' specific to the contexts in which they are used. Organizational knowledge stocks only make sense in the contexts in which they are employed and when stocks expand and shift members question the context they thought they were operating in, which, based on the qualitative interview findings, leads to trepidation and frustration.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked how the research participants rationalized their actions during Students Come First implementation. The personal experiences of participants as students, serving as teachers or administrators in school settings or in the private sector clearly played a significant role based on their responses. The findings of this study revealed how personal experience populates an individual's knowledge stock

and inform decision-making (practical consciousness) regarding how to 'go on' in the workplace every day. In the context of this study, experience cultivates assumptions about what students need to be successful. When faced with new rules and resources provided by the Students Come First initiative, decisions made that contradicted assumptions about the well-being of children in school, participants seemed to question these decisions even with the risk of sanction and dismissal from the organization. Similarly, participants seemed to support new ideas when they aligned with beliefs and assumptions informed by their previous experiences. The chasm between the rules/resources provided by Students Come First and assumptions about continuous improvement or what students need to be successful in school from individual experience resulted in a tension-filled SEA during Students Come First implementation. The recursive nature of social life described in structuration theory centers on the idea that individuals know how to navigate their surroundings through reflexive monitoring, or drawing on past experiences to inform present-day action. This rationalization process informs language and action as members go about their day to day business in organizations. The findings from the qualitative interviews offers useful insight into the reflexivity participants engaged in that influenced their perceptions of, and reactions to the change initiative. In other words, SEA members rationalized their actions by drawing on their assumptions and tacit beliefs about what is good for public education and the role of the SEA in supporting student achievement. The routines guiding system processes (day to day life in the organization), and the tools available for action (e.g., language, reporting structures, escalation mechanisms) are key components to understanding negotiated meanings; for these are the mechanisms available for members to make sense

to others. The abrupt unveiling of the change was a unique time because it awakened the practical consciousness of members, whether they were excited about it or not. All of the sudden members were pressed to articulate what they thought about the change and why and it is a challenge to translate practical consciousness discursively. Interestingly, both supporters and resistors did not offer comment on the potential merits of the opposite perspective. Members were firm in their conviction.

As an example of these tensions, one participant stated "centralized purchasing of computers makes all kinds of sense," while another said "nervousness from parents who were not digital natives, who were not comfortable with technology, feared what their child was going to do with this device." Reflexivity contributes to personal perspective and participants drew on their experiences to inform their interest, or hesitation in the change initiative. Interviewees often drew upon their background to explain their perspective: "as a student I was bored," "as a principal I was excited," "in the private sector we did this all the time," and "here is a non-educator telling us educators what to do." Practical consciousness is not only informed by present day interaction but by the memory traces of experience. The experiences of being teachers, students, administrators, and private sector employees is generative of personal perspective and the responses regarding what's good for education, education technology, access to information, governance philosophy, and time helps to explain why subjects reacted in the ways they did.

Through time, personal experience establishes a schema, or lens, that informs how an individual sees the world, makes decisions, and determines appropriate actions, as one participant reflected: "It almost became like a two-caste system; ones that know and ones

that don't know." Those who didn't know lacked the context and information to inform knowledgeable action. For instance, private sector business practices came up a number of times in the data and the personal experience of the interviewee was certain education would benefit. His certainty, based on experience, provided the rationale for his supportive actions. Conversely, subjects skeptical of non-educators making policy decisions rejected the entire change package due to their experience and policy makers' lack of experience. Individual assumptions and beliefs become hardened over time and challenging, or bolstering them provides rationalization for action. Practical consciousness is described in structuration theory as the amalgamation of experiences that tint each individual's lens a unique color. Because practical consciousness is the individual knowledge stock (based on personal experiences) accessed through reflection that informs present-day actions, it provides the rationalization for actions within the context of rules and resources. Practical consciousness is manifest through drawing on existing rules and resources and as organizational reality shifts through interaction, practical consciousness is impacted. Why did some members view the changes as positive while other's viewed them with skepticism? Their convictions about what is good for public education based on their unique life experiences informed reactions. The education and background of participants varied: some are certified teachers and administrators and others had no formal training or experience in schools. However, they all considered their perspective just as valid as others (if not more so than others). Each member felt justified in their perspective, whether one worked 'in the trenches' of education or thought private sector ideas would benefit public education.

Extending individual practical consciousness to the organization, members are interdependent in the regularization of practices within social settings. The regularization process implicates member reflection in organizational reflexivity; put another way, the experiences individuals bring to the organization influence how the organization as a whole adapts to new conditions. As I concluded interviews, my closing question for all participants inquired how the SEA changed after a voter referendum repealed Students Come First. I included this line of questioning to ascertain organizational reflexivity, or how the SEA, as a collection of individuals who experienced something disruptive together, perceived their surroundings. Organizational learning implicates each member and is representative of the whole, and reflects the recursive implication of rules and resources played out in social reproduction. As the data indicates, it takes time for a new program or initiative to demonstrate outcomes; many subjects were frustrated by the lack of time afforded to understand and implement the changes, and this frustration informed action. Organizational members learn through experience (reflexivity), and by extension the organization learns. Members rationalized their actions based on their own, unique experiences and interpretations of the change initiative, and the rules and resources that either enabled or impeded understanding. Consider the following contradicting perspectives: "The information was not taken all the way down to the administrative level so they (administrative assistants) are left there trying to explain to people when they get a phone call and they don't have a clue," and "it was a unifying focus. It was one of the few things I think over the years that really had been consistent." How can one member say people don't have a clue and the other say it was a consistent, unifying focus? The rationalization of action stems from personal experience and involvement in the emerging

rules and resources. If member interaction is constitutive of organizational reality, then exclusion from interaction around critical conversations surrounding change cultivates skepticism and doubt. Inclusion in these conversations generates buy-in for those on the 'inside,' and frustration when other members don't see the same benefits for students and the professionals who serve them. The comfort provided by common language and predictable social interactions in knowing what to do while navigating social interactions can be disruptive when the policy and financial landscape shifts on a broad scale by surprise.

In sum, the research questions posed were attempting to understand how change took place at the SEA. Predictable patterns in organizational structures (rules and resources) are the currency for how members manage routine interactions and how they develop an internal narrative around the purpose and function of their service in the organization. When these understandings are upended by unfamiliar language and new expectations, the consequences result in member anger, frustration, and resistance. The cost of member exclusion from new information and participation in decision-making processes is thwarted personal investment in the initiative and the organizational as a whole. Related to this outcome is the rationalization of actions based upon personal experience and involvement in the change design. All participants had strong views about what is best for public education, and those involved in the creation of Students Come First had the opportunity make sense of the changes through dialogue and work out any confusion before it was passed as law. The main issue reticent participants expressed was that the change was introduced by surprise; due to the unexpected unveiling of the

change, members were challenged to see the benefit and assumed ulterior motives such as a power grab by the state or the privatization of public education.

The consequences of new rules and resources imparted by Students Come First included validating the assumptions and beliefs of those who agreed with the changes and alienating those who did not agree. From an organizational perspective, this left the SEA with a deep rift between members as they sought to understand the new, or regain the old deep practical structure of the organization as the prevailing routines were disrupted. Additionally, the difference between the *time* members had to generate knowledgeability about the changes (some were aware of the changes and for others it was a surprise) was a core factor in the perceptions members had about Students Come First. Members rationalized their actions based on their own, unique experiences and interpretations of the change initiative, and the rules and resources that either enabled or impeded understanding. Ultimately, the practical consciousness of subjects led to agreement or disagreement with the changes, which informed their actions. The consequences of new rules and resources and the rationalization of actions intersect at the corners of subject practical consciousness and the alignment of change with existing beliefs and assumptions. If the rules and resources of a change initiative are not understood or made available, and if they challenge prevailing assumptions about why the organization exists and what it provides, the result is a bifurcated structure with certain members operating on one set of understandings and another set questioning their existence in the organization. Rather than an organization with a clear and shared focus, Students Come First produced a confused and disorganized SEA staff because the change did not align with fundamental beliefs and assumptions about how to best serve children.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study of change in public education contributes to existing studies of change by extending ideas and concepts from structuration theory around a change initiative at the Idaho SEA and has implications for future change initiatives in public education. Traditional understandings of organizational functioning and the 'breaking away' of these understandings through the incorporation of how member interaction contributes to organizational reality highlights the interplay between "macro" features and "micro" practices, and how the process of member 'grappling' with ingrained assumptions when they are disrupted serves as a process of reconstituting the structure itself (change). The implications of this project can serve to cultivate member confidence in their place and role within organizations, which increases commitment to the vision and purpose rather than questioning why change is necessary and what it means. At its heart, this study seeks to explicate how the individual members of the SEA, with unique beliefs and perspectives, participate in the social construction of reality in organization. Many post-mortem analyses of the Students Come First experiment have been published based on different perspectives: contract procurement issues, legislative process, education funding, instructional management systems, the unionized teaching force and data collection; however, none have explored this chapter in Idaho education from a communication perspective focused on the individuals responsible for implementation at the SEA. This perspective helps us understand how members navigate their surroundings and co-construct organizational reality, and the importance of drawing on members' tacit

knowledge through discourse when contemplating change so disruption by surprise is avoided. Structuration theory helped me understand that when change ideas are incongruent with deeply held assumptions and beliefs, the practical consciousness of members emerged and become discursive consciousness (conversations). When members are struggling to make sense of change they are faced with the challenge of articulating why they are concerned, these instances expose tacit assumptions about organizational reality and aid in recognizing divergent member perspectives. The process of tacit assumptions becoming discursively expressed represents authentic engagement, and that is the special sauce to successful change. Exactly how to facilitate a safe space to engage in this process is beyond the scope of this paper, but recognizing the value of authentic member engagement is a starting place to entertain new practices and structuration theory offers a framework to identify points of resistance and draw them into dialogue. The literature review provided in Chapter Two casts the tensions this study uncovered in a different light. Rather than divisive and frustrating, if member assumptions were deliberately drawn out and discussed, the result may have been quite different.

A communicative approach to studying Students Come First is valuable because it reveals deeper understandings around member assumptions and how they relate to social interaction in the context of organizing. For example, recalling the tensions in public education described in Chapter One, if the assumptions around both the value of relational connectivity between teacher and student *and* accountability for taxpayers are not attended to, then substantive change will remain problematic in public education. Reflexivity is an important idea imbedded in structuration theory that describes how previous experiences are drawn upon to make sense of present social situations. Through

reflection, members establish an understanding of expectations (of themselves and others) throughout the day to day activities within an organization. Reflexivity is an important concept because it guides, based on the memory of previous experiences, how members navigate the minor conventions of daily social life. Lived experience is a critical factor in the arena of reflexivity, reflection on a current situation draws upon a similar situation one has experienced in the past that can be referenced to inform present-day action. Students Come First was a situation many struggled to reflexively relate to; the time, influence, and access some members had and others did not mattered when it came to seeing the potential benefits.

Framing this study from a different vantage point helps to highlight how structuration theory can help us understand change. Chapter Two included a description of a study in which members of a social group conducted 'deviant' acts, or acted in a way that was incongruent with the way members historically acted. This resulted in disrupting the ontological security of the members; it challenged members to make sense of what was happening because there was no context for it. In the context of Students Come First, which was the deviant act? Supporting the change, which was the directive from management, and many espoused the benefits of the initiative, or resisting the changes because practitioners thought it ill-informed and misguided. In the context of this change, SEA members were seeking a place of knowability (which is the right, or appropriate way to act?).

As such, I encourage scholars to delve deeper into the concept of practical consciousness and raise it up as a centerpiece of consideration for organizing because this study exposed that one members' conclusion about how to improve public education

often contradicted other's conclusions. Consideration of deeply held beliefs and assumptions manifest through engaging members in critical conversations about what the organization looks like when it is at its best and how to get there. Preempted by this kind of discussion, a more uniform understanding of a deviant act would be established, signaling a common understanding of organizational focus and methods of operating.

Circling back to the themes presented in Chapter Two and reflecting on the findings presented, I am struck by how imbedded traditional understandings of the construct of organization were insinuated in the comments of the research participants. Whether comments related to the education system as it was (pre-Students Come First), or with the changes proposed, underlying tones of organizational fossilization emerged. Implying districts will fire teachers because online courses will provide instructional services teachers used to provide or that every student can satisfy all of their educational needs through technology invoke the idea that organization are frozen containers that are thawed, changed, and then re-frozen when change is contemplated. Member perception of their capability to influence the organizational direction was diminished when they were not included in change design, thus acquiescence was more common than actively participating in redirecting the change in a different trajectory. The responses indicate members perceived the organization, as an entity separate from its members, asserted control over individuals. One clear implication is to deliberately include those responsible for change implementation in the design of the change itself. The data revealed that members are eager to contribute and that even if one's idea is not accepted there is value in having a voice at the table. Affirmation and acknowledgement are important

motivators for organizational members. The exploration of opposing ideas through discourse can be generative of new and exciting practices.

In sum, research participants did not talk about the SEA as a dynamic, fluctuating environment, but rather as a collection of individuals charged to implement programs and policies and absent new ones, the organization was inert. These reflections complicate CCO ideas such as structuration theory and challenge scholars to make the language and concepts of these theories understandable and accessible to laymen (non-scholars) so the enactment of theory can further play out in organizational settings. The link between theory and application is a critical one, whether emphasizing faculty involvement in organizational settings or focusing on translating theoretical nomenclature to real-world settings, academe would do well to break out of its bubble and get into the fray. Organizational change is hard, and communication scholarship affords the language and ideas to help make sense of it. Like Students Come First, if the language and ideas of communication scholarship are guarded and access is restricted, how can we expect to exert the value communication theory holds?

This study explored the Students Come First change initiative through a perspective that uncovered new information about how influence, access to resources, and rationalization matter when it comes to organizational communication at the SEA. Opportunities to make sense of new constructs through interaction and to work out how personal experience informs reactions to change are critical factors in generating commitment. In this context, organization is defined as the collective reflexivity and practical consciousness of the members within it. In the future, organizational change agents would be well served to investigate the beliefs and assumptions of members when

considering change and extend conceptual conversations to all members as the change is crafted. As it emerges, easy access to new organizational language for all members will serve to dissipate the semblance of 'caste systems' and generate new, cogent knowledge stocks of information. The reactions to Students Come First presented a range of perspectives, informed by access, influence, beliefs, and assumptions about how students are best served and the decision-making process used to inform policy and funding. A useful starting place for conceptual conversations is asking: "What are the conditions needed for our organization to be at its best?"

I invite readers to reflect on the findings of this study and let these inform how approaches to organizing can be more inclusive of member perspectives. This research project demonstrates the outcomes when decisions based on assumptions trump authentic member engagement and the impact organizational surprises have on membership. Individuals make sense of their surroundings through communication, if opportunities are not provided for this critical function to occur, the repository of knowledge for how to engage in organizational routines is reduced and members are left struggling to re-establish their place. Structuration theory provides a premise to re-conceptualize how structural principals are birthed through member interaction, and to realize structuration's potential we must change the way we talk about what it means to organize and then unleash the power of each member to actively create organizations that empower all members to be part of its future direction.

To summarize, I encourage those interested in implementing organizational change to draw out and seek to understand member assumptions about the organization's purpose as this will increase the ontological security of members during change.

Additionally, deliberate organizational reflexivity aids in knowledgeable change ideas; this includes an open dialogue about historical decision-making and the outcomes of those decisions. As changes are conceived, open access to the discussions and information explaining new ways of organizing are defining features of maintaining staff alignment with a new direction. Imparting an intentional process of drawing out tacit assumptions based on experience serves to leverage the best thinking of the organization and will promote change environments with less stress and anxiety for organizational members. In this way, change can be reconceived as a process of continuous dialogue about tacit assumptions among organizational membership rather than a 'flash cut' implementation of new ideas.

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APPENDIX

Boise State University Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

B

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Date: January 14, 2015

To: Matt McCarter   cc: John McClellan

From: Social & Behavioral Insitutional Review Board (SB-IRB)
c/o Office of Research Compliance (ORC)

Subject: SB-IRB Notification of Approval - Original - 008-SB15-006
Member Action/ Structural Duality: A Study of Idaho's Students Come First Education Change Initiative

The Boise State University IRB has approved your protocol submission. Your protocol is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance (#0000097) and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

Protocol Number: 008-SB15-006	Received:	1/5/2015	Review: Expedited
Expires: 1/13/2016	Approved:	1/14/2015	Category: 6, 7

Your approved protocol is effective until 1/13/2016. To remain open, your protocol must be renewed on an annual basis and cannot be renewed beyond 1/13/2018. For the activities to continue beyond 1/13/2018, a new protocol application must be submitted.

ORC will notify you of the protocol's upcoming expiration roughly 30 days prior to 1/13/2016. You, as the PI, have the primary responsibility to ensure any forms are submitted in a timely manner for the approved activities to continue. If the protocol is not renewed before 1/13/2016, the protocol will be closed. If you wish to continue the activities after the protocol is closed, you must submit a new protocol application for SB-IRB review and approval.

You must notify the SB-IRB of any additions or changes to your approved protocol using a Modification Form. The SB-IRB must review and approve the modifications before they can begin. When your activities are complete or discontinued, please submit a Final Report. An executive summary or other documents with the results of the research may be included.

All forms are available on the ORC website at http://goo.gl/D2FYTV

Please direct any questions or concerns to ORC at 426-5401 or humansubjects@boisestate.edu.

Thank you and good luck with your research.

Mary E. Pritchard

Dr. Mary Pritchard
Chair
Boise State University Social & Behavioral Insitutional Review Board