

## ABSTRACT

PELLEGRINO, LAUREN NICOLE. Complex Contributors to Major Change in a Community College. (Under the direction of Dr. Audrey Jaeger and Dr. Chad Hoggan).

For more than 10 years, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) regional accrediting body has required all of the nearly 800 institutions under its umbrella to prepare and execute a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) as part of the reaccreditation process that occurs every 10 years. Pursuant to the requirement, the QEP must focus on improving student learning outcomes and is, therefore, typically a large-scale change initiative (SACSCOC, 2017). While there is some literature addressing short-term outcomes and anecdotes of QEPs, there is little published about the *process* of implementing this major change. Because it is typically large in scale, the QEP affects many institutional stakeholders, often requiring significant changes in teaching strategies, process execution, and/or course content. Given the wide-reaching implications of the QEP as a major institutional change and the number of institutions that must meet the requirement, it is surprising that stakeholder perceptions of major change have not been explored in this context.

Applying a three-pronged lens of sensemaking, constructivism, and organizational learning (Kezar, Gerhke, and Elrod, 2015), this intrinsic case study contributed to closing the gap in knowledge of stakeholder perceptions of change through examining those perceptions at Wake Technical Community College (Wake Tech) in North Carolina as the college implemented a QEP aimed at improving online student outcomes (e-Learning Preparedness Initiative Across the College (EPIC)). Through conducting 18 in-depth interviews with stakeholders who were not involved in the initiative through sitting on committees for implementation or assessment, this study began to uncover the ways in which relevant stakeholders developed perceptions around a

major change, how those perceptions evolved over time, and the learning that took place as stakeholders adjusted their practices and changed their beliefs and attitudes.

The findings of this study revealed that participants developed perceptions through a multitude of ways, including communication about the initiative, individual learning, professional development requirements, and beliefs about organizational culture, innovation, and change in general. Further, this study illuminated that EPIC, while large-scale and complex, closely aligned with the institutional mission, goals, and values such that the change itself was not radical or transformative but rather, a process of building upon existing skills and knowledge and, in some cases, validating existing knowledge. This is important as leaders consider framing change and seeking support, where an enhancement of skills rather than an overhaul of skills may be more palatable for individuals affected by the change.

It is hoped that through this study college leadership can also gain a better understanding of the elements that contribute to the development of perceptions of a QEP and thus, can better prepare for dealing with challenges in advance of actually encountering them *and* assemble a list of best practices for use in conceiving, implementing, and sustaining future changes. Furthermore, leaders of the other nearly 800 SACSCOC-accredited schools could benefit from garnering an understanding of how perceptions are formed among directly affected faculty and staff, the largest non-student stakeholder groups affected by a major student learning-related change.

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Complex Contributors to Perceptions of Major Change in a Community College

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

To Amelia Jo.

In your 17 months of life, you have inspired me to be a better person, to keep pushing no matter how tired or frustrated I become, and, most of all, to be a person you are proud to call “Aunt Lolay.” I will work tirelessly to contribute positively to the world on your behalf. You deserve better than what we have right now and I hope that by the time you read this, the world is a more inclusive, peaceful, and civilized place.

## BIOGRAPHY

Before entering higher education, Lauren Pellegrino spent 16 years in sales, marketing, and business development roles in the private sector. In addition to a PhD in Educational Research and Policy Analysis, Lauren holds a BA in Marketing ('97) and an MBA ('09) from Stetson University. Her private sector experience spans the industries of technology and education.

During the course of her PhD program at North Carolina State University, Lauren has held roles as a graduate assistant, qualitative methods teaching assistant, part-time community college faculty member teaching business administration courses, QEP assessment team member, and program evaluator. She served as the AWCPE Graduate Student Association Chapter President for four years where she also sat on the internal Research Recognition Committee and served as the graduate student representative for the Council on the Status of Women. Lauren also served as a member of the Community Advisory Board (CAB) for the NCSU Women and Gender Studies Department and NC State Women's Center. Her research interests include organizational change in higher education, issues and reforms impacting college student persistence and retention, and the individual, sociocultural, and institutional factors associated with college student success.

Lauren lives on the Upper West Side of New York City with her Golden Retriever, Lola. She currently works for Community College Research Center at Teacher's College at Columbia as a Research Associate focusing on iPASS and Guided Pathways work. When she is not working, Lauren can be found taking long walks with Lola, reading sci-fi novels, seeking stellar shrimp tacos and craft beer, traveling, being the "cool" aunt, and exploring the outdoors.

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Resist.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the 1850s, regional accreditation has played a significant role in establishing accountability measures for institutes of higher education (Ewell, 2008; Jackson, Davis, and Jackson, 2010). Though many 4-year institutions had been receiving accreditation status, it was not until the establishment of the Higher Education Act (HEA) and Title IV law of 1965 that community colleges and others began seeking accreditation. The law required that students must attend an accredited institution in order to gain access to federal funds for college (Suskie, 2015). In 1998, HEA was reworded to include stronger language about accountability and student success, prompting many accrediting bodies to strengthen their requirements and add components to the reaffirmation (reaccreditation) process (Suskie, 2015). Still, accreditors were criticized for being non-rigorous, inconsistent, and somewhat ineffective, which led to the Spellings Commission of 2006 where Education Secretary Margaret Spelling called for greater federal regulation of accrediting bodies (Ewell, 2011; Perley & Tanguay, 2008; Suskie, 2015). Once again, accreditors reworked their requirements to improve rigor and reliability (Suskie, 2015).

Today, accreditation typically involves two major components: verifying that schools meet quality standards and requiring institutions to present evidence of ongoing quality improvement efforts, each existing to protect students (Eaton, 2016; Perley and Tanguay, 2008). Furthermore, accreditation begets confidence among employers and potential funders and eases the transfer process for students as other academic institutions recognize compliance with quality standards at the current institution (Eaton, 2015). As a requirement for receiving access to federal funds in the form of student loans and other programs, accreditation takes place at both the programmatic level and the institutional level (Eaton, 2015, 2016). As of 2016, there were

42,686 accredited programs and 7,896 accredited institutions, 3,050 of which are public and private two and four-year institutions while the remaining are faith-related and career-related (Eaton, 2016).

Regardless of the accrediting body, the process of accreditation is similar for most institutions. First, schools must prepare a summary of their performance as measured against a set of standards provided by the accrediting body (Eaton, 2015). Much of this component relates to the rise in accountability requirements and the increased pressure by the federal government and state governments on institutional effectiveness departments in measuring outputs of institutions that began in the 1980s and continues today (Eaton, 2015, 2016; Ewell, 2010; Perley & Tanguay, 2008).

The second and third components of accreditation involve a system of peer review and at least one site visit. Peer reviewers evaluate the written summary and assemble a group of peers for the site visit whereby they meet with several members of the institution, visit classes, and ultimately, make a judgment about the accrediting status, the fourth step in the process (Eaton, 2015). The final component of accreditation involves the periodic external review of the institution through which the institution receives a reaccreditation also known as reaffirmation (Eaton, 2015).

Though accreditation is ubiquitous among U.S.-based institutions of higher education and growing globally (Jackson, et al., 2010), there is little empirical work centered on the process of accreditation, the specific requirements by regional accreditors, or the nuanced experiences of schools as they navigate the process and implement plans to meet requirements. Much of the accreditation literature concerns the increase in accountability measures through state and federal policy, while the institution-related literature tends to focus on perceptions of accountability

and/or the anecdotal recollections of institutional stakeholders as they implement accreditation requirements.

Per the reaffirmation requirement put forth by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) regional accrediting body for 11 southern states, post-secondary institutions must prepare and execute a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) designed to improve student learning outcomes. The forthcoming sections and literature review will describe the QEP process and illustrate the large-scale and complex nature of designing and implementing this type of major institutional change. Despite the fact that the QEP is a required part of reaffirmation for nearly 800 institutions, very little is known about how the process unfolds from a stakeholder perspective. Through a qualitative approach, this intrinsic case study will explore the ways in which relevant stakeholders at a large community college in southeast develop perceptions around a major institutional change. The following sections will provide a brief history and background of the research site, an overview of the theoretical framework and research methodology, and a description of the purpose and significance of the study.

### **History and Background of the Site**

Community colleges represent the largest, single group of institutions under the SACSCOC accreditation umbrella that spans 11 southern states. Despite their large representation, there is almost no empirical data collected from these schools concerning a major reaffirmation requirement put forth by SACSCOC, QEP. Along with those nearly 800 other institutions, Wake Technical Community College in North Carolina (Wake Tech) receives accreditation through SACSCOC. Of those schools, 270 or approximately 34% of those schools are community colleges (SACSCOC, 2016). Since 2004, as part of the reaffirmation process,

SACSCOC has required that institutions present a QEP, a 5-year plan for improving student outcomes (SACSCOC, 2016).

A QEP typically involves a major institutional change (see Table 4 for guidelines). For example, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (ABT) in North Carolina launched a 5-year QEP in 2014 centered on improving online student success. The multi-step plan included student preparedness interventions during orientation, ongoing interventions for online students, regular data collection and analysis, and a faculty professional development plan (Hast, 2014). During that same year, Coastal Bend College (CBC) in Texas initiated a QEP focused around improving student retention. The plan included a redesigned student orientation, intrusive faculty advising, and the development of college preparation courses (Anderson, 2014). In 2013, Greenville Technical College in South Carolina designed its QEP around aligning a student's academic pathway with the student's career ambitions. As with ABT and CBC, Greenville's plan was multi-step in nature and included several newly designed courses and a complete reworking of the college's career center (Krout, 2013). In each of these cases, the plan involved the implementation of multiple, large-scale interventions and the input and cooperation of numerous stakeholder groups.

Because QEPs are required to have large-scale impacts on student success over several years, a plan typically takes months to formulate and years to implement. Depending on the institution's initiative and size, there can be hundreds of stakeholders involved in the plan, whether they are planning, implementing, or monitoring the program (or some combination of the three). In short, QEPs are often complex, multifaceted, and designed to drastically change the way the institution delivers services to students.

Considering the high stakes nature of the QEP and the sheer number of institutions impacted by the requirement, it is surprising that there is little published research concerning the process, the plans themselves, and the outcomes of the programs. In fact, of the 20 QEP-related articles summarized in the literature review, only nine are research studies. The other 11 articles are summaries of processes, descriptions of programs, or anecdotal experiences of a particular individual or group. There could be any number of reasons for this. For one, assessing program components and outcomes is a complex and evolving process often involving several individuals or groups, each tasked with a specific aspect of the plan. Furthermore, assessment may be carried out by individuals who do not consider themselves formal researchers and, therefore, do not take an interest in disseminating results in the form a research study through peer-reviewed journals or report formats. In addition, time is a premium among all stakeholders at any given institution. Designing a research study and assessing a program may share some similarities, but they are quite different processes and publishing empirical research requires a lot of time. Human resources are also a premium at nearly every institution. It is highly unlikely that most higher education institutions, community colleges in particular, have the resources to conduct formal research as the QEP evolves from a concept to a fully realized, sustainable program. These factors notwithstanding, it is unfortunate that more outside researchers do not take an interest in the QEP process, as it is greatly impactful to students, institutional stakeholders, and ultimately, society.

Wake Tech is the largest community college in North Carolina, offering more than 200 degrees, diplomas and certificates to more than 70,000 students annually ([www.waketech.com/about-wake-tech](http://www.waketech.com/about-wake-tech), 2017). In compliance with the SACSCOC requirement, Wake Tech began thinking about its 2014 QEP proposal in the fall of 2012. This coincided with

the college's implementation of Completion by Design, a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation initiative intended to boost community college student success and retention (Scott, 2014). After hosting a competitive, faculty-led QEP proposal process in the spring 2014, Wake Tech launched "e-Learning Preparedness Initiative Across the College" (EPIC, aka the QEP) in the fall of 2014. The program goals were to improve students' skills and success rates (retention and grades) in online classes and reduce the gaps between online and seated success rates (Scott, 2014). With over 30,000 students taking online classes through Wake Tech each year, the college was concerned that their success rates were, on average, 5% lower than those in seated (face-to-face) classes (Scott, 2014). Furthermore, success rate disparity was greater in approximately half of the courses with the highest enrollments, with some reaching nearly 40% (Scott, 2014). Several of those high enrollment courses were "gateway" courses, or those considered foundational to a course of study. This added to the urgency of addressing the issue given that student performance in early classes is a predictor of persistence (Jaggers, Edgecombe, & Stacey, 2013; Scott, 2014).

EPIC aligns with two of the strategic goals put forth by the college as part of its mission: *Student Success* and *Diverse Learning Needs* (Scott, 2014). The student success goal centers on providing students with the appropriate education and services that support their completion, their employment goals, and/or their intent to transfer to a 4-year institution. Diverse learning needs considers how best to assist a diverse population of students in terms of "flexible, accessible, and customized education and training programs" (Scott, 2014, p.17). The EPIC objectives of Student Preparedness and Faculty Preparedness align with each of the Strategic Goals listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Strategic Goals and EPIC Objectives

Strategic Plan Goals	EPIC Objectives
<b>Strategic Plan Goal 1:</b> Student Success	<b>Objective 1: Student Preparedness:</b> Help students overcome online learning barriers and gain the skills they need to be successful online learners
<b>Strategic Plan Goal 3:</b> Diverse Learning Needs	<b>Objective 2: Faculty Preparedness:</b> Help faculty design and deliver online courses in accordance with Wake Tech's e-Learning quality standards

*Source: e-Learning Preparedness Initiative Across the College: A Quality Enhancement Plan (Scott, 2014, p. 17)*

To reach the two objectives, Wake Tech designed EPIC to align with the Completion by Design initiative already in place (Scott, 2014). More specifically, QEP leaders drew from the Completion by Design Loss and Momentum framework which considers the critical points in a student's academic journey where he or she may experience barriers and may encounter momentum (Scott, 2014). The college designed a student preparedness modularized series that every student must complete before enrolling in an online class. The modules are delivered in three parts: expectations management skills, computer literacy skills, and Blackboard boot camp skills (Scott, 2014).

To meet the faculty preparedness objective, EPIC included a faculty certification procedure for existing online faculty through one of two ways (Scott, 2014). The first pathway for certification was to take a 30-hour professional development training (EPIC 30) with several Blackboard-based course modules for subjects like Universal Design for Learning principles, Blackboard training, accessibility training, and course design. The second pathway was certification by review where a trained peer reviewer reviews an instructor's course and, using a rubric, determines if it meets EPIC standards (Scott, 2014). Per the QEP plan, all faculty wishing to teach online must have been certified by Fall 2017.

As part of the EPIC Assessment Plan, a Course Quality Rubric (now renamed “Course Reviews”) was applied to online courses to ascertain whether those courses are configured delivering content in accordance with EPIC standards (Scott, 2014). The course reviews began in Spring 2017, with the primary objective of reviewing courses to see if the prescribed Blackboard templates were being used in accordance with EPIC standards. In Fall 2017, the reviews expanded to consider the entire course for content, accessibility, ease of navigation, etc. The reviews are conducted by one person (who is certified and trained) and all findings are presented in aggregate with only the reviewer and their team leader knowing the identity of the faculty member. The reviews are not intended to be an evaluation of a faculty member, but rather part of the evaluative assessment of EPIC and to inform any future professional development needs. For example, if faculty are seemingly struggling with an accessibility standard or with facilitating collaboration in online courses, professional development modules may be developed for faculty wishing to fine-tune or improve upon those skills.

Starting in Summer 2015 and continuing through Spring 2016, I met with EPIC leaders to discuss EPIC, specifically the way in which stakeholders involved in the program were actively engaging in their work, learning through committee work and training, and developing perceptions about the program. QEP leaders said that EPIC was the single largest change initiative the college had ever attempted and they wanted to capture and document the learning that took place among stakeholders as a means to document the process for future use. They also wanted to understand where and why successes and challenges were happening, and to address any issues that may affect program success such as stakeholder buy-in or resistance, communication barriers, and the proliferation of misinformation, among others. In other words, leaders wanted to understand how stakeholders were developing perceptions around EPIC, what

was working, and where there were areas of improvement. In following through with this work, I aimed to uncover how perceptions were being formed among stakeholders who were not directly involved with EPIC but were impacted by its requirements (i.e. not sitting on implementation or assessment teams). The college has nearly 400 online faculty members and numerous staff members whose job responsibilities were influenced by EPIC in some way and, up to this point, we knew very little about how they are developing perceptions around this major change.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While there is some literature addressing outcomes of QEPs, there is little known about the *process* of implementing this major change. Because it is typically large in scale, the QEP affects many institutional stakeholders, often requiring significant changes in teaching strategies, process execution, and/or course content. Given the wide-reaching implications of the QEP as a major institutional change and the number of institutions that must meet the requirement, it was surprising that stakeholder perceptions of major change have not been explored in this context. Through examining the ways that stakeholders in a SACSCOC-accredited institution formed perceptions around the QEP, this study attempted to address a gap in knowledge among scholars and practitioners and, hopefully, provide some insights about major change plays out for individuals in this context.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to uncover the ways that stakeholders at a SACSCOC-accredited institution develop perceptions around the QEP. Through a qualitative inquiry, I attempted to build upon the work of Kezar, Gerhke, and Elrod (2015) by applying the lenses of constructivism, sensemaking, and organizational learning within the context of a QEP implementation. Through a series of interviews with stakeholders, I examined the sensemaking

processes among individuals and attempted to understand what factors may have contributed to their interpretation of the change.

Organizational change is likely to be successful and sustainable if relevant stakeholders collectively develop a new cognitive map around the change and embrace new meanings and beliefs accordingly (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). It was, therefore, imperative that I garnered an understanding of how perceptions were formed among stakeholders and share those data with institutional leaders and stakeholders. If college leadership can gain a better understanding of the elements that contribute to the development of perceptions of a QEP, they can be better prepared for how to deal with challenges in advance of actually encountering them and assemble a list of best practices for use in conceiving, implementing, and sustaining future changes. As illustrated in the forthcoming literature review, the QEP process is complex, multifaceted, and nuanced. Because of this, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to understanding stakeholder perceptions, but there may be several factors identified that are transferrable to other post-secondary institutions, particularly those with similar characteristics such as size and organizational structure.

### **Overview of the Theoretical Framework**

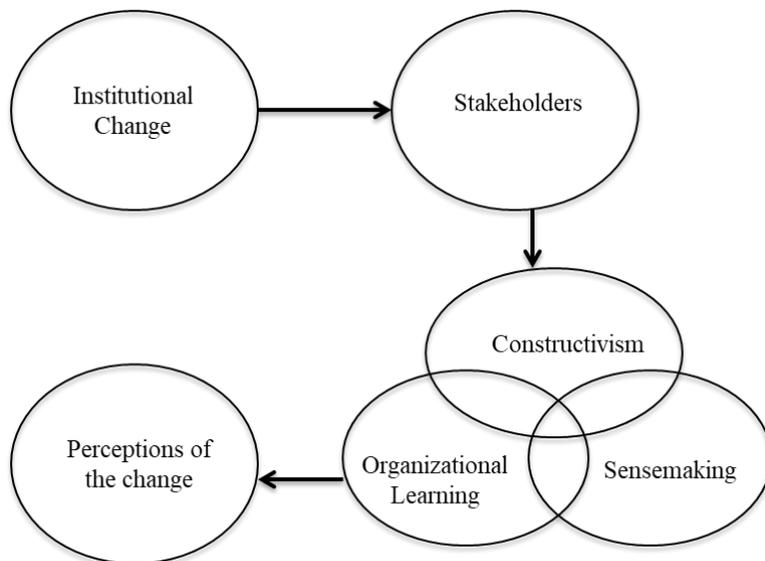
The literature concerning organizational behaviors and composition is vast, spanning areas of business, education, psychology, sociology, political science, and economics. Prominent topics include organizational change, organizational learning, organizational structure and/or culture, organizational leadership, and individual learning and perceptions among stakeholders in an organization. Each of these major areas has been explored in higher education settings and is frequently done during or after a major institutional change. While this study considered the literature in each of these areas, the most appropriate areas of foci for this study were around

stakeholder learning and perceptions. Because I interviewed individuals and asked questions about their internalization of a major institutional change, I derived findings that pertained to individual perceptions versus broad institutional change, large-scale organizational learning, or organizational structure, culture, or leadership, though several of these were found to play a role in how people perceived change in their institution.

One of the ways researchers can uncover stakeholder perceptions of major, institutional change in educational settings is through the social cognitive lens of sensemaking (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Weick, 1979). Organizational change typically occurs slowly, through a cumulative series of processes over time. It is usually unsustainable unless relevant stakeholders collectively develop a new cognitive map around the change and embrace new meanings and beliefs accordingly (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Change in this manner can be considered transformational (Kezar, 2013; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Moreover, Institutions that have successfully implemented change and facilitate sensemaking through a transparent and open process have done so by involving stakeholders across the institution versus a few select executive level actors (Eckel & Kezar, 2003). Those stakeholders can be then become change agents who can lead the change from the ground up (Kezar, 2011, 2013).

To further understand how individuals responded to organizational change initiatives, Kezar, Gehrke and Elrod (2015) examined the ways in which change agents' implicit theories of change influenced their ability to facilitate sense-giving activities and implement the change. The concept of implicit theories centers on the idea that people hold beliefs about things that they are unaware exist and, thus, have not reflected on them. Specifically, the study investigated STEM reform in undergraduate education and was guided by three lenses: sensemaking, constructivism, and organizational learning. The researchers applied a constructivist lens to understand how

experiences shape the way people recognize and examine their beliefs about change (i.e. make them explicit). The organizational learning lens considers the ways that data and information influence the way in which people challenge their existing assumptions and develop new mental models around the change (Kezar et al., 2015). On a holistic level, sensemaking “is an acknowledgement that organizations are not static and that there is no single reality, challenging more positivist views of organizations” (Kezar, 2013, p. 762). Sensemaking is essentially the process associated with the breaking down of a sturdy construct, the rebuilding of a new construct, and ultimately the adaptation of a new version of a previously held belief (Kezar, 2013, Weick, 1979). Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework for this study.



*Figure 1: Theoretical Framework*

The principles of stakeholder involvement and sensemaking were conceptually aligned with the situation at Wake Tech. Because institutional leaders believed stakeholder involvement was crucial to designing and implementing a successful program, Wake Tech facilitated its QEP selection and implementation process through large-scale stakeholder involvement, with faculty

and staff members across the college participating in committees tasked with implementing and assessing all aspects of the program. In other words, EPIC's implementation and execution was largely faculty and staff driven, with those stakeholder groups empowered to make decisions, develop and facilitate aspects of the program, and conduct program assessment.

### **Research Questions**

This study aimed to qualitatively address the following research question and sub-questions:

1. In what ways are relevant stakeholders developing perceptions around a major organizational change?
  - a. How are attitudes and perceptions of the QEP being formed among key stakeholder groups within the institution and why?
  - b. What are stakeholders learning about the change?
  - c. In what ways have their beliefs and/or assumptions about the QEP changed over time and why?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study contributed empirically to the QEP, organizational change, and organizational learning literature by qualitatively examining sensemaking among relevant stakeholders at a community college. Though there is some literature addressing organizational change in educational settings, there is not a single empirical study investigating organizational change and sensemaking in the context of a QEP, which is inherently a major organizational change requirement that affects 800 institutions in 11 states. This knowledge gap presented a unique opportunity to go beyond asking *if* stakeholders were buying into the new change, but rather, to probe deeply to ask *why and how* these stakeholders were developing perceptions around the

change and doing so in a context that many other institutions experience under the SACSCOC regional accreditation umbrella.

This study also illuminated the idea that the type of change is important to consider, as not all change is transformative or radical even if it is large and impactful. Individuals draw on a number of sources of knowledge and engagement in developing perceptions around change. Further, Wake Tech and other two-year colleges may garner helpful ideas in designing, executing, and communicating change. In Chapter 6, I offer a starting point for thinking about and framing change that may be useful in the early planning stages of change. Finally, leaders of SACSCOC-accredited schools may likely benefit from garnering an understanding of how perceptions are formed among directly impacted employees, the largest non-student stakeholder group affected by a major student learning-related change.

### **Study Design and Methods Overview**

The purpose of this study was to capture the interpretations, perceptions, and learning experiences of stakeholders about the EPIC program as it was being implemented. As a component of the implementation assessment, this study endeavored to answer the “how” and “why” questions about perception development around the EPIC program and, thus, garnered feedback from stakeholders about the program and address the following research question: How are stakeholders developing perceptions around an organizational change? Again, the overarching goal of the EPIC program was to improve the experience and outcomes for students in online courses, which, ostensibly, will lead to better overall retention and completion outcomes for degree seeking students. Because online course quality is closely linked with student outcomes (Jaggars & Xu, 2010), the EPIC program took a two-fold approach of

enhancing online faculty skills and increasing student competencies in the online learning environment.

The research questions were appropriately answered using qualitative methods within a constructivist framework. They were contextual in nature, meaning participants were asked to communicate personal interpretations of their experiences, rather than simply recall those experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Thus, the objective of the research was to understand how these individuals made meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative methodology was appropriate here because the purpose of this study was to understand how the participants interpreted their experiences in a new and unfolding situation (Patton, 2002).

This study employed a purposive sampling procedure as a means to understand the nature of the phenomenon experienced by the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). By definition, purposive sampling strategies are those in which the researcher sets boundaries (e.g., a location) and determines a conceptual framework of organizational learning and deliberately selects participants that are believed to have experienced similar phenomena or will contribute to answering the research question(s) (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Devers & Frankel, 2000). For this study, the participants included relevant employee stakeholders (i.e. those most heavily impacted by the change) who were not currently involved in the initiative. Participants included online faculty members, staff members, and those in roles of influence (lead instructor, former and current associate department heads.) who were not currently sitting on an EPIC committee or participating in EPIC decision-making. Wake Tech college leaders had been garnering feedback from EPIC-involved stakeholders for more than a year. However, they had not yet gathered feedback from impacted stakeholder groups that were not directly involved in the initiative.

Although it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure transferability of findings through reliability tactics, Lincoln and Guba state, “case study is perhaps the only format that can remain true to the moral imperatives of constructivism...” (2013, p. 80). They further describe the researcher in this context as “the passionate participant deeply involved in the reconstruction of a ‘reality’ in which all, including the inquirer, have a stake” (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 81). In this view, case study methods were highly appropriate for a study examining the interpretation and manifestation of realities and perceived truths in individuals and among groups (Reay, 2004).

The findings are a collection of data presented in the form of an exploratory, *intrinsic* (also called ‘holistic’) case study with thick description (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Stake, 1995). Lincoln and Guba (2013) found that case study is an excellent method by which to carry out a constructivist examination and more importantly, the most appropriate qualitative design for use in evaluative context (Merriam, 2009). The *intrinsic case study* approach is useful when the case itself is highly nuanced and unique (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). In this case, the EPIC program and all of its components are unique to WTCC, and I treated the institution and the program as a single unit of analysis (Yin, 2014). This is not to suggest that findings from the study will not be useful or transferrable to other institutions. Rather, this approach enabled the researcher to examine a wide variety of aspects relating to the institution and the program itself versus examining a single problem or issue (known as an *instrumental case study*).

### **Researcher Position**

My affiliation with Wake Tech began in 2013 when I was hired as a part-time business instructor. In 2015, I began working with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness as a Research

Intern tasked with qualitatively collecting data from institutional stakeholders regarding their perceptions of the QEP development process and the early phases of the QEP implementation. Additionally, I was invited to participate on the QEP Assessment Team committee as a fully contributing member. As of December 2018, I was no longer in those roles.

My closeness to the institution and the QEP had advantages and drawbacks. In terms of advantages, I was very knowledgeable about the program and was able to interview stakeholders quite adeptly as I knew and understood the program nomenclature, its history, and the overarching program goals. Furthermore, I understood the culture of the institution and was able to navigate the system of hierarchy and institutional political structures. I also believe that as an instructor at the institution, I was able to quickly develop rapport and earn credibility with study participants because we have shared some common experiences.

The biggest drawback is the appearance of a conflict of interest, bias, and the perceived inability to separate myself from the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Notwithstanding those concerns, the goal of this study was to uncover stakeholder perceptions of the QEP and my duty was and is to provide the truth. I anticipated that study participants would share positive and negative perceptions during the interviews, as I asked questions that sought a full range of feelings (see the interview protocol in Appendix D). This study did not aim to paint a certain picture of the QEP process but rather attempted to tease apart some of the nuanced perceptions and mental constructs that had formed among stakeholders and, to understand what factors were contributing to those feelings. While the QEP was by definition a “plan,” it was a dynamic and evolving system of major change, and it was imperative to uncover how people were responding to it. All relevant findings are presented, including those that may be perceived as “negative.”

Though the previously described benefits and drawbacks align with research that takes place “in your own setting,” having a previously established close proximity to the institution and the phenomenon being studied can be considered positive in terms of the quality of a qualitative study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 106). For instance, the researcher possesses a body of knowledge about the subject(s), they may be able to easily gain entry into the location(s), develop rapport with the participants involved, and draw more precise conclusions and interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In this study, I contend that my closeness to the institution and to the EPIC program did not negatively impact the study design or the presentation of findings.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited by some factors. While an intrinsic or critical case approach allowed for a deep exploration of a phenomenon in a particular context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015), the findings from this study may not be generalizable to other institutions. Wake Tech, like most organizations, has its own unique and nuanced attributes and may not be comparable to other colleges. Further, Wake Tech is a large institution and the findings from this study may not be viewed as reliable or transferable by smaller institutions. Further, the context of the QEP, while reliable to SACSCOC institutions, may not be reliable to those outside of the region. It was my hope that readers would be able to relate the study and findings despite that component, but perhaps not in some cases.

Due to time constraints and the need to maintain strict confidentiality, I was not able to use multiple sources of data such as observations and document analysis. By design, case studies allow for multiple data collection methods and long engagements (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015), however, I was not able to go beyond the single, one-on-one interview with

participants. Because the data was considered highly sensitive, I was not able to conduct member checking which contributes to the trustworthiness of qualitative findings (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton 2015). Finally, because participants volunteered to participate in this study, there may be some common attributes among those who self-select to participate in research and those who do not. While qualitative research does not aim to garner representative samples of participants, it is likely that participants in this study shared some attributes that are not representative of all stakeholders.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provided a brief overview of accreditation, the SACSCOC QEP requirement, the EPIC initiative and its genesis at WTCC, the theoretical framework, and the methodological approach. Using a qualitative methodology, I applied the three-pronged lens of constructivism, sensemaking, and organization learning to gain an interpretive understanding of the ways in which stakeholder perceptions were being formed during the implementation of a major organizational change initiative. In doing so, I endeavored to illuminate how stakeholders interpreted the change, learned about the change, and perceived the evolution of their feelings about the change over time. Because it was being done in the context of the QEP, this study may contribute empirically to a small, but growing body of literature about accreditation and the QEP, along with the literature concerning organizational change, sensemaking, and organization learning in educational settings.

The following chapter will provide a review of the literature in the areas of community colleges, QEP for both community colleges and baccalaureate-granting institutions, theories of organizational change and organization learning, and sensemaking. Chapter three will provide a detailed description of the proposed qualitative case study approach including sampling

procedures, data collection methods, and the data analysis strategy. Chapter four will present the findings of this study and a provide discussion and analysis of the themes. Chapter five will offer concluding thoughts, implications for research and practice, and recommendations for Wake Tech about how they may consider looking ahead with EPIC and other initiatives.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Through a three-pronged lens of constructivism, organizational learning, and sensemaking, this intrinsic case study endeavored to answer the following research question: “In what ways are relevant stakeholders developing perceptions around a major institutional change?” While this study focused on a particular college and program, the issues facing community college leaders as they plan for and implement a major change initiative are often similar. Moreover, they may be strikingly similar for two-year and four-year SACSCOC-accredited institutions as each of the approximately 800 institutions under this regional accreditor’s umbrella are required to prepare a minimum five-year Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to improve student learning every 10 years as part of the reaffirmation process (SACSCOC, 2016).

In order to better understand the foundational aspects of this study, several topics will be explored in depth. After providing a brief introduction to community college reforms, I will provide a detailed description of the QEP as a process as well as a review of the QEP literature for community colleges and four-year institutions. Because there is very little empirical work available about this topic, it seemed appropriate to include studies beyond community colleges to demonstrate the type of literature available and illuminate how similarly institutions approach this requirement, despite differences in size, type, and plan instituted.

The second half of the literature review will examine theories and topics of organizational change, organizational culture, organizational learning, sensemaking, and constructivism. Though this study did not explicitly apply organizational change or culture lenses to understanding this phenomenon, stakeholders were developing perceptions within the context of a major institutional change. Furthermore, given the size of the organizational learning

literature, it seemed appropriate to focus on organizational learning and sensemaking in the context of change, though those phenomena can be examined in other settings and under other circumstances. Finally, because all organizations consist of shared norms, beliefs, and attitudes (Lakos & Phipps, 2004; Schein, 1996), a brief review of organizational culture in educational contexts is offered as individuals drew on those beliefs in the context of change.

### **Brief Background**

Reforms in community college settings are ubiquitous. The benefits of open enrollment policies and low tuition are sometimes viewed as being offset by low success rates. As a result, the majority of the nearly 10 million students enrolled in community colleges annually do not achieve their educational goals (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). In response to these issues, individual two-year colleges and statewide system offices have been and are continually designing, implementing, and/or restructuring programs aimed at improving persistence, retention, and completion rates (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). With typically far fewer resources than their four-year counterparts, community colleges must take whatever steps are necessary to maintain a level of performance and, therefore, funding that will enable them to continue serving students. It's a challenge, but one that many passionate and committed faculty, staff, and administrators are willing to endure to serve their students and their communities.

Considering that nearly 50% of all undergraduate students attend community college, it is not surprising that these institutions have garnered considerable attention from university researchers and non-profit research institutions, mainstream media, and even the former Obama administration directly (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Wyner, 2014). It is no secret, however, that success rates (persistence and graduation rates) have remained low at community colleges, ranging from a 20-40% graduation rate within six years (Bailey & Cho, 2010; Bailey et al., 2015;

Malcom, 2013). There are a series of forces that contribute to this phenomenon including lack of preparedness among students and the characteristics of students such as low income, first generation status, non-traditional, veterans, and minorities (Malcom, 2013; Wheeler, 2012).

Other common factors that put community college students in high-risk categories are things like delayed entry, financial independence, full-time employment, part-time enrollment, dependents, single parenthood, and lack of a high school diploma or GED (Wheeler, 2012).

Given the fact that some states are implementing or considering free access to community colleges and the growing wage gap between those with a high school diploma and those with a post-secondary credential, it is likely that community college enrollment will continue to grow over the coming years (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Because of this, community college leaders will continually grapple with how to handle growth, adapt to changing economic conditions, *and* improve student outcomes. One of the ways that colleges in South develop strategies to improve student learning outcomes is through the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a process put forth by the SACSCOC regional accrediting body for 11 states. The following sections will examine the QEP and, through reviewing the literature about specific institutions, illustrate how that process has been the catalyst for large-scale change among post-secondary institutions in the south.

### **Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)**

Formed in 1895, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (the Commission, SACSCOC) has been the accrediting body for post-secondary educational institutions that award associate, baccalaureate, master's and doctoral degrees in 11 Southern states and Latin America (SACSCOC, 2016). The Commission's jurisdiction includes

the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (see Table 1) (SACSCOC, 2016).

The Commission serves two major purposes. Its primary purpose is to certify that member and candidate institutions have been and are continuing to meet the Core Requirements and uphold the Comprehensive Standards put forth by the commission. This is to ensure that schools are delivering effective, high quality education and taking the necessary steps to sustain that effort. Secondly, the Commission works with various legislative and regulatory bodies to influence policy decisions that directly impact its members (SACSCOC, 2016). Table 2 provides a breakdown of the numbers of accredited institutions by level or types/quantities of degrees offered.

The Commission's philosophy centers on student and societal well-being and focuses heavily on an overarching commitment to quality improvement. Institutions can apply for initial accreditation or prepare for reaffirmation, the 10-year review of institutional activities as a condition of renewed accreditation. According to the Commission (SACSCOC, 2012, p. 2) "The process provides an assessment of an institution's effectiveness in the fulfillment of its mission, its compliance with the requirements of its accrediting association, and its continuing efforts to enhance the quality of student learning and its programs and services." Table 2 lists the number of SACSCOC- accredited institutions by state and Table 3 presents the numbers of institutions by school level.

*Table 2: Quantities of Accredited Institutions by State*

State	Quantity of Institutions
AL	54
FL	76
GA	84
KY	50
LA	39
MS	32
NC	112
SC	50
TN	63
TX	160
VA	72
Other	6
Total	798

*Source: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.sacscoc.org/>*

Table 3: Quantities of Accredited Institutions by Level

Level	Description	Quantity of Institutions
<b>Level I</b>	<b>Associate Degree</b>	<b>270</b>
Level II	Baccalaureate Degree	121
Level III	Master's Degree	131
Level IV	Master's Degree and Education Specialist Degree	21
Level V	3 or fewer Doctoral Degrees	143
Level VI	4 or more Doctoral Degrees	112
<b>Total</b>		<b>798</b>

Source: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.sacscoc.org/>

A key requirement for reaffirming schools is that they develop and submit a 75-page Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to the Commission prior to their review (SACSCOC, 2012). The purpose of the QEP is to encourage institutions to pinpoint issues where improved processes, structures, curricula, or procedures could have a marked impact on student learning outcomes and student wellbeing. These institutions must also provide a detailed roadmap for addressing those issues in a prolonged and sustained manner (SACSCOC, 2012). Developing a QEP can take several months and is a resource-intensive process that often includes input from members across all major stakeholder groups associated with the institution (Batten, 2010; Rodriguez, 2015). The commission provides a description for how the institution should present the QEP plan (see Table 4 for the description) along with detailed rubric for evaluation. As part

of Core Requirement 2.12, an institution’s QEP must be considered “acceptable” or higher to receive reaffirmation (see Table 5).

The reaffirmation process requires that institutions permit an evaluation committee to perform an on-site review (Batten, 2010). The institution must supply compliance forms and reports six months beforehand and must supply the QEP proposal within four to six weeks of the visit. The on-site committee is typically composed of a minimum of seven members including a chair, evaluators for areas such as faculty and student support services, and at least two QEP evaluators. Additional members can be added if the institution is large or complex in nature (Batten, 2010). Table 4 presents a description of the QEP with some examples.

*Table 4: Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Description with Examples and Explanations*

QEP Plan Presentation Description	Examples/Explanations
Includes a process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment	Student preparedness, critical thinking skills, degree completion times
Focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution	Focus on improving outcomes in a discipline such as health science or mathematics or on a course format such as online learning
Demonstrate institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP	Empirically supported strategies are presented for reaching goals such as implementing a peer mentor program or a college 101 course with a detailed timeline, required personnel resources, scale-up plans, and a 5-year budget
Includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP	Solicit competitive proposals from institution faculty and staff for the internal QEP selection process; develop and maintain committees to oversee the major components of the QEP throughout implementation

Table 4 (continued).

QEP Plan Presentation Description	Examples/Explanations
Identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement	Institution will typically provide a logic model with measurable goals (e.g. 10% increase in 2nd year student retention within 2 years); assessment team committees often assist with formative and summative assessment of the overall program and its components

*Note: Examples taken from 2015 reaffirmation class. Source: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.sacscoc.org/>*

Table 5: Indicators of an Acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan

Indicator	Acceptable
1.A Institutional Process	Topic is directly related to prior institutional planning which had involved a broad-based effort. Plan then developed by key individuals/groups on campus.
1.B Key issues identified that emerge from institutional assessment	A direct relationship established between QEP topic and institutional needs. QEP may indirectly affect needs
2.A Focus on learning outcomes and accomplishing the mission of the institution.	Outcomes are generally related to student learning and reasonably address the accomplishment of mission-specific goals
2.B Focus on the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution	Activities of QEP focus generally on the improvement of student learning, with some that may not be directly tied to that effort
3.A Capability to initiate the plan	Yearly, overall, budget, with basic descriptions of personnel needs including the organizational structure needed to carry out the plan
3.B Capability to implement and complete the plan	Detailed timetable is provided for year by year activities including specific actions, budgetary expenditures, and assessment processes

Table 5 (continued).

Indicator	Acceptable
4.A Broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development of the plan	Process used to develop plan involved key constituencies
4.B Broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the proposed implementation of the plan	All relevant constituencies involved in implementation, either directly or indirectly.
5.A Identified goals for the quality enhancement plan	Goals deal with expected accomplishments
5.B A plan to assess the achievement of the goals of the quality enhancement plan	Assessment plan is based on clear outcomes; assessment methods related to outcomes

*Source: Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement. (2012). (5th Ed.). Decatur, Georgia: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges.*

To prepare a QEP, colleges are required to conduct an internal assessment to determine what issues they believe are the most pressing in terms of student success, the program(s) is/are needed to address the issue, and how they will launch, implement and sustain such program(s). As described in the forthcoming sections, institutions seem to approach the QEP development process in one of two ways: competitive proposals submitted from faculty and staff or non-competitive planning committees formed for the sole purpose of developing the QEP. Because the QEP is typically a long-term, large-scale institutional change, a great deal can be learned about the process, the institution, and individual stakeholder groups. Considering that nearly all 799 institutions under the SACSCOC governing umbrella have gone through a QEP at least once, there is undoubtedly much valuable information that has yet to be uncovered (SACSCOC, 2016).

*The Two-Year College QEP:* The shortage of empirical research around the community college QEP process is interesting considering that Level 1 schools, or those that offer an associate degree as the highest-level credential, account for the single largest category of institutions with 270 members (See Table 2). The next closest category is schools offering three or fewer doctoral degrees at 143 (SACSCOC, 2016). Given the large number of two-year schools in the SACSCOC region, it is puzzling that so little data has been captured in this area, particularly considering the widespread impact of the QEP and other large-scale institutional changes happening at community colleges across the country (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015).

Assessing the need on which the QEP will be focused is a task unto itself. Some schools may use secondary data from large national datasets such as Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) or the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Balog & Search, 2006; Beile, 2007). Tallahassee Community College (TCC) analyzed secondary data from CCSEE and, separately, collected data from its students and faculty members. Though TCC faculty and administration believed the college had been performing very well, the data they collected also revealed some shortcomings in the areas of student engagement and learning outcomes (Balog & Search, 2006). The college then developed planning committees to focus on the areas identified as needing the most improvement and to devise ways to address them. Once those interventions were agreed upon, the steering committee fleshed out the program and added details concerning program preparation, the implementation plan, the maintenance of the program, and all the resources needed at each of those stages (Balog & Search, 2006).

TCC has been recognized nationally for its QEP and its efforts to improve student outcomes through strong leadership, data-driven decision-making, and a culture of assessment (Hellyer, 2009). Part of TCC's plan included a student portal, which provided students with a

single source for advising assistance, scheduling help, academic planning, and individual learning plans. This portal was found to be very helpful to both faculty and students.

Additionally, the college implemented a mandatory orientation for new students in which they were given information about the student portal, financial aid, and other college resources available to them. Over a five-year period, TCC experienced significant improvements in student retention rates and GPAs (Hellyer, 2009).

As the first North Carolina community college to apply for reaffirmation, Guilford Technical Community College blazed the trail for the QEP process in the state (Davis, 2009). Because of this, it is likely that many schools were keeping an eye on how they developed and implemented their QEP. With the intent to improve soft skills among students and enable them to become more successful contributors to the workforce, the initiative focused on preparing faculty members to incorporate employability skills into their courses. In the end, the institution facilitated both a successful QEP and a complete institutional culture and philosophy change among faculty members concerning student employment skills and economic development (Davis, 2009).

Several factors contributed to GTCC's success (Davis, 2009). For one, there was significant early, campus-wide communication about the process. Everyone knew well in advance that a big change was coming, and this was found to have an impact on the faculty support across the college (Davis, 2009). The planning team also conducted focus groups and solicited feedback from stakeholder groups across the college to identify a theme for the QEP that would garner large-scale support. Agreement among faculty about the importance and practicality of the program was also found to be a major factor in buy-in (Davis, 2009).

In terms of institutional culture, GTCC had a history of putting local economic development in the forefront of its mission. In fact, the college had conducted extensive research and developed economic models for use across its region, earning it state and national recognition (Davis, 2009). Furthermore, because employability was a significant factor in its approach to serving local and regional businesses, it is possible that the QEP felt like a natural fit since employees had long ago adopted the belief that this was an important issue for the college's students (Davis, 2009).

The QEP planning team and college administration took steps to ensure that stakeholders were informed about the process and could actively participate in program development (Davis, 2009). They structured the QEP development process and subsequent implementation such that they were highly participative, encouraging faculty members across the college to sit on committees and play a role in the initiative. Administrators made deliberate efforts to make sure faculty members understood the QEP, the SACSCOC requirements, and program expectations at every phase of implementation (Davis, 2009). The college also implemented a professional development curriculum that served as both a content platform to educate participants on the topic, and a medium through which faculty could collaborate and share ideas (Davis, 2009). Though this study only included full-time faculty member's experiences, GTCC's success story illuminates the potential for earnest buy-in from most faculty members in community college through a strong commitment to the institutional mission, effective communication, professional development, and wide spread participation among stakeholders.

While institutions like GTCC developed the QEP using designated planning committees, some institutions have designed a QEP development plan that calls for a competitive proposal process among faculty members (Batten, 2010). It has been found that the two major factors

contributed to the success of the winning QEP development team: a) a unified group goal that everyone rallied around and, b) a sense of belonging among team members (Batten, 2010). This is not surprising, given the manner by which GTCC designed its QEP around a goal that stakeholders were already rallying around.

Through investigating the factors that contribute to QEP implementation success, the importance of faculty buy-in and the mere existence of the SACSCOC requirement emerge as themes (Davis, 2009; Hellyer, 2009; Rodriguez, 2015). In a comparative case study of two pseudonymously named schools using a management theory lens, Rodriguez (2015) found that of the six principles of Deming's Total Quality Management framework (customer service, training and development, teamwork, measurement, improvement, and leadership), teamwork was the only principle that both SACSCOC-accredited schools exhibited as part of their QEP implementations. The author found that the factors of accountability, accreditation, and assessment were prominent in terms of guiding the institutions through their QEP processes. Similarly to what occurred at GTCC, faculty buy-in was also a significant factor in the perceived success of the programs and, in fact, Rodriguez recommended that institutions prepare plans with buy-in in mind as part of the QEP development process (2015). This finding and the recommendation seemingly align with the stated mission and expectations of the quality enhancement plan requirement and the rubric by which plans are judged (SACSCOC 2012).

In another comparison study, this time of two exemplary First Year Experience programs, Miller (2014) found that while both schools were considered high performing and successful in their mission, the quality enhancement plan requirement at one school was itself a significant factor in the success of that two-year institution's First Year Experience course. Because one of the colleges was in the SACSCOC jurisdiction and one was not, the author was able to single out

the QEP requirement as a driving force in program success. Furthermore, Miller recommended that schools, regardless of location, adopt the QEP procedure as best practice for implementing similar programs as the reaffirmation requirement potentially nudges institutions into making discernable and sustainable change, resulting in improved student success rates (2014).

Considering the small amount of research exploring the community college QEP process, it is somewhat predictable that there is insufficient data concerning implementation from the early years of the SACSCOC requirement. Some efforts to understand the new requirement around the time it was introduced revealed interesting aspects of the QEP development process for Level 1 institutions. For instance, five factors of QEP development that have been found to “transcend institutional differences” are internal motivation (described as constituency support and belief in the mission), commitment of college leadership, process strategies, support from accrediting agencies, and reaffirmation review (Cruise, 2007, p. 207).

In the early QEP development literature, there was evidence that collaboration among disparate groups in two-year schools was a key factor in program development. Gordin (2006) examined the ways that community college faculty and assessment experts in the institutional effectiveness office worked together to develop a QEP. Interestingly, the researcher found that because the institution had a long history of cooperation between these two stakeholder groups and a strong culture of continuous improvement in student learning outcomes, they had formed a productive community of practice and were able to successfully develop a QEP that garnered institution-wide support (2006). This is particularly significant because it speaks to the role of the culture, mission, and overarching philosophy of institutions in successfully developing and implementing large-scale change, like a QEP. This is not only reminiscent of the shared beliefs of stakeholders at GTCC, but it also raises the question of whether the QEP requirement itself

has an indirect influence on its member institutions to avoid becoming fractured or having a culture of noncooperation to the point where inertia is insurmountable and change cannot occur.

Though most of the early literature focused on the QEP planning process, some findings emerged regarding program success. Navarro College, a rural two-year college in Texas, developed a faculty-centered student advisement initiative as its QEP (Kantor, 2007). At the heart of the initiative was the idea that first year students need intensive support and faculty would be the best people for the role. The program was designed with a growth goal of eventually reaching all students and with a mechanism for training and support for faculty members as needed. The program was a success, with measures of student retention, GPA, and graduation rates all achieving marked improvements (Kantor, 2007). While it is unknown what institutional factors contributed to the success of Navarro's program, one can infer that because faculty members were the most highly impacted constituency group in this QEP *and* because it was a success, they did so wholeheartedly. Once again, however, we are reminded how the dearth of research on this topic creates gaps in our understanding of the QEP as a whole. It would be very helpful to know what steps Navarro took to get stakeholders on board with this program. Community college faculty members typically manage enormous teaching loads and often take on additional non-teaching responsibilities. Asking them to take on another role might prove difficult. It would be useful to know what worked in this case.

In an effort to share best practices with SACSCOC-accredited colleagues, some practitioners have written about their QEP experiences. Reflecting on the multi-year QEP at Caldwell Community College, Hampson (2009) described the multitude of ways in which faculty professional development played a role in the successful implementation of the "writing across the curriculum" or "WAC" initiative aimed at improving student writing across the

college. Over a three-year period, the number of faculty members who participated in the training rose from 10 individuals to 50% of the faculty members overall. Hampson shared some examples of curricular changes that faculty members made and indicated that professional development course evaluations were quite strong (2009). Unfortunately, the author did not provide detailed explanations or data that provided insight as to *why* they were experiencing success. It would have also been beneficial to know if there was resistance and how they handled it.

In Tincher-Ladner's (2009) reflection on the ways in which Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College selected its QEP, the author provides a step-by-step guide for selecting the initiative based on what is described as "best practices" (p. 622). The described process was indeed interesting as it incorporated focus group research principles and thematic analysis to help narrow down the eventual QEP topic. The primary QEP planning committee prepared abstracts for the five biggest themes and then distributed a survey asking stakeholders to rank the options. The final step involved a feasibility study (Tincher-Ladner, 2009). Unfortunately, we do not know exactly what happened after that. One can presume that they went on to implement a successful program. However, this piece is intended to be a recap of how one institution believed their process was successful and worthy of emulating rather than an empirically-based finding about what works in QEP development.

While it is commendable that institutions share valuable experiences with their SACSCOC-accredited colleagues and the world at large, the lack of rigorous research examining these massive program implementations renders reflective papers like these as "nice to have" but not particularly useful. The Commission is willing to give institutions the freedom to make decisions in the best interest of a successful QEP, but those decisions should be informed,

justifiable, and appropriate for the nuanced environment of that institution. It is unlikely that saying “because that’s what X school did” would be acceptable as reasoning for QEP-related decision-making, unless, of course, the research was available to justify those claims. According to The Commission:

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), submitted four to six weeks in advance of the on-site review by the Commission, is a document developed by the institution that (1) includes a process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes 8 broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. The QEP should be focused and succinct (no more than seventy-five pages of narrative text and no more than twenty-five pages of supporting documentation or charts, graphs, and tables). (SACSCOC, 2012)

Some community colleges have explored changes that were not already part of the institutional shibboleth. Recognizing that globalization and international awareness were pressing issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Motlow State Community College (MSCC) in Tennessee opted to develop and implement a QEP concentrated on international education (Guerin, 2009). Because so few community college students have the means or the time flexibility to travel abroad, MSCC wanted to integrate international education into the curriculum across the college. Further, a survey of faculty and staff at the college revealed that a significant number of key stakeholders were receptive to incorporating more international topics into their courses (Guerin, 2009).

In reviewing best practices for internationalizing the curriculum, the QEP team decided on a modular model as a means to deliver globally related content to students (Guerin, 2009). This plan was seen as both cost effective because they did not have to develop new courses and

also highly impactful since they could be used in several courses across the college without requiring a major curriculum overhaul.

MSCC made some interesting implementation choices for its QEP. For one, faculty members were not *required* to participate in this program. All faculty involvement was voluntary and only the courses offered by the volunteers were internationalized. A series of professional development courses were offered to help the volunteer faculty members gain the necessary knowledge and skills to internationalize their courses. Next, the five-year plan called for only 15 internationalized courses (3 per year). This seems somewhat small given the hundreds of courses offered by a typical community college. Finally, a \$5 per student “international fee” would be added to each semester’s tuition to fund the program and generate additional revenue for the college (Guerin, 2009, p. 613). This seemed unique and somewhat peculiar given the small number of internationalized course available to students.

Another approach that MSCC took for its QEP was the appointment of a faculty member to the position of Coordinator of International Education (CIE) (Guerin, 2009). The faculty member, a person with international expertise and interest, received reduced course load and compensation for assuming this role. The International Education Committee essentially served as the coordinating and steering committee for the QEP. From an assessment standpoint, the college planned to use qualitative and quantitative data to measure students’ progress against the student learning outcomes associated with each module/course, though results were unavailable at the time of publication (Guerin, 2009).

Like GTCC, Wytheville Community College (WCC) recognized the increased demand by employers for soft skills among job applicants. In response, the teaching faculty at WCC designed its QEP around developing students’ interpersonal communication skills and, thus,

improving their potential employability (Leonard, 2008). Though the large-scale success of the QEP is unknown, Leonard (2008) implemented the program in a developmental English classroom by requiring that the students complete a podcasting assignment as a low-stress means to practice oral communication. There were some challenges in implementing this strategy such as limited internet access among rural students and a lack of social face-to-face interaction. Still, learners were able to complete the assignments and listen to other students' submissions (Leonard, 2008).

Nearly all of the community college QEP plans and programs seemed to meet the requirement to improve student learning outcomes and well-being. However, little is known about the process of implementation (successes and challenges) or the outcomes of many of the programs themselves. While helpful, this body of empirical and anecdotal literature is uneven in its contribution to understanding the process of developing and implementing a QEP. Furthermore, it offers very little insight into how relevant stakeholders developed perceptions around the change. What did they learn? How did their attitudes and perceptions change over time?

*The Four-Year University QEP.* As mentioned earlier, the shortage of empirical work concerning the QEP process at community colleges is unfortunate, as there are so many of these institutions that receive accreditation through SACSCOC. Because of this, it seemed appropriate to explore QEP literature for four-year institutions as well. Though the needs and populations of four-year schools are different from those at community colleges, there are similarities in terms of how the schools approach the QEP process. This segment will review the QEP literature for four-year schools and illustrate that, like that of the community college literature, there is inconsistency in terms of what is presented. While useful and informative, the literature does not

present an in-depth look at how stakeholders develop perceptions around the major change being implemented. Notwithstanding, several of the studies offer some description of relevant stakeholder involvement and participation, inadvertently affirming the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of how perceptions are formed among that key group of people.

University of Central Florida (UCF) used a competitive process in which faculty and staff across the college submitted proposals for a QEP that would focus on a “campus-wide core competency” (Beile, 2007, p. 127). The winning proposal, submitted by the university library, recommended a large-scale information fluency initiative designed around the Associated Colleges of the South Information Fluency Model (ACS). The model combines aspects of information literacy, computer literacy, and critical thinking skills (Beile, 2007).

Faculty members were identified as the group charged with executing the program, which included everything from creating appropriate assignments with assessments to determining “what the information-fluent student should look like upon exiting their program.” They also opted to use an instrument from Educational Testing Services specifically designed to collect information fluency data (Beile, 2007, p. 141). Faculty members received training on pedagogical strategies and a new software system. Notably, faculty members embraced the program, primarily because they believed information fluency was important (Beile, 2007).

Two issues did arise, however. First, faculty members were found to be implementing the program differently across the college, emphasizing only one or two aspects of the model versus all three areas equally and consistently, as the model implies. The second issue was that supporting departments across the university provided uneven support levels. Many aspects of the new faculty workload required support from multiple departments, many with differing levels of resources (Beile, 2007).

While it is not clear whether this QEP was successful, it is reasonable to infer that for UCF faculty members, their belief that the identified issue was important and the program had value was influential in their willingness to embrace their new responsibilities and the program as a whole. This is similar to the experience at GTCC and at Gordin's (2006) unnamed community college where faculty and assessment team members had formed a community of practice. In those instances, faculty members and other constituent groups developed shared beliefs about the initiative and, thus, developed well-received QEPs (Davis, 2009; Gordin, 2006). Furthermore, as *belief* begins emerging as a theme in both four-year and two-year institutions, it is worth recalling that internal motivation was considered one of the five factors of QEP success that "transcend institutional differences" (Cruise, 2007, p. 207).

Like their two-year counterparts, many four-year colleges and universities use well-known national surveys such as National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to learn more about their students. Modeled after NSSE, Western Kentucky University's Student Engagement Survey (WKUSES) was developed in 2001 to assess the degree to which WKU students were participating in experiential learning activities, gauge to what extent their knowledge was enhanced by academic courses, and garner an understanding of how students were engaging academically with their peers and faculty members (McElroy & Cobb, 2010).

For the university's 2005 reaffirmation and QEP, the WKUSES was valuable tool in assessing the overall success of its program titled, "Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society" (McElroy & Cobb, 2010, p. 20). The fundamental tenets of the program were that students would gain a series of new capacities around ways to apply their knowledge to societal and global issues and an expanded awareness of diverse "peoples, ideas, and cultures" (p. 20). Over the three-period after the QEP launch, WKU noticed a significant increase in several QEP-

specific variables and in four major categories: 1) awareness of social issues, 2) ability to use knowledge to tackle social issues, 3) diversity awareness, and 4) overall sense of social responsibility (McElroy & Cobb, 2010, p. 33). In fact, the biggest increases during that three-year period in any area were in those associated with the QEP, indicating that institutional commitment to specific, formalized goals like those associated with the QEP, may be a significant factor in program success (McElroy & Cobb, 2010).

Though it is unclear exactly how WKU implemented its QEP, there can be some inferences made as to why the program was successful. For one, the university incorporated the basic principles of the QEP (experiential learning, global and societal awareness and enhancement) into its academic mission years before the SACSCOC affirmation. Therefore, aspects of faculty-student engagement such as advising, research assistance, study abroad, and joint participation in scholarly projects were already targeted areas of improvement by departments across the university. The WKUSES survey also revealed, somewhat unexpectedly, that students and faculty were engaging more meaningfully outside the classroom, indicating that those other activities were leading to stronger faculty-student relationships (McElroy & Cobb, 2010). Given the faculty-centered nature of WKU's QEP and the marked improvement in program-related aspects over time, it seems reasonable to conclude that faculty members across the institution embraced the principles of the student engagement QEP and played a key role in the program's success. It is worth noting, however, that like GTCC, WKU opted for a QEP that aligned with a previously stated institutional mission and focus.

Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia (Marymount) also developed a QEP focused on student engagement titled, "DISCOVER: Inquiry, Scholarship, Creativity, and Research" (Oxenford, Summerfield, Schuchert, 2012, p. 72). The overarching theme of the

program was Inquiry Guided Learning (IGL), a set of practices that encourages students to explore multifaceted and often ambiguous issues and problems for which there are many possible outcomes and/or solutions. The overarching purposes for using this teaching style is to prepare the students to be good researchers and problem-solvers *and* to focus on “educating the whole person” (p. 71). DISCOVER had several complementary, component parts. These included first year and transfer seminar courses, the inclusion of IGL and a capstone project in at least two courses in each major, the integration of IGL into the core curriculum for liberal arts, and the development of an undergraduate research center (Oxenford et al., 2012).

Although Marymount’s DISCOVER program was a faculty-driven initiative, the QEP implementation team believed that faculty members would need a lot of support to adopt and incorporate IGL into their classrooms (Oxenford et al., 2012). The university’s Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) arranged to host the founding author of IGL for a two-day workshop open to all full-time and adjunct faculty members. Each college was then offered a specialized faculty development program aimed at further enabling faculty members to gain a strong understanding of IGL and develop skills to implement it in practice. Annual summer workshops were also offered to train faculty members to teach the first year and transfer courses along with the new IGL-based courses that were added to each major. On an ongoing basis, the university sent faculty members to conferences and other training centered on good teaching practices and student-centered teaching (Oxenford et al., 2012).

DISCOVER’s implementation results were interesting as each department incorporated IGL into its curriculum differently. Faculty members in areas such as mathematics and health sciences found it difficult to relinquish the control that a lecture-based teaching style provides. However, they were generally pleased with early results from the program implementation

(Oxenford et al., 2012). Notably, students in those areas were also reluctant to adopt the IGL method of teaching. They too had become comfortable with lecture-based teaching in those types of courses and needed some reassurance that it was something beneficial to them. The Literature and Language Department took a unique approach by identifying a departmental “inquiry objective” and integrating that into all of its IGL-based courses (p. 76).

Based on early assessment data, Marymount’s DISCOVER program was a success in the first two years, though the impact in year two was lower than in year one (Oxenford et al., 2012). Furthermore, because each curriculum department implemented IGL into its courses differently, there were significant inconsistencies in terms of how effectively faculty members believed they were using IGL in their classrooms. Many faculty members were slow to adopt the program and adjunct faculty members were not included in the IGL faculty development courses. In an effort to ameliorate those issues, university leaders began asking faculty job candidates about IGL as part of the vetting process. The university also implemented a reward and recognition system for departments that properly and successfully use IGL in their classrooms (Oxenford et al., 2012).

For Marymount’s QEP team, the process of garnering full faculty support was slow and arduous. This makes some sense given the drastic changes that need to be made in terms of teaching style. The challenge of gaining large-scale buy-in earlier may also have been linked to the fact that IGL was a completely new concept to many, if not most, of Marymount’s faculty members. One drawback of the large-scale nature of the QEP requirement may in fact be the tendency for some colleges and universities to operate as a series of silos rather than a single, cohesive entity. These factors may have been partially to blame for a noticeable drop in impact in the second year of the program (Oxenford et al., 2012).

For its multifaceted QEP, Baylor University (Baylor) launched an Engaged Learning Groups (ELG) initiative in which faculty teams led student groups living together in residence halls in learning about issues pertaining to Hispanic Families in Transition, Film and Global Culture, and Energy and Society (Sriram, Scales, & Oster, 2011, p. 26). These ELGs were offered as one-credit courses during a three-semester period with the goals of increasing faculty-student interaction, promoting experiential learning, and increasing participation among undergraduate students in scholarly research (p. 27).

Focus groups revealed that, in fact, the university achieved its stated goals. Students and faculty members reported feeling connected to one another both inside and outside the classroom. Through field trips and other experiential learning activities, students and faculty members found the learning experiences meaningful and relevant. Students and faculty members also experienced community building with each other, as student neighbors bonded with each other and faculty members across disciplines developed newfound friendships with one another. One of the only significant drawbacks of the ELG was that faculty members had to adjust their classroom management techniques since everyone (faculty and students alike) knew each other very well and tended to socialize more than normal (Sriram et al., 2011).

Though not explicitly clear, it seems highly likely that program participating faculty members at Baylor were wholeheartedly committed to the program and its principles. A program like ELG was highly participative, time-consuming, and hands-on in nature. What is not certain, unfortunately, is the number of faculty members and students who participated in the program. It is also unclear what, if any, supporting institutional units were involved in this program. Still, the program earned the university a National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) *Promising Practices of Student Affairs Partnerships with Academic Affairs* award,

indicating ELG may indeed have had a widespread impact and institutional support (Sriram et al., 2011).

Since its 1997 inception, Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) has required that all undergraduate students take a course in sustainable development as part of the university's commitment to promoting ecological literacy among graduates (Bevins & Wilkinson, 2009). Fundamentally, the university founders and leaders believed that ecology affects people's lives in many ways and is relevant to everyone regardless of academic discipline. The course, known as "The University Colloquium: A Sustainable Future," centers on a "sense of place, ecological literacy, and sustainability" (p. 222). Throughout the course, students toured regional parks, swamplands, and urban areas to better understand nature and urban development. Additionally, the curriculum required that students complete a community service project linked to ecological issues (Bevins & Wilkinson, 2009).

As part of its 2005 reaffirmation process, FGCU put forth a QEP that expanded on the existing University Colloquium program in several ways (Bevins & Wilkinson, 2009). For one, ecology and sustainability education was integrated into the curricula across the university at all levels. In other words, all traditional four-year college students would learn ecological and community awareness concepts related to their fields of study during each of their four years of school. The university also implemented the use of two instruments, the Environment Literacy Instrument and Community Service Attitudes Scale, to assess the extent to which students' knowledge and awareness of these topics had improved (Bevins & Wilkinson, 2009).

Although still in the early stages of data collection at the time of the report, the university had undergone some significant changes in terms of research and academic offerings related to sustainability and community awareness (Bevins & Wilkinson, 2009). Several of its colleges

added or changed degrees, amended existing programs, and added new courses. The university opened a Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education to support research efforts and the overarching mission of the university in promoting ecological awareness and has since published many books and reports related to sustainability (Bevins & Wilkinson, 2009).

For FGCU, faculty members were key to the success of the QEP. One of the first academic initiatives related to the QEP occurred in the First Year Writing Programme (original spelling) through which students were assigned readings related to sustainability issues (Rowland, Millner, Hill, Towne, & Wohlpart, 2009). Faculty members across the university submitted suggested readings, resulting in a team of faculty members having to whittle down the choices they felt would be manageable for a semester. Faculty members in all disciplines created assignments and projects related to ecological and environmental issues, many of which centered on how those concepts related to students' lives (Rowland et al., 2009).

Anecdotally, it seemed that faculty members not only embraced the QEP, but also actively implemented the core program principles into their classrooms. It is worth noting, however, that the QEP focused on the university's long-held mission of ecological literacy and community awareness. As noted earlier, for schools and colleges that chose a similar route, faculty member buy-in appears to be consistently high. It could be argued, though, that because the university had long been focused on these issues, faculty members did not view the changes as drastic or obligatory, but rather part of the natural course of upholding the university mission.

Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU) also opted for a QEP that expanded on a program that had existed for some time. A historically black university (HBCU), JCSU launched a learning communities pilot program in 1998 as a means to improve academic success and assist students in engaging with the university both academically and socially (Yancy, Sutton-

Haywood, Hermitte, Dawkins, Rainey, & Parker, 2008). That program was the inspiration for the university's 2006 QEP centered on the development and implementation of the Freshman Academy Learning Community (FALC). The real catalyst for FALC, however, was the participation by the university in a national project called Building Engagement and Attainment of Minority Students (BEAMS), through which majority minority institutions come together to discuss issues of student engagement. It was the invitation into the BEAMS project that prompted university researchers to administer the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to the freshman and senior classes, the results of which ultimately informed QEP development and set the baseline data for the program (Yancy et al., 2008).

Through the FALC program, freshmen can earn up to 16 general education credits through enrollment in interdisciplinary learning "blocks" based on themes concerning "real world problems" and facilitated by teams of faculty members from several areas of the institution (Yancy et al., 2008, p. 252). Drawing from Tinto (2000), the theory behind the program was that students who engaged in active and collaborative learning early in their college career would integrate more fully into college life, enjoy the experience, and be more likely to stay and complete their degrees (Yancy et al., 2008).

The FALC program required heavy faculty member involvement and, therefore, JCSU developed and delivered a series of professional development opportunities in the form of a workshop series featuring highly regarded experts in the field of student-centered learning (Yancy et al., 2008). University staff and administrators also participated in the workshops. The training program was heavily pedagogical in nature, concentrating on integrating curricula across disciplines, implementing active and collaborative learning strategies, and incorporating

techniques for building critical thinking and problem-solving skills in real-world contexts (Yancy et al., 2008).

Early results from NSSE and the Noel-Lovitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) at JCSU indicated that the FALC was on track to be a success (Yancy et al., 2008). On the academic side, there were increases in both credit hours completed and GPAs, keeping variables such as required courses, curriculum, and faculty members constant (except for normal attrition). The probation rates for academically marginal students dropped by more than 50%, indicating that the Freshman Academy was having a significant impact on the most at-risk groups of students (Yancy et al. 2008).

In terms of student satisfaction and student engagement (two closely linked aspects of student retention), there were noticeable increases in both categories among students who participated in the Freshman Academy. The survey results indicated that students' satisfaction increased as their academic performance improved and that student-faculty engagement was a factor in increased satisfaction. Accordingly, faculty-student interaction, along with active learning and educational experiences, were all highly rated engagement factors, with numbers considerably higher for JCSU than the national averages (Yancy et al., 2008).

Using data-driven measures, schools like JCSU have been able to gauge the success of their QEPs through comparisons of baseline and post-implementation data. Once again, however, JCSU is an example of how schools and colleges that play to their strengths and align their QEP with the institutional mission experience marked improvements in student performance. As a result, faculty members and other key stakeholders seemingly embraced the new program, as it had long been part of the university's retention plan, albeit in a different format.

The University of Louisville (UL) implemented an institutional-wide QEP with a central emphasis on improving critical thinking skills among students (Hagerty & Rockaway, 2012). The program was based on the Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Framework, a metacognitive model that considers the three major factors of “reason, reflection, and judgment” as integral to learning (Ralston & Bays, 2015, p. 87). Multifaceted and complex, the framework plays out through a series of questions aimed at solving problems through identifying elements of thought (point of view, implications, questions), applying intellectual standards (logicalness, clarity, relevance) and ultimately, developing new intellectual traits (intellectual integrity, intellectual autonomy, fair-mindedness) (Hagerty & Rockaway, 2012; Ralston & Bays, 2015).

The published works on UL’s initiative have focused on changes in the Engineering Department. As a heavily problem-solving discipline, engineering is a logical target for understanding a new critical thinking directive given the critical thinking assessments and evaluations required by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) (Ralston & Bays, 2015). With this in mind, it is understandable why many UL engineering faculty members initially believed they were already adequately teaching critical thinking skills and resisted making any major changes to their curriculum or teaching strategies (Ralston & Bays, 2015).

The faculty members did eventually realize that, while the engineering program curriculum encouraged critical thinking, it did not necessarily teach students how to do this deliberately (Ralston & Bays, 2015). In other words, faculty members were not necessarily pointing out to students the instances in which they were applying critical thinking skills to an issue, problem, or assignment (Hagerty & Rockaway, 2012). Interestingly, the actual curriculum changes were considered minor, taking the form of added assignments each semester or small

changes to the organization of the presented materials (Hagerty & Rockaway, 2012; Ralston & Bays, 2015).

Findings from a 3-year cohort study revealed that the program at UL was a success. Through using a detailed rubric to analyze student artifacts (specific assignments for freshman through seniors), 20 engineering faculty members conducted a detailed analysis to determine scores for each submitted assignment (Ralston & Bays, 2015). The analysis uncovered a marked improvement in critical thinking scores among engineering students over the three years. Additionally, faculty members reported that their teaching improved because they placed greater emphasis on metacognition as it pertains to critical thinking (Ralston & Bays, 2015).

Similarly to the experiences of UCF and UL, a library faculty group at Saint Leo University (SLU) developed its QEP around improving critical thinking skills among students in certain core classes. Like UL, SLU drew upon the Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Framework. However, Bryan (2014) states that SLU included information literacy as a critical component of the QEP. With permission from SLU, Bryan explored a “modified” QEP, which would explore the role of librarians in fostering critical thinking and would map the Association of College and Research Libraries Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (ACRL IL Standards) to the critical thinking QEP developed by the university (2014).

Bryan (2014) focuses heavily on the process of mapping QEP objectives with ACRL IL. It was a collaborative process involving nearly all of the library faculty and staff. Furthermore, the author set up a wiki page for the team to serve as a repository for librarians to share their ideas and techniques for fostering critical thinking and promoting information literacy. It is not clear whether other SLU faculty and staff were using similar strategies to collaborate on ways to implement the QEP in their areas. However, the wiki was posted publicly for anyone in the

university who wanted to view or contribute to it. It was quite clear to Bryan that the “group effort” of mapping the standards and sharing strategies was a significant contributor to the success of the endeavor as it promoted commitment and buy-in from the participants (p. 400). The author highly recommends that schools use similar approaches in their QEP development processes (Bryan, 2014).

Like SLU, UL, and UCF, Tennessee Tech University (TTU) developed a QEP aimed at online learners to “improve students’ critical thinking/real-world problem solving using active learning strategies” (Anitsal, Anitsal, Barger, Fidan, & Allen, 2010, p. 42). The plan, developed by a multidisciplinary faculty group across the university, underscored the areas of creativity, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem solving. Through student surveys, university researchers analyzed the factors associated with the QEP, along with personality traits among online learners. The findings indicated that the QEP was a success, with high ratings among students for the four major areas (Anitsal et al., 2010). Given the fact that each of the major discipline areas implemented content-appropriate strategies to foster these skills, it is logical that students would show increased abilities in those areas. Despite the fact that personality traits were not a factor in the QEP, the TTU research team contends that in order to truly achieve success in promoting creativity, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem solving, personality traits and course delivery method must be taken into account (Anitsal et al., 2010).

Though critical thinking was a popular choice among four-year universities, Western Carolina University (WCU) took a unique approach to developing its QEP. WCU decided to focus on guiding undergraduates through a process of “synthesizing their university experiences” in which students set academic and career goals and, over time, reflect on how their university experience is contributing to the achievement of those goals (Atanasov, Foguel, & Lawson,

2013, p. 393). It is uncertain how the QEP was developed, who was involved, or which academic disciplines embraced the program, but early indicators were promising for the math department in particular. Mathematics faculty designed and implemented a senior capstone course designed to foster critical thinking skills, help students think about their post-graduation plans, and assist students in understanding mathematics on a holistic level (Atanasov et al., 2013). Based on the capstone project submissions, faculty members believed that they had accomplished their goals, though there were some areas for improvement.

Like Wytheville Community College, the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) implemented a QEP designed around improving students' written and oral communication skills (Howdeshell, 2012). At the heart of the program was a strong faculty development initiative, which consisted of a 10-week seminar that required participants to complete homework assignments, readings, and presentations. Supplemental workshops were also available. Because the program was implemented in the form of senior capstone projects, the faculty development courses were limited to the faculty members most likely to teach those courses.

Through examining the effectiveness of the faculty development program, researchers utilized the rubrics developed for the QEP as a means to examine whether students who received instruction from trained faculty members outperformed their counterparts who did not. Predictably, capstone projects submitted by students who received instruction from a trained faculty member received much higher scores than those submitted by students instructed by untrained faculty (Howdeshell, 2012). Results like those at USM demonstrate the power of the QEP process in nudging colleges and universities towards a culture of assessment and to move them forward in linking faculty development programs to student outcomes.

Like USM, Montreat College in North Carolina (Montreat) developed and implemented a QEP focused on “Writing Across the Curriculum” (WAC), a program designed to improve writing proficiency among students (Oxenreider, 2010, p. 7). Because Montreat is a small, liberal arts college, the QEP development team agreed that, rather than introduce new courses or change curriculum, it would be best to implement a peer-to-peer tutoring initiative in which students would work with other students to help them complete writing assignments. The model is depicted as a triangle with the tutor, tutee, and a faculty member at each point. Both the faculty member and the tutor help evaluate the tutee’s work. It was conceptualized as a collaborative process between all of the parties involved (Oxenreider, 2010). Though it is unclear whether Montreat’s QEP initiative was successful, it is worth noting that it was unique in that it involved active student participation in *facilitating* the learning versus a model in which students are simply the recipients of a program put forth by an institutional committee.

In conclusion, while there is some unevenness in terms of what is revealed through the four-year school QEP literature, some overarching themes emerge. Stakeholder involvement is consistently a major factor in designing and/or implementing the initiative. In many cases, faculty members were asked/required to change an instructional strategy, take on additional responsibilities, or modify the curriculum in some way. In all cases, including those at community colleges, the change is sizable in nature and reaches many employee stakeholder groups and student populations across the institution. However, it is evident that, although these changes are large and far-reaching, there is little known about how stakeholders develop perceptions around these major changes. The following sections will review organizational structure, change, culture, and organizational learning, illustrating that change in any

organization is a multi-stage, multifaceted, and dynamic process involving many stakeholder groups.

### **Theories of Organizational Structure and Organizational Change**

The previous segments reviewed the literature for community college and four-year university QEPs, illustrating that the QEP requirement can be a catalyst for major institutional change, however, it is an inadequately understood process. In reviewing the literature, it is evident that the QEP is disruptive and requires the cooperation of many, often-disparate stakeholder groups. However, little is known about how those stakeholders participating in (and affected by) the disruptive change process developed meaning and perceptions around the change over time. In an effort to situate this study in the context of change, this section of the literature review will first explore academic settings as a unique place for change through a review of the scholarship on change and structure. The following segments will review organizational learning, organizational culture, and sensemaking in change contexts, and constructivism as a foundation for organizational learning and sensemaking activities to occur.

Once again, organizational change and structure, while not specific frameworks applied to this study, cannot be ignored, as they framed the context through which learning, meaning construction, and sensemaking take place among stakeholders. Through further understanding organizational structure, change, culture and, more specifically, organizational structure, change, and culture in academic settings, the study is situated in a relatable context for colleges and universities attempting to facilitate change.

*Organizational Structures and Academics.* Institutions of higher education are inherently decentralized and fragmented, rendering large-scale institutional change initiatives difficult to facilitate at best (Kezar, 2014). Scholars have come to view bureaucratic institutions like

colleges and universities as *loosely coupled systems*; namely, ones in which many autonomous units operate with generally weak connections to one another (Boyce, 2003; Clark, 1983; Scott, 2014; Weick, 1976; Kezar, 2014). Each unit consists of a nuanced set of expertise typically with a great deal of variation between units in terms of decision-making, priorities, and overarching goals (Kezar, 2014).

Like many institutional characteristics, loose coupling has some benefits and drawbacks. One benefit centers on the lack of interdependence between units. Because each unit functions nearly entirely on its own, the performance of other units does not dictate the success or failure of all. The downside of this, however, is that both innovative and antiquated processes and beliefs can be allowed to persist within units (Weick, 1976). Accordingly, loosely coupled systems can themselves be highly innovative and adaptive. However, the institutional structure may prevent that tendency for adaptability to manifest when large-scale change or change across multiple units is introduced. Moreover, the incentive to share innovations across units is often non-existent (Weick, 1976). Finally, Weick (1976) found that individuals operating within a unit of a loosely coupled system display higher levels of self-efficacy than members of tightly coupled systems because the units themselves are autonomous and face few restrictions. However, the insular nature of this existence can lead to resistance to large-scale organization-wide change (Weick, 1976).

In this perspective, change in academic institutions is particularly challenging because, as stated earlier, the inherent structure of the organization is itself a barrier, in addition to other potential barriers such as stakeholder buy-in, funding, and change management (Kezar, 2014). Clark (1983) postulates that the (academic and non-academic) units within an academic institution function separately and as autonomous “social systems” (p. 103). By focusing heavily

on the structural nuances of the institution, change is more easily facilitated because it can be designed to work within that structure. Clark (1983) also concurs with Weick (1976) that the independent units can thrive, struggle, or even die without disturbing other units within the institution. However, institutional leadership sets the tone for whether adaptability is feasible by “the peculiar, internal constitution” of the institution (Clark, 1983, p. 105).

Scholars have found that, for various reasons, faculty members tend to relate their institutional experience mostly closely with their departmental experience (Campbell & O’Meara, 2012; Lindholm, 2003; Peterson, 1976). Further, issues of student success and overall mission tend to reside within departments (despite those of the overall institutional mission) and, therefore, institutional-wide beliefs about culture and climate emerge as “an amalgam of institutional cultures” (Lindholm, 2003, p. 129) as each department is composed of its own norm, beliefs, and attitudes along with commonly accepted patterns of behavior, decision-making, communication, and leadership structure (Peterson, 1976). Because these agreed-upon norms exist, there tends to be conformity in departments with individuals having a high level of “social influence” over one another (Peterson, 1976, p. 23). Though change facilitators may find departmental nuances a daunting obstacle to overcome, there may be benefits to departmental associations that can be leveraged. Campbell and O’Meara (2013) found that departmental associations contributed positively to faculty’s feelings of agency and their beliefs about career advancement within the institution. With this context in mind, perhaps institutional-wide changes may be conceived as a series of changes, meeting departments where they are and treating them like autonomous “social systems” as Clark (1993, p. 103) described. It is possible that through tailoring communication using language and norms accepted at the departmental-level early

phases of change, facilitators may experience less resistance to change in the long-term as individuals will have absorbed information contextually.

Because academic institutions are “bottom heavy” (Clark, 1983, p. 113), change in academic institutions is often fraught with political complexities and, therefore, tends to work best when initiated from the bottom up (Boyce, 2003; Clark, 1983; Kezar, 2014). From a research standpoint, academic institutions are optimal locations for studying elements of strategic change like a QEP because they are characterized by diffused power, a myriad of goals (often competing), a multitude of decision-making processes and decision makers, and as stated earlier, complex political arrangements (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

*The Pillars Framework:* Scott’s (2014) pillars framework is another useful tool in understanding institutional structures in the context of change. Drawing from an amalgam of institutional theories based in economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, and psychology, Scott (2014) describes institutions as composed of three central pillars or systems: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. It is through the regulative pillar that the system of rules, policies, rewards, and punishments are formed and enforced. Aspects of authority, coercion, and conformity are part of this system, as individuals may devise the rules to serve their own interests. The normative pillar considers the obligations and expectations of values and behavior associated with the organization. While adherence to rules is a factor in the normative pillar, the bigger issues center on whether actions are appropriate and normative in nature (Scott, 2014).

The cultural-cognitive pillar considers “the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and create the frames through which meaning is made” (Scott, 2014, p. 67). It is through this pillar that elements of symbolism, mental models, and perceived reality are

acknowledged as highly influential in institutional systems. Unlike the normative or regulatory pillars, where compliance rules or norms are considered obligatory, the cultural-cognitive pillar views compliance as driven by a sense of convention and shared beliefs among the individuals within the organization that their expectations are worthy of support and, thus, deserving of adherence (Scott, 2014). This aligns closely with the constructivist theories (expanded upon later) that suggest that meaning is derived through a series of experiences, social interactions, and previously held beliefs and perceptions by individuals and/or groups of individuals (Kezar, Gerhke, and Elrod, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Phillips, 1995). Once again, theories of structure and change cannot be isolated from theories of meaning making and learning, as they all play a role in organizational and individual behaviors.

This brief overview of Scott's pillars framework contributes to developing a holistic understanding of the ways in which organizations form and evolve as stand-alone entities and ones in which individuals infuse their own sets of values, beliefs, and mental models (Schein, 1996) into the many structures—formal and informal—that exist within the organization. Like the frames of Bolman and Deal (2013) and Kezar's schools of thought" described in the following section, the pillars serve as frameworks or lenses through which institutional change can be thoughtfully examined, as they offer varying perspectives that are appropriate for certain types of inquiry and contexts.

### **Theories of Organizational Change**

As discussed earlier, the QEP for reaffirmation is intended to be a significant change, affecting multiple areas of the institutions and ultimately, improving student learning outcomes. Because of this, it seems appropriate to examine theories of change and culture because, a) the QEP is a major change for institutions and, b) changes happen within an existing organizational

structure (as discussed earlier) and in the context of organizational culture. The following sections will provide an overview of change and culture in the context of higher education. As institutional leaders consider initiating major changes, it may be helpful to consider aspects of change and culture in designing, implementing, communicating about, and sustaining the change.

Once again, the organizational change literature is immense, spanning the fields of education, psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and business with seemingly endless theories of how major organizational change occurs or why it does not. Because this study is situated in the context of change in an educational setting, I will synthesize the organizational change literature put forth by prominent education and business scholars in an effort to draw comparisons across the literature and illuminate areas of intersectionality.

Bolman and Deal (2013) and Kezar (2014), leading scholars of organizational structure and change, have developed categories that represent the major traits and characteristics of such structure and change. Whereas Bolman and Deal use the term “frames” to describe common organizational structures, Kezar uses “schools of the thought” to describe theories of change in education. While there are some differences in approach, their configurations and descriptions have many similarities (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Kezar, 2014). Bolman and Deal focus on the lens through which an organization is viewed, including non-profit organizations and businesses of all sizes, through a four-frame model of structure that they also apply to organizational change. By contrast, Kezar focuses very deliberately on change that takes place in educational institutions using six categories of change theory. These differences notwithstanding, both sets of categories are useful in understanding the manner through which organizations address problems and institute changes.

By definition, the “frames” of Bolman and Deal are “a coherent set of ideas or beliefs forming a prism or lens that enables you to see and understand more clearly what goes on from day to day” (2013, p. 41). The four frames are structural, human resource, political, and symbolic, each serving as a cognitive lens through which managers can effectively analyze and solve problems that occur in an organization. Kezar takes a slightly different approach - grouping theories of change into overarching segments based on their similarities in description and application. The theory groups are scientific management, evolutionary, political, social cognition, cultural, and institutional/neo-institutional (2014). The following section will review the frames as they pertain to organizational composition, explore Kezar’s schools of thought or theory groups relating to change in education and, finally, revisit the frames of Bolman and Deal in terms of barriers and strategies in facilitating organization change.

*Structural Frame and Scientific Management:* Two early twentieth century management scholars, Frederick Taylor and Max Weber, were the inspiration for the *structural frame* (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This frame assumes that organizations are rational and linear in nature and have clearly defined goals, it also assumes that division of labor, rules and policies, and clearly defined hierarchies are key to ensuring efficiency and productivity within an organization. In a comparable school of thought, Kezar (2014) describes *scientific management*, stating that it is one where “change is seen as positive and directed by goals” (p. 26). Within these theories of change, strong leadership directs the effort in nearly all aspects and phases, and change is approached as a highly controlled process (Kezar, 2014). It is likely that the scientific management theory of change would be highly applicable in examining change through a structural frame, as many of the assumptions about the configuration of the organization are the same. Furthermore, any organizational change will disrupt the configuration of an entity. There

may be periods during which stakeholders are confused and uncertain about how they fit into the new structure. It is suggested that if leaders can anticipate the structural changes and how those changes may impact certain roles, they can work to reshape those roles within the new structure before those issues arise (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

*Political frame and political school of thought:* In the political frame, Bolman and Deal describe a lens in which politics is a fundamental aspect of organizational decision-making (2013). Through this lens, the “organizational politician” cleverly navigates the political landscape, forms strategic alliances, and facilitates frequent negotiations (p. 184). Kezar (2014) grouped change theories that support this frame into a political school of thought in which organizations are viewed as highly political, where the savviest politicians gain and keep power to maintain the status quo. In terms of fostering change, leaders negotiate and build alliances, working to overcome resistance to change by identifying influencers among change supporters (Kezar, 2014).

*Symbolic frame and cultural theories:* The *symbolic* frame emphasizes the ways in which individuals assign meaning to objects, systems, cultures, and ideals (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This frame assumes that values ascribed to rituals, process, policies, and organizational norms can be helpful or hurtful depending on the situation. *Cultural theories*, therefore, tend to focus very heavily on context and the role of symbols in the development and maintenance of social structures (Kezar, 2014; Scott, 2014). Leadership introduces new symbols and values to existing structures, rituals, or goals to foster institutional change, though the theories themselves tend to offer very little practice-based advice on exactly how to do that (Kezar, 2014). It could be argued, however, that by situating oneself in the symbolic frame, a leader could more easily recognize the relevant symbols that carry the most meaning among stakeholders and implement

strategies to adjust those meanings. Symbols or meaning attributed to objects and artifacts can often mean more to those stakeholders than the reality of that object or artifact. Changes or disappearance of symbols can lead to a sense of loss and tendency to mourn. Bolman and Deal (2013) recommend formalizing the transition from one symbol to another through a ritual of passage, allowing time to mourn the old symbol, and arranging for an official celebration of welcome for the new symbols - all as a means to help participants avoid shutting down and resisting the change altogether.

*Human resource frame and social cognition:* The *human resource* frame centers on the relationship and interactions between people and the organization. Some assumptions in this frame are that organizations and humans are interdependent, human/organizational relations should be healthy and mutually beneficial, and that organizations exist to serve human needs (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Although this frame rests squarely in a business context, it is worth noting that the human resource point of view may likely draw from early institutional theories rooted in sociology. Many of the sociological perspectives formed in the early twentieth century and still used today were formed around institutional attributes that “emphasized the interdependence of individuals and institutions, of self and social structure” (Scott, 2014, p. 11). It was through the sociological lens that institutions began to be thought of as a series of constructed realities by individuals and groups, where normative cultural values, beliefs, and structures were highly influential in governance and culture (Scott, 2014). Whereas sociologists have emphasized the social structure as the dominant force in the formation of institutional norms, cognitive psychologists the individuals and their ability and desire to make sense of their world as central to the formation of social and culture groups and structures (Scott, 2014).

The human resource frame and the political theory school of thought do contain some crossover as both consider the factors of human motivation and needs, though these theories do not consider the human factors of perception and socially constructed realities associated with social cognition change theories (Bolman & Deal, 2013). From the political point of view, disputes are an expected part of the change process. This makes sense, given the tendency for negotiation and coalition building that takes place within this frame. If allowed to persist with no intervention, however, the disputes can lead to a form of anarchy where rules and respect are no longer factors (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

The group of educational change theories that most closely align with the human resource cognitive lens, sociological institutional theory, and cognitive psychology is *social cognition*, in which organizational learning process takes place and the way individuals think about existing “norms, goals, and structures” changes in small or significant ways (Kezar, 2014, p. 31).

Through using the human resource frame and social cognition theories, organizational leaders can strive to help stakeholders develop modified or new mental models around the organization. This is a particularly helpful frame/theory combination for organizations that anticipate or have experienced resistance to change (Kezar 2014). From a human resource point of view, change may cause some individuals to develop a sense of incompetence as they go from being experts in their fields to being novices in a new configuration. Bolman and Deal contend that organizations can mitigate those issues by providing training on the new ways of doing things, encouraging participation and feedback, and providing psychological support to instill confidence (2013).

*Evolutionary and institutional and neo-institutional theories:* Two of Kezar’s (2014) theory groups that do not neatly align with the frames of Bolman and Deal (2013) are *evolutionary* theories and *institutional and neo-institutional* theories. Evolutionary theories deal

largely with change brought about primarily from environment factors (Kezar, 2014). Elements such as economics, politics, and social and societal changes are often associated with these theories of change. Because they focus heavily on external factors, these theories tend to neglect the human element of change and factors associated with leadership (Kezar, 2014). Institutional theories rely on elements from evolutionary and social cognition theories, but, as a stand-alone group, examine the internal and external forces that drive change. This theory group assumes that those forces are situated within a broader societal context (e.g. the entire education sector).

Formulated by mid-twentieth century sociologists, neo-institutional theories are similar to institutional pillars described by Scott (2014) but do take into account the change factors associated with human agency (Kezar, 2014; Scott, 2014). In neo-institutional theories, the human aspect is typically associated with actors who, like their political theory counterparts, form alliances, negotiate, and act as agents of change (Kezar, 2014). In this view, the role of cultural rules and norms is pivotal in the ongoing construction of an organization or institution (Scott, 2014). The intersection of these concepts further demonstrates the reasoning for exploring relevant scholarship of organizational structure and organizational change as a means to frame a study about organizational learning, sensemaking, and constructivism in an institutional change context.

In terms of how change should be initiated and implemented, Bolman and Deal (2013) found that organizations that drive change from the top typically fail in their endeavors because leaders “don’t understand their circumstances well enough to anticipate the consequences of their actions” (p. 377). This aligns closely with Kezar’s (2013) findings that bottom up approaches to change, *when supported by leadership*, are highly effective for instituting transformational change. Furthermore, the authors have found that broad-scale participation in the

conceptualization and implementation of a change initiative reduces the opportunities for resistance and improves the chances for long-term success. Table 6 outlines the frames of Bolman and Deal (2013) in an organizational change context with barriers and strategies to overcome those barriers. While this study does not aim to identify barriers to change per se, it is likely that participants will identify barriers to accepting some aspect(s) of the change that they have experienced or witnessed among colleagues.

*Table 6: Reframing Organizational Change*

<b>Frame</b>	<b>Barriers to Change</b>	<b>Essential Strategies</b>
Human Resource	Anxiety, uncertainty; people feel incompetent and needy	Training to develop new skills; participation and involvement; psychological support
Structural	Loss of direction, clarity, and stability; confusion, chaos	Communicating, realigning, and renegotiating formal patterns and policies
Political	Disempowerment; conflict between winners and losers	Developing arenas where issues can be renegotiated and new coalitions formed
Symbolic	Loss of meaning and purpose; clinging to the past	Creating transition rituals; mourn the past, celebrate the future

*Note: Taken from Bolman and Deal, 2013, p. 378.*

This section outlined relevant areas of organizational structure and organizational change in institutional contexts. Through gaining a more thorough understanding of structure and change from an institutional perspective, it becomes apparent that change in a post-secondary setting is a profoundly complex endeavor. It also underscores the need to expand the knowledge base about how these factors come into play at the stakeholder level. Granted, this study will not seek to

understand structure and change as such. Notwithstanding, having a foundational understanding of the aspects of structure and change that may influence individual perceptions contributes to a more holistic understanding of the experiences of stakeholders and constructively guides the recommendations that may arise from data analysis. The following sections will provide an in-depth analysis into organizational learning, sensemaking, and constructivism in educational contexts.

### **The Role of Organizational Culture**

Schein (1996) asserted that organizational culture "...was one of the most powerful and stable forces operating in an organization" (p. 231). Schein defines culture as "...the sum total of what a given group has learned as a group, and this learning is usually embodied in a set of shared, basic underlying assumptions that are no longer conscious but are taken for granted as the way the world is" (1993, p. 705). As this study endeavored to uncover the ways that perceptions formed among individuals, the consideration of organizational culture was important because it consists of the "values, beliefs, and assumptions" that are shared within an organization and thus, can strongly influence the way that individuals develop values, beliefs, and assumptions around something new (Lakos & Phipps, 2004, p. 346).

In terms of impact, culture has a profound influence on the performance and behavior of an organization (Kilmann, Saxton, & Serpa, 1985). For instance, culture positively influence the organization when it is found to align with the institutional goals and mission. However, culture can negatively influence the organization when it is going in the "wrong direction" and does not align with organizational goals and mission (Kilmann, et al., 1985, p. 4). While organizations often display an overall culture, most organizations contain a series of smaller sub-cultures as they are composed of divisions or departments each operating with their own mission and goals

(Kilmann et al., 1985). This is common in organizations that are described as *loosely coupled* (as institutes of higher education have been previously described by Weick, 1976) where there can be both cooperative and conflicting interests at play (Martin, 1992). While this study did not endeavor to define or deeply examine the culture at Wake Tech, perceptions of culture (and change) resided in the backdrop for all institutional stakeholders and influenced the ways perceptions were formed around EPIC and, possibly, other changes.

Although literature concerning organizational culture resides predominantly in the business and psychology disciplines, some work has been done to understand and build frameworks of organizational culture in academics. Frustrated by the lack of available literature exploring culture in higher education, Tierney (1988) developed a proposed model of studying organizational culture in higher education. The components of the model are described as “cultural concepts” that are appropriate to study in higher education contexts (p. 8). Table 7 lists the concepts and the questions that guide addressing those concepts when evaluating an institutions culture.

*Table 7: A Framework for Organizational Culture*

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Guiding Questions</b>
Environment	How is it defined? Is it friendly or hostile?
Mission	How is it defined, communicated, and used?
Socialization	How is it communicated to new and existing members? How can members survive and/or thrive?
Information	What is it, who has it, and how is it shared?
Strategy	How are decisions made and by whom?
Leadership	What is expected of leaders? Are there formal and informal leaders?

*Note: Adapted from Tierney's Framework of Organizational Culture (1988, p. 8)*

Though this model can be used as a framework for understanding culture in higher education, parties examining culture in these contexts should be aware that colleges and universities contain a plurality of perspectives because each of the major stakeholder groups (faculty, staff, students, leadership) experience and interact with the institution in a multitude of ways (Smart, Kuh, & Tierney, 1997). Furthermore, because culture is thought to influence how an institution reacts to internal and external forces, there may likely be a plurality of reactions to those forces in a college or university (Smart, et al., 1997). This thinking aligns with that of Collins (1998) who believes that traditional approaches to understanding, changing, or leveraging culture for change neglect to consider that “people interpret events and bend the cultural norms and mores of the cultures they inhabit in order to address the contextual problems and events they must face” (p. 124). It is likely, if not universally applicable, that institutes of higher education have many sub-cultures that reside underneath the broader cultural umbrella of the college or university. In other words, there may be values, assumptions, and beliefs that exist for most members, however, there are another set of shared values, beliefs, and assumptions within departments, divisions, etc.

As individuals develop knowledge as they encounter situations in their organization (Weick, 1995), it is likely that knowledge-building may vary among the sub-cultures within an institution as each group considers both the broad culture and their unique sub-culture in interpreting events and activities. It is because of this that college and university leaders who are considering change strategies are encouraged to take steps to understand the norms, beliefs, values, and assumptions both at the macro and micro-levels within the institution (Kezar, 2001; Smart et al., 1997). While there is little consensus about the nature of academic culture, Kezar (2001) contends that it is, “...clearly political yet consensus oriented. Faculty professional values

(collegium) and administrative values (bureaucratic) are both present, there is a fair degree of clashing of different value sets (political), and ambiguity and unclear structures exist (anarchical)” (p. 66). If indeed the political and anarchical contexts exist as described by Kezar, it is likely clashes may occur as an institute of higher education attempts to facilitate change, particularly if the collegium (faculty values) are not considered (2001).

In a causal study of organizational effectiveness, Smart, Kuh, and Tierney (1997) examined how institutional cultures influenced effectiveness at two-year colleges. The research team studied 30 two-colleges and applied “culture scores” (p. 261) to each of the institution and then analyzed those scores in relation to a series of variables such as college size, financial health, transfer emphasis, and enrollment health. The culture scores are described as, a) clan culture with an emphasis on normal and values that foster connections, talent development, and participatory governance, b) adhocracy culture which assumes that change is expected and that “adaptive and interpretive” strategies are used in decision-making, c) bureaucratic culture where stability and maintaining the status quo are strongly emphasized, and d) market culture which resembles that of a private sector organization whereby things like productivity and efficiency are emphasized and often rewarded as individuals are seen to contribute positively to those outcomes (Smart, et al., 1997, p. 262).

The study found that each of the culture scores positively influenced some variables in some way, however the schools with dominant clan or adhocracy culture scores performed better overall than the schools with dominant market or bureaucratic scores, as the former are better poised to contend with challenging environmental contexts and more adeptly cope with internal pressures (Smart, et al., 1997). These findings indicate that colleges with participative and cooperative governance and with malleability in the context of ever-changing internal and

external climates, fare better overall than schools that have more rigid structures and those that emphasize and reward efficiency and productivity. As changes are introduced, potentially disrupting internal forces, it seems that colleges that emphasize flexibility, adaptability, and institutional-wide participation are more likely to change successfully than those who do not.

This brief review of organizational culture and how culture plays out in educational institutions introduced the concepts of exploring culture in academic settings, how culture is interpreted or should be interpreted by leaders and those interested in proposing change initiatives, and that culture affects change and overall institutional performance. It was, therefore, important to consider issues of culture as it may influence how individuals develop perceptions around change.

### **Organizational Learning**

Argyris and Schon (1978, 1996) posited that because organizations are composed of individuals, organizational learning occurs through individual learning. They introduced the concepts of single loop learning and double loop learning as means through which organizations solve problems and facilitate change. The concepts are relatively simple: single loop learning occurs when individuals attempt to solve problems by altering their actions such as improving on a process or finding a new way to do something. Their beliefs and assumptions about organizational governance, however, remain the same (Argyris, 1990; Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2014). Single loop learning is often associated with *first order* change or that which is often considered structural or procedural in nature and is accomplished using tried and true formulas or processes (Boyce, 2003). An example of single loop learning might be the learning that takes place during a professional development seminar about a newly acquired software system.

By contrast, double loop learning occurs when the beliefs and assumptions about organizational governance are challenged. In other words, the policies, procedures, cultural norms, and structures are understood to be at odds with the goals of the organization in solving particular problems and must be viewed as contributors to those problems (Argyris, 1990; Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2014). Double loop learning is often associated with *second order change* and is often the focus of social cognition and cultural theories. Social cognition focuses on the human aspect of making individual meaning, socially constructed meaning, and resistance to change, while cultural theories focus on the values and symbolic aspects of organizational culture (Eisner, 2003; Kezar, 2014). Second order change is thought of as irreversible, as the underlying assumptions about the organization undergo a transformational change (Boyce, 2003).

Not all scholars concur that double loop learning is transformational. Some have speculated that double loop learning, though deeper in scope than single loop learning, merely considers the values and perspectives brought forth by the individuals in the organization. These scholars posit that, in fact, *triple loop learning* is the point at which individuals challenge the organization culture, values, and mission (Kenny, 2006; Sun & Scott, 2003). Because this study will draw on frameworks applied in higher education, *double loop learning* will be considered the primary learning that takes place when individuals challenge assumptions, organizational culture, value, and mission.

At the heart of double loop learning or second order learning is *sensemaking* (Kezar, 2014). It is, however, important to examine the term sensemaking in relation to other similar terms/phrases such as schema, mental model, mental map, and epistemology. While each of these terms/phrases refers to the ways in which individuals construct their realities and thus rests

squarely in the theoretical category of social cognition, they are not necessarily used interchangeably. Complicating matters further is the concept of shared mental models among members of a group and, therefore, the vast amounts of mental models that can be present within an organization. In any case, a mental model is thought of as a sturdy construct, one that individuals and groups are often determined to hold onto despite challenges to it that are posed (Boyce, 2003).

Double loop learning does not occur without encouragement. Argyris (1990) contends that organizational leaders must foster a capacity for double loop learning through teaching relevant stakeholders what he calls *Model II* actions or social virtues. These virtues are help and support, respect for others, strength, honesty, and integrity and, according to Argyris (1990), do not produce satisfaction in and of themselves. Rather, they are thought of as *governing values*, and it is up to individuals whether they want to learn and, if so, how quickly and with what accompanying action. Through this lens, human beings are thought of as naturally inclined to seek information and learn, be it to solve problems, address an issue, make a decision, or process a change (Argyris, 1990).

Double loop learning can be inhibited by several factors. For one, many organizations unintentionally put up barriers to double loop learning (Argyris, 1999). When organizations implement solutions to localized problems, they may inadvertently prevent individuals within the organization from examining and possibly adjusting their underlying assumptions about the overarching goals of the organization. Furthermore, if individuals fear that they may put themselves at risk in some way by questioning their assumptions about a particular topic, they may avoid double loop learning altogether. Finally, quality control measures can be inhibitors to double loop learning as cross-functional units may tend to apply the same management theories

to the processes and, thus, continue to perpetuate the same beliefs and assumptions without any question (Argyris, 1999).

It is through double loop learning that sustainable or second order institutional change occurs successfully and sustainably (Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2014). Several factors contribute to sustainable change. First, continually practicing authentic inquiry and dialogue helps individuals and groups learn and devise new meanings around the change that is occurring. Correspondingly, action learning, or the practice of solving new problems in new ways, enables learners to develop sturdy constructs around the change. Finally, through entrenching the change into the culture of the organization or *institutionalization*, organizations can weave the change into a new set of values and norms that are shared across the establishment (Boyce, 2003).

The idea of second order change invokes a series of corresponding and complementary concepts, though each concept is not weighted equally in terms of contribution. If we consider second order change as occurring somewhere in the overlap between cultural theories and social cognition theories, then we can imagine a series of individual and social (group) *schemas* within that overlap (Kezar, 2014). For the purposes of this study, I will use the following definition of schema: “the dynamic, cognitive knowledge structures regarding specific concepts, entities, and events used by individuals to encode and represent incoming information efficiently” (Harris, 1994, p. 310; Markus, 1977).

Bringing to mind Scott’s (2014) cultural-cognitive pillar, the overlap conjures up images of cognitive frames or mental maps along with the symbols and rituals associated with normative cultural experiences. For definition purposes, schemas can be viewed as mental maps (notice the synonymous terms) through which individuals interpret their experiences, whether individual, social, familial, or professional, and develop a worldview around those experiences (Harris,

1994). Accordingly, the cultural aspect can be thought of those widely held beliefs and values attributed to certain aspects of the environment that are recognized as universal or at the very least, acceptable (Scott, 2014).

### **Sensemaking and Constructivism**

As indicated earlier, sensemaking, double loop learning, and second order change are very closely related concepts and fall squarely under the umbrella of organizational theory as a cognitive and constructivist lens for examining organizational structure and change (Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2013; Kezar, Gehrke, & Elrod, 2015). According to Brookfield, “constructivism rejects universals and generalizable truths and focuses instead on the variability of how people make interpretations of their experiences” (2005, p. 15). In the context of change and organizational learning, constructivist theory suggests that learning is an active practice of experimentation through which individuals concurrently engage in reflection and formulate new perspectives about the change (Kezar, Gherke, & Elrod, 2015; Phillips, 1995; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2015). A key factor in considering constructivist theory in this context is the acknowledgement of past and present individual experiences and the way those experiences influence the development of new perspectives. This is particularly important for facilitators of change to recognize as they can provide experiences that can stimulate the formation of those new perspectives (Kezar, Gherke, & Elrod, 2015). Examples of activities that stimulate the examination of one’s perspectives include role-playing, reflective essays, simulations, and case studies (Kezar, Gherke, Elrod, 2015; Shapira-Lischinsky, 2015).

It is important to note here that there are many tenets of constructivism, some of which conflict with one another. For instance, one of school of constructivist thought focuses on the individual learner while another emphasizes the social and societal aspects of learning (Phillips,

1995; Shapira-Lischinsky, 2015). These have been referred to as “cognitive constructivism” (individual) and “social constructivism” (social) respectively (Shapira-Lischinsky, 2015). While this study takes place in a context of a large organization undergoing major change, the focus is on individuals and the way they develop perceptions around the change. Because change can be seen as an organizational dilemma, it aligns with the contention of Argyris and Schon (1978, 1996) that second order change (triggered by a dilemma) is best understood through the lenses of constructivism and organizational learning as individuals actively engage in the building of new constructs around a change. Therefore, it is appropriate to apply constructivism and organizational learning lenses when examining the process of individual experience of sensemaking.

On a holistic level, sensemaking “is an acknowledgement that organizations are not static and that there is no single reality, challenging more positivist views of organizations” (Kezar, 2013, p. 762). Cognitive organizational theories recognize that a sturdy construct is broken down, rebuilt, and ultimately adapted as a new version of a previously held belief. It is important to note that sensemaking among a few individuals does not necessarily facilitate second order change in an institution. Nor does sensemaking among large numbers of individuals amount to groupthink. Groupthink involves many individuals adopting and rallying around a single schema (Weick, 1979). Rather, sensemaking is the evolution of normative institutional practices, ideas, and symbols that reflect the change (Kezar, 2013). This occurs through consistent, ongoing repetition as individuals grapple with the new order, process what it means for them, and develop a new schema (Kezar, 2014; Weick, 1979).

Because organizations are composed of people, they are also composed of complex cognitive processes. As Karl Weick (1979) alliteratively stated, “An organization is a body of

thought thought by thinking thinkers” (p. 42). He was making the point that individuals, each with their own schemas about a variety of institutional attributes, are what give the organization its content as a “body of thought” (1979, p. 43). This concept has been applied widely to the organizational change and learning literature as *schema theory* (Harris, 1994). However, the theory is often applied to organizations or groups of people and less frequently used in understanding individual schemas and the ways in which they influence and are influenced by the broader cultural context of the organization (Harris, 1994). By contrast, sensemaking is often studied in terms of individuals, though acknowledging the social context through which they make meaning and construct perspectives (Kezar, 2014).

Though sensemaking and organizational learning (first or second loop) both involve a change in mindset, they are not transposable concepts because of the differing viewpoints through which each concept is approached. Theorists approach organizational learning from an inquiry-based and problem-solving standpoint (often managerial), recognizing that individuals identify errors or issues and, through dialogue and reflection, devise ways to address or solve them (Argyris, 1999; Kezar, 2014; Schon, 1983). Additionally, organizational learning often deals with first order changes or those in which a change or improvement in process or procedure is designed and implemented (Kezar, 2014).

Another important distinction between organizational learning and sensemaking is that sensemaking tends to be easier to ascertain because it is a process of recognition of change in which individuals “only need to appreciate how a change might shape their identity and adopt the perspectives that emerge through the change process” (Kezar, 2014, p. 68). By contrast, organizational learning is thought of as a deep learning experience that is often difficult to

measure. As a result, individuals can potentially articulate sensemaking more easily than organizational learning as they develop new understandings of an issue or change (Kezar, 2014).

It should be noted that organizational learning and the concept of the learning organization are two distinctly different things. Organizational learning theorists recognize that individuals contribute to the way in which the organization learns (Sun & Scott, 2003). As Weick (1979) has indicated, the organization itself is a body of cognitive processes that fuel learning. The learning organization is one in which the organization “must institute practices, systems and structures to continue to learn how to learn” (Sun & Scott, 2003, p. 203). In short, the organization is an entity unto itself, whereas organizational learning considers the individual, social cognitive processes, and schema development in learning.

Sensemaking, as indicated earlier, is approached from a cognitive processes viewpoint such that individuals construct a new reality around a change and how they comprehend their identity in the new context (Kezar, 2014; Weick, 1979). For leaders of an organization, sensemaking can be a multidimensional process in which constructs of personal identity, collective identity (that of the organization), and image (how it is believed others view the organization) are reframed as part of the change process (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Because individuals socially construct their own reality, individuals tend to resist or opt out of participating in change if it does not align with their values or they are unable to identify a connection with the change (Kezar, 2013).

The theoretical foundation of sensemaking considers seven contexts or properties through which meaning is constructed among individuals. The process of sensemaking is

1. Grounded in identity construction
2. Retrospective

3. Enactive of sensible environments
4. Social
5. Ongoing
6. Focused on and by extracted cues
7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995, p. 17)

*Identity construction* considers both the individual and the organizational identity and the ways that the current identity may differ from the future identity once a change is made (Smerek, 2013, Weick, 1995). Through interactions with others, introspection, and perceptions of one's self by others, one develops (and continuously revises) a socially situated identity (Weick, 1995). This same phenomenon occurs for organizations as they collectively define and redefine their identities (Weick, 1995).

Individuals reflect on their actions and make meaning of those actions *retrospectively*. The outcome has already been produced and individuals assign value and meaning to that outcome (Smerek, 2013). Conceptually, the retrospective property of sensemaking stems from individual reflections on lived experiences. Through that reflective process, the meaning that is derived is greatly influenced by the present. Furthermore, because an individual is influenced by a series of stimuli at a given time, multiple meanings can arise during the process of retrospection. Also complicating matters is the idea that retrospection (by definition, occurring after the fact) may distort the reality of an occurrence or phenomenon because the outcome is already known. This closely resembles the concept of *hindsight* such that one remembers somewhat selectively and critically (Weick, 1995).

*Enactment* refers to the fact that people create their own environment. In short, "They act, and in doing so create the materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face"

(Weick, 1995, p. 31). Whereas identity and retrospect address the process of sensing, enactment addresses the creation of “that which is sensed” (Weick, 1995, p. 30). Sensemaking underscores the ways that individuals enact, typically with action taken in the absence of planning (Smerek, 2013). The *social* context considers the interaction of individuals along with the consideration of the viewpoints of others and how it compares with one’s personal viewpoint (Smerek, 2013).

The idea of the *ongoing* factor in sensemaking is that the meaning-making process is continually unfolding, with individuals mining cues from the steady stream of information and events (Smerek, 2013; Weick, 1995). The actions that individuals take are interlaced with attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions. At the heart of this property is the idea that sensemaking is a constant process and one that is laden with emotion (Weick, 1995).

In terms of *extracted cues*, Weick (1995) draws on the work of Shotter (1983) and uses the metaphor of “seeds” to describe cues (Weick, 1995, p. 50). In an extension of the metaphor, Weick describes Shotter’s comparison of the formulation of a sentence to that of a growing plant. This is further described as “a process of temporal unfolding” (Shotter, 1983, p. 29; Weick, 1995, p. 50). Metaphors notwithstanding, the idea here is that a seed represents a “range of possible expressions, the actual one realized being formulated (progressively) in interaction with its circumstances” (Shotter, 1983, p. 30; Weick, 1995, p. 51). In other words, a cue can set the stage for an assortment of outcomes in terms of how individuals make sense of the information.

Finally, sensemaking is *driven by plausibility rather than accuracy*. Because sensemaking is a process of assigning meaning, constructing perceptions, and developing personal truths, it is not feasible to link sensemaking with accuracy (Weick, 1995). Individuals are presented with information (cues) and, as they filter that information, they infuse it with their own interpretations and meanings. Time is also a factor here since organizations tend to have

many time sensitive actions/processes happening and there is little time to sort out accuracy among perceivers (Weick, 1995). Moreover, because sensemaking is done retrospectively, the actions or objects that are being made sense of are no longer in their truest form but rather a memory laden with individual filters (Smerek, 2013; Weick, 1995).

*The Roll of Sense Giving:* While this study is not focused solely on institutional leadership activities, it is important to understand the role leaders play in facilitating sensemaking. Most theorists agree that sensemaking is facilitated through a process commonly referred to as *sense giving* (Kezar, 2013; Kezar, 2014; Maitlis, 2005; Mills, Bettis, Miller & Nolan, 2010). It is through this two-part process that individuals seek out information and cues that enable them to reflect upon and reframe their identity as it relates to the organization (Kezar, 2014; Mills et al., 2010). Sense giving, conducted by leaders and non-leaders in an organization, is also a process of garnering support among constituents and influencing the outcomes of a proposed change (Kezar, 2013). While the sense giving process is highly significant, caution is advised for those attempting to guide this process as people typically have existing connections and group associations through which they seek information and cues and, therefore, may not respond favorably to being directed to those outside of their existing frames (Mills et al., 2010). Furthermore, people can be influenced by cues that may align with the institutional or cultural narrative but the resulting set of new assumptions may not be accurate (Kezar, 2014).

It is possible to analyze certain contexts and ascertain whether sensemaking may occur among stakeholders (Kezar, 2003, Weick, 1995). Most of the literature concerning sensemaking in academic institutions considers the process from a leadership perspective (top down). One of the first studies to do this uncovered the interconnectedness between sensemaking and sense giving and identified phases through which college leaders facilitate strategic change. Through

an ethnographic study after a new university president was appointed and initiated a strategic change, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) identified sensemaking and sense giving as reciprocal processes carried out by both university leaders and stakeholders. They found that university leaders who are enacting change engage in sensemaking/sense giving as they look for signals that indicate the appropriate vision they should adopt and sense giving as that vision is shared with stakeholders (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kezar, 2013). Accordingly, stakeholders engage in sensemaking as the vision is being communicated and sense giving as they respond to the change with ideas that reflect their assumptions and positionality (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kezar, 2013).

In terms of how strategic change was initiated by leadership (top down), Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) found that four major stages of progress occurred: envisioning, signaling, re-*visioning*, and energizing. In the *envisioning* phase, the new leader applies previously held cognitive models to the new circumstance, developing a new vision for the institution. The *signaling* phase is defined as that in which the leader makes the first declarations that a change is coming, resulting in some ambiguity and leading to feelings of anxiety among the top-level stakeholders who were brought into the fold. If managed properly, this phase is also characterized by the coming together of leadership and stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of the change and work through feelings of ambiguity and anxiety (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

The *re-*visioning** phase is often spent addressing stakeholder resistance. During this phase, the leader is reiterating the message of change and fine-tuning the plan to initiate and implement the change. Accordingly, the leader may revise some aspects of the change to appease certain stakeholder groups and adapt to the nuanced institutional structure. Finally, the

*energizing* phase, the leader broadens the base of stakeholders consulted on the project. The longest of the four phases, energizing is a lengthy process of bringing nearly all stakeholders into the fold of the strategic change and, thus, garnering support for the project (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

In a grounded theory analysis of sensemaking among new (or recent) and first-time university presidents, Smerek (2013) discovered that social cognition and sensemaking were coupled for presidents and institutional stakeholders, albeit in differing ways. For new university presidents, the social aspect of sensemaking was helpful in terms of coping with feelings of isolation in their position. They often reached out to other presidents for their perspectives and guidance, for instance. On the stakeholder side of the institution, new presidents found that if they could facilitate social cognition and sensemaking (through sense giving), they could more successfully get everyone on board with the vision and reduce equivocality among the many disparate groups that typically exist at a college or university (Smerek, 2013).

In reviewing the higher education literature on sensemaking, sense giving, and strategic change from a leadership standpoint, several themes become apparent. For one, the ways that leaders *frame* change is a significant factor in the ways in which the message is heard and accepted (Eddy, 2003; Hamilton 2016). It is also quite likely that leaders frame change differently to different subgroups of constituents, given the myriad of interests that exist among divisions within higher educational institutions (Hamilton, 2016). Factors such as age and length of service have been found to influence the ability for college leaders- presidents in particular - to exhibit complex framing of issues and changes (Smerek, 2013).

Using a non-leadership approach, Kezar (2013) applied Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) findings to an examination of strategic change from a *bottom up* perspective, examining a group

of 28 institutions who were initiating strategic change using teams composed mainly of faculty members. However, rather than presenting sensemaking and sense giving as separate findings from the change initiative phases, Kezar coalesced the phases of strategic change with the sensemaking/sense giving activities of the relevant stakeholders, establishing a connection between the progress of a change and the role of sensemaking/sense giving in the process (2013). Focusing mainly on the seven institutions that made progress toward their goal after a three-year period, Kezar identified contributors to their success and termed the phases of the change mobilization, early implementation, late implementation, and early institutionalization (2013).

Successful institutions typically exemplified medium to high levels of sensemaking/sense giving activities. These activities were thoughtful, targeted, and deliberate, aimed at developing a consistent, shared understanding of the new strategic plan (Kezar, 2013). During the *mobilization* phase, this happened across the institutions with various stakeholder groups engaging in active dialogue, participating in workshops, and listening to lectures. It is during this phase that large-scale support and acceptance is being generated. During the *implementation* phases, the focus shifts from support for the project to active engagement with the change (professional development, new course roll-out, for instance). In this phase, sensemaking/sense giving activities gear more toward reiterating the new processes/procedures, addressing issues that may arise or have arisen, allaying concerns about whether the new change will work, and removing barriers (Kezar, 2013).

A primary difference between Kezar's (2013) study and Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) work is that Kezar found sensemaking/sense giving as a critical part of the early, middle, and later phases of the change process. Granted, Kezar followed institutions into the implementation phase of the change whereas Gioia and Chittipeddi focused on the strategic change initiation

phase, so this is not an entirely fair comparison. However, Kezar (2013) found that the campuses that became stalled in their strategic change efforts typically scaled back or completely ended any sensemaking/sense giving activities after the mobilization phase. This suggests that successful strategic change in academic institutions is best facilitated when sensemaking/sense giving is promoted continually throughout the change process (Kezar, 2013).

The influence of sensemaking/sense giving interaction on outcomes is illustrated in Maitlis's 2005 exploration of sensemaking among three British symphony orchestra companies. This large qualitative study revealed significant findings. For one, the intensity of sense giving efforts on the part of the organizational leader greatly influenced the sensemaking depth of the stakeholders. When leaders arranged for controlled diffusion (scheduled private meetings, for instance) of sense giving activities, stakeholders could reciprocally engage in sense giving by providing feedback and garnering an understanding of the new information. By contrast, less controlled sense giving activities (large parties, for example) resulted in fragmented sensemaking by stakeholders (Maitlis, 2005).

Correspondingly, when stakeholders engage in high levels of sense giving the results are also positive. Because there was a continuous, "animated" (frequent and enthusiastic) feedback loop among all members of the organization, the sensemaking process was expedited, as nearly all members within the organization were familiar with a proposed change and understood it (Maitlis, 2005, p. 31). Not surprisingly, low levels of sense giving among stakeholders resulted in low levels of collaboration, poor communication, and uneven sensemaking among members. These findings indicate that sense giving is a critical component of facilitating organizational change effectively.

Maitlis (2005) also identified four forms of organizational sensemaking: guided, fragmented, restricted, and minimal. In terms of how individuals described their understanding of an issue or change, each form produced either a unified or varied message among participants and also either a rich account or narrow account of the change. These forms also considered whether the decision or change was put forth as prominent or emergent, or whether it was presented as a one-time call to action (Maitlis, 2005).

In *guided* sensemaking, leaders and stakeholders display high degrees of sense giving activity along with high levels of animation (enthusiasm) and control, resulting in participants developing a unitary, rich account of the issue and displaying actions that are emergent and consistent. In *fragmented* sensemaking, leaders display low levels of sense giving while stakeholders display high levels of sensemaking. There is evidence of high levels of enthusiasm, but the level of control over the flow of information is low because leaders are not engaged in that process. This results in varied multiple, narrow accounts of the change and emergent but inconsistent actions (Maitlis, 2005).

In *restricted* organizational sensemaking, leaders display high sense giving attributes but low levels of animation. Though they exhibit high levels of control, the resulting actions are one-time actions that are consistent and participant accounts that are narrow but unified. In *minimal* organizational sensemaking, both leader and stakeholder sense giving efforts are low. As one might expect, the levels of animation and control are low and, therefore, participants cannot clearly describe the change or issue at all and actions are one-time at best (Maitlis, 2005).

Once again, this study does not endeavor to examine leadership activities specifically, however, it is important to understand the context through which sensemaking is facilitated. Accordingly, sense giving is not solely a leadership-based activity since stakeholders can

stimulate sense giving (thus, engaging in the practice itself) through communicating feedback to leaders and other stakeholders. As this review highlights, however, the quality of communication is a significant aspect of facilitating sensemaking and simply communicating does not necessarily mean that stakeholders will identify with and accept the change.

### **Conclusion**

In the context of the implementation of a QEP, this study endeavors to examine sensemaking among stakeholders through the lenses of organizational learning and constructivism. This review of the literature illuminated deficits in the QEP literature, provided a detailed description of the three-pronged theoretical framework, and expanded on issues of organizational change, organizational structure, and sense giving as a means to facilitate sensemaking. The following chapter will provide a detailed account of how this intrinsic case study will be designed and executed.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

*Introduction.* As the review of literature illuminated, there is little known about the ways in which relevant stakeholders develop perceptions around major organizational change, specifically a QEP. Though the QEP has been discussed anecdotally and researched in localized contexts, there has been a shortage of information about *the process* of change. Part of the process involves understanding how relevant stakeholders, who typically have to alter their behavior and attitudes in some way, make sense of their new roles within a new framework. As the QEP literature revealed, colleges and universities typically design a plan that requires a large number of stakeholders (mostly faculty) to reframe their practice, learn new skills and procedures, and/or adopt a completely new process for doing something. Furthermore, the literature revealed that, while many schools conduct some assessment of the QEP outcomes, there appears to be little assessment of the process itself. Given the requirement of SACSCOC-accredited institutions to design and implement a QEP every 10 years, it seems there is a benefit in understanding why and how stakeholders come to understand the change to inform future decisions about the QEP process and prepare college and QEP leadership for issues that may arise. This chapter will provide a detailed description of how this study was designed and executed to uncover ways that individuals developed perceptions around change.

This study qualitatively addressed the following research question and sub-questions:

1. In what ways are relevant stakeholders developing perceptions around a major organizational change?
  - a. How are attitudes and perceptions of the QEP being formed among key stakeholder groups within the institution and why?
  - b. What are stakeholders learning about the change?

- c. In what ways have their beliefs and/or assumptions about the QEP changed over time and why?

*The Qualitative Approach.* Because this study endeavored to understand the nuanced experiences and interpretations of the participants in a particular context, a qualitative approach was an appropriate means through which data will be collected and analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002, 2015). Additionally, because this study attempted to identify the evolution of attitudes and perspectives of the participants, a qualitative inquiry enabled me to present a holistic description of the events and perspectives in context (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2002).

Qualitative inquiry has been used to examine sensemaking and organizational learning in academic settings, presumably because capturing individual narratives is valuable in terms of understanding how individuals interpret phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In considering the studies of sensemaking, some researchers have used grounded theory as a means to understand the phenomenon of strategic change and leadership transition (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Smerek, 2013). Others have used general qualitative inquiry (Kezar, Gherke, & Elrod, 2015) or critical discourse (Thurlow & Mills, 2009). Most of the recent studies that focus on sensemaking around institutional change and leadership use a case study approach (Eddy, 2003; Hamilton, 2016; Kearney, 2013; Kezar, 2013; Maitlis, 2005). In nearly all cases, researchers opted for case study design because it allowed for an in-depth analysis of sensemaking among participants, the expansion on the theory and process of sensemaking, multiple data collection methods, and in some cases, prolonged engagement (Eddy, 2003; Hamilton, 2016; Kearney, 2013; Kezar, 2013; Maitlis, 2005). None of these studies, however,

examine sensemaking during the implementation of a QEP and many of them approach the research from a leadership perspective.

### **Case Study Design**

While the qualitative approach empowers participants to share their experiences (Creswell, 2013), the case study design explicitly allows the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon using multiple data collection methods along with the element of discovery that facilitates flexibility and fluidity during the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). Prior to its inclusion in the field of education in the late 1980s, case study was typically associated with the fields of psychology, sociology, and counseling (Lichtman, 2010). Today, case studies are used frequently across several disciplines including education (Lichtman, 2010). Case studies can be explanatory (to understand the “why” of a phenomenon), exploratory (to understand something new or not well understood), or descriptive (to understand the “what” and/or “how” of a phenomenon) (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002). This particular case study is descriptive, as I endeavored to understand, and ultimately describe, the ways in which individuals learned and made sense of a nuanced, large-scale organizational change.

In addition to providing flexibility and fluidity in an investigation, case study design provides a platform for “thick description,” or rich detail about personal experiences, feelings, perspectives, and interpretations that exist within a bounded system (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 79; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam (2009) characterized case study, and the bounded system in particular, as that which focuses on a “unit of analysis” versus simply the “topic of investigation” (p. 41). In other words, there must be some limit on the study, be it the place or the number of

possible participants or both (Merriam, 2009, Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Considering these parameters, focused on a single institution implementing an internally designed quality enhancement plan (QEP) for a specific population of employees and students and was, therefore, a clearly bounded case study design.

Just as the purpose of a case study may vary, the designs of case studies vary as well. Three of the most commonly used types of case studies are intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). The intrinsic case is utilized when the researcher is interested in a particular entity or event, whereas instrumental case study focuses on a particular issue (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009; Stake 1995). The collective case study (also known as multi-case, cross-case, or multisite case) typically examines between four and ten individual cases that share a commonality, such as renowned honors programs, or have a contrast, such as different developmental math procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014).

Whereas Creswell and others use the phrase “intrinsic case” to describe an in-depth look at a particular event or entity, Patton (2015) describes an array of what are referred to “single-significant-cases,” each with its own qualities and sampling procedures, where a person, program, or event receives close examination (p. 273). Included in that group is a “critical case” in which a single site is chosen, often because of resource limitations and/or because that particular site is thought to potentially yield, “...the greatest impact on the development of knowledge” (Patton, 2015, p. 276). In the case, Wake Tech and the EPIC initiative in particular was a good fit for an intrinsic/critical case design as the phenomena of change took place at a single site, potentially affecting thousands of students and hundreds of stakeholders. For the

purposes of this study, I have used critical case and intrinsic case interchangeably as they are similar and highly appropriate in this context.

*Intrinsic Case Design.* Through a three-pronged framework of constructivism, organizational learning, and sensemaking, this study was designed as a descriptive, *intrinsic* (also called ‘holistic’) case study with thick description (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Stake, 1995). There is agreement among methodologists that case study is an excellent method through which to carry out a constructivist examination (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure transferability of findings through reliability tactics (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015), Lincoln and Guba state, “case study is perhaps the only format that can remain true to the moral imperatives of constructivism...” (2013, p. 80). They further describe the researcher in this context as “the passionate participant deeply involved in the reconstruction of a ‘reality’ in which all, including the inquirer, have a stake” (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 81). In this view, case study methods are highly appropriate for a study examining the interpretation and manifestation of realities and perceived truths in individuals and among groups (Reay, 2004).

Merriam (2009) contends that case study is the most appropriate qualitative design for use in evaluative context. Unlike a qualitative approach that seeks to understand a general problem, the *intrinsic case study* approach is useful when the case itself is highly nuanced and unique (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). In this case, the EPIC program and all of its components are unique to WTCC, and I am treating the institution and the program as a single *unit of analysis* (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014). Considered a major characteristic of case

study, the unit of analysis is “*one* particular program or *one* particular classroom of learners...” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 38-39, italics in original).

### **Sampling Procedures and Criteria**

Unlike quantitative research that may use randomized sampling procedures, qualitative inquiry primarily uses strategic and purposive (also referred to as purposeful) sampling strategies whereby the researcher sets boundaries (e.g., a location) and determines a conceptual framework (constructivism) and recruits participants that are believed to have experienced similar phenomena or will contribute to answering the research question(s) (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Devers & Frankel, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Patton, 2002, 2015; Yin, 2014). Because the goal of qualitative research is to deeply examine a particular context, the priority in selecting a sample is ensuring that the selected participants can contribute to further understanding the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Patton, 2015).

*Purposive Sampling.* While purposive sampling is an overarching approach, there are several types of sampling that fall within the purposive framework. Common types of sampling are typical, unique, maximum variation (also called theory-based sampling), convenience, and snowball sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Of the 40 purposeful sampling strategies he describes, Patton (2015) asserts that a *critical case sampling strategy* facilitates localized generalizability of the findings and allows for transferability to similar cases. Because Wake Tech is one of nearly 800 institutions that must design and execute a QEP every 10 years per accreditation requirements, it is possible that many other institutions will benefit from the findings of this study. Moreover, these findings may inform the leadership and QEP

teams at the college in their continued implementation of EPIC and in planning for/executing other changes.

For this study, I used purposive sampling strategies. I used a unique sampling strategy in which the participants exemplify similar characteristics and experienced the exact same type of program under similar conditions (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). LaCompte and Schensul (2010) refer to this as criterion-based selection whereby the researcher identifies specific criteria that are considered essential for the study and identifies participants that meet those criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For his part, Patton (2015) refers to this purposive strategy “homogeneous sampling” where participants are recruited that demonstrate similar characteristics or have similar shared experiences and, thus, may yield insights about those shared attributes or experiences (p. 268). Terminology differences notwithstanding, this sampling approach enabled me to maximize the transferability of the findings and verify the application of theory to the context of this study (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2014).

For this work, the sample consisted of stakeholders at Wake Tech who were in some way affected by the EPIC QEP initiative. This included the following: (1) faculty members who were classified as online faculty members and thus, required to complete a certification program and standardize their learning management systems, (2) staff members in supporting departments such as eLearning who developed learning modules for faculty and student preparedness training, and (3) influences (lead instructors, associate department heads) who regularly participate in staffing-related activities and participate in ongoing quality assurance procedures. For this 5-year QEP, several faculty, staff, and administrators from across the college have participated in all aspects of planning and implementing the program. A key characteristic of the sample participants in this study was that they were not currently participating in EPIC-related

planning or implementation. Thus, this group of participants was unique in that they share similar characteristics in relation to a major organizational change initiative.

*Participant Recruitment.* After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval during late Summer/early Fall 2017, I began recruiting participants for the study. I endeavored to recruit 15-20 participants, believing that number would be appropriate given time constraints and lead to “saturation” or the point to which I would not be collecting much new information that would be relevant to answering the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 101).

In August and September 2017, I began sending blind copied emails to full-time faculty members who teach online, lead instructors, and associate department heads (see Appendix A). In a few instances, I sent a personalized email to individuals that were recommended to me or that I knew taught online classes (See Appendix B). Although the potential sample was too large for me to send everyone a personalized request, it is believed that “personalized requests will receive larger and more committed responses from potential participants” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 107) and, thus, should be used when time and resources permit. For all participants, I sent two reminder emails (blind copied) with the same verbiage and the word “Reminder” added to the subject. When interested participants responded, I screened them to be certain they were not participating in the implementation of EPIC. Because individuals move on and off EPIC committees somewhat frequently, I was not able to thoroughly omit all EPIC participants from the sample list initially. Accordingly, a few people politely declined to participate because they had recently joined a committee or were involved in some other way. By early December 2017, I conducted 18 interviews (see data collection procedures below) with 17 faculty members (5 of whom were also influencers) and 1 staff member.

The number of online faculty members within each division of the college is highly uneven, with some divisions offering only a handful of online courses. Accordingly, the number of staff members associated (but not involved) with EPIC is small (<15). Therefore, I chose not to disclose any demographic data about participants other than the number of participants in each role (faculty, staff, and influencers). With the goal of this study having been to capture candid and personal feedback from participants about a major workplace change program, it was of the utmost importance that their identities be protected. Any information collected during the interviews that I believed was identifying, such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, content expertise, and years of service, was not included in the findings. While there may be value in considering demographics in this examination of sensemaking, constructivism, and organizational learning, the risk of participant identification was too great to consider those factors. Furthermore, I used caution in including quotations from participants as nuanced speech patterns and vernacular can also be identifying. Because of the potentially sensitive nature of this study, the only quotes presented in the findings (Chapter 4) were words, phrases, or generic sentences.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Though experts vary in their proposed rules for effective data collection in a case study context (see Creswell, 2013; Stake 1995, 2006; Yin, 2014), there is general agreement among them that case study is best executed when multiple forms of data are collected (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2014). I was able to use individual interviews and field notes as the sources of data collection. While this study will rely heavily on individual interviews for data collection, the use of field notes was also used. Because of the potentially sensitive nature of this study, focus groups were not used.

*Semi-structured Interviews.* Interviews are considered the best method for conducting intensive studies aimed at garnering perspectives from individuals (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002, 2015). The three main interview types are structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Structured interviews are described as a “written survey,” often aimed at collecting demographic data, with little room for elaboration or in-depth descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p110). Semi-structured interviews are like structured interviews in that they both have pre-determined questions, but the semi-structured interview is considered a guide with the opportunity for flexibility in how the questions are posed and in asking probing or follow-up questions (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002). Unstructured interviews are considered conversational in nature and, typically, the researchers are conducting an exploratory study in which they may not have enough knowledge of the subject to ask pre-determined questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002). Because of the variation in data collected, this type of interview data can be difficult to analyze (Patton, 2002, 2015).

This study used a semi-structured interview procedure (See Appendix D for interview protocol). This is also referred to as a “standardized open-ended interview” where the interview questions and sequence are predetermined, however, they are open-ended questions allowing interviewees to provide individualized details and descriptions (Patton, 2015, p. 438). This approach has several advantages. First, by having a set of predetermined questions, the researcher can be adequately prepared and utilize the interview time appropriately (Patton, 2002, 2015). Those questions, however, can be asked flexibly and expanded upon by the researcher during the interview, allowing participants to elaborate on an issue or provide clarifying

information when needed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002). Through utilizing a predetermined set of questions in sequence, I was also able to more easily draw comparisons across responses as participants each answered the same basic set of questions in the same order (Patton, 2015). Because this study endeavored to garner perceptions and attitudes and how they developed over time, the semi-structured interview approach allowed me to understand what contributed to the development of those perceptions and attitudes. With this in mind, the interview protocol was developed using a combination of experience and behavior questions (“How have you experienced this?”) and opinion and values questions (“What do you think about this?”) (Patton, 2002, pp. 349-350).

*Interview Procedures.* Once a participant agreed via email to participate in the study, we scheduled 45-minute one-on-one interviews. Because of scheduling issues and confidentiality concerns (crowded office, for instance), I conducted several interviews over the phone and one interview via Google Hangout. Of the 18 interviews, 6 were conducted in person, 11 were conducted via phone, and one interview took place over Google Hangout. Prior to beginning the interview, participants were provided with a copy of the informed consent (Appendix E) and we discussed the study, how the data would be collected and stored, the manners through which I would maintain confidentiality, and how the findings would be disseminated. After I fielded questions and/or addressed any concerns, I asked the participant if they agreed to be recorded and then I turned on the handheld recorder.

All participants agreed to be recorded. I collected signed informed consent forms from all participants either in person or electronically. The interviews averaged around 40 minutes in length. Upon completion of each interview, I loaded the recording into a password-protected folder on a password-protected laptop, after which I uploaded the file to a third-party

transcription company. Upon receipt of the completed transcripts, I downloaded the documents into the same secure folder on the same laptop. For data safety reason, recordings and transcripts were also stored in a folder in the North Carolina State Two-Factor Authentication Google Drive.

### Data Analysis Procedures

*Patton's Framework.* Patton (2015, p. 523) offers “Twelve Tips for Ensuring a Strong Foundation for Qualitative Analysis” through which he recommends that researchers consider a multitude of strategies to ensure that data is organized and safe and that analysis is thoughtful and thorough. Table 8 lists each tip, a description, and any aspects of my study that aligned with those recommendations.

*Table 8: Twelve Tips for Ensuring a Strong Foundation for Qualitative Analysis*

<b>Tip #</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>This Study</b>
1	Begin analysis during fieldwork: look for emergent themes while still in the field	I began data analysis in Dedoose and took notes during interviews on possible themes
2	Inventory and organize the data: label, date, and make notes regarding all data collected	I used two secure folders to store all transcripts and recordings. I used the same naming convention for all files (participant number, date - P1-10.15.17.dox). I kept a spreadsheet with the participants names and their participant number in both secure folders.
3	Fill in gaps in the data: fill in any gaps in the data while information from the field is fresh	The interview and field notes were used for this.
4	Protect the data: back them up and make sure they are secure	Again, all files were stored on NCSU Google Drive and a secure folder on my personal laptop

Table 8 (continued).

<b>Tip #</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>This Study</b>
5	Express appreciation: thank those who have participated sooner rather than later.	I emailed participants after the interview thanking them for their time and their thoughtful participation
6	Reaffirm the purpose of your inquiry: restate the purpose of your analysis and reengage with your research questions regularly.	I had my research questions stapled to my interview protocol. I also explained the purpose and intent of the study to each of the participants prior to beginning interviews. I also had my research questions attached to my desk.
7	Review exemplars for inspiration and guidance: Reexamining classic works and award-winning works.	I frequently referred to award-winning dissertations (Hudson, 2015) and seminal works for inspiration.
8	Make qualitative analysis software decisions: take time to learn and understand any software used in analysis as there can be a steep learning curve, update any old versions if need be.	I used Dedoose qualitative analysis software. I was familiar with this product, however, I watched tutorials on advanced analysis tools so I was able to maximize its use for this study.
9	Schedule intense, dedicated time for analysis: set a realistic schedule and allow time for immersion in the data.	I used my calendar (and still do) to schedule blocks of time for data analysis and writing.
10	Clarify and determine your initial analysis strategy: consider study design; could be question by question, thematic analysis, story-telling; reconnect with theoretical and strategic framework	I developed initial a priori codes (Saldana, 2016) based on the research questions and theoretical framework (e.g. influence perceptions, evolution of beliefs and attitudes, description of learning)
11	Be reflective and reflexive; monitor your thought processes and decision-making; recognize any bias, fears, hopes, constraints, etc., learn about yourself.	Throughout the process, I kept notes concerning interviews, issues that were arising, strategies for analysis, etc.
12	Start and keep an analysis journal: document decisions, ah-ha moments, and the analysis process	See notes above. I also used the memo feature in Dedoose to make notes about particular excerpts from the data and indicators of those excerpts may contribute to the thematic presentation of findings and the research questions.

*\*Adapted from Patton's Twelve Tips for Ensuring a Strong Foundation for Qualitative Analysis, 2015, p. 523*

*First and Second Cycle Coding.* Per Patton's (2015) recommendation, I began data analysis began as I received transcripts. Using Dedoose qualitative analysis software, I uploaded the transcripts and began the process of analysis. Prior to beginning analysis, I developed a small set of high-level a priori codes based on the theoretical framework and the research questions.

They were as follows:

- Influence perceptions of EPIC
- Influence perceptions of change
- Evolution of beliefs and attitudes
- Description of Learning

Because I started analyzing data as I was continuing to conduct interviews, I was able to start identifying patterns and noteworthy findings early (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used the memo feature in the software to capture other thoughts or possible overarching themes as I read through and coded transcripts. In addition to a priori codes, I used a manual "pre-coding" process through which I highlighted phrases, words, and sentences that I found to be intriguing and/or relevant to the literature (Saldana, 2016, pp. 20-21). Each of the pre-coded segments were assigned to a series of identifying words or phrases as initial category ideas (Saldana, 2009, 2016). The initial pass of coding yielded 38 codes with approximately 10 sub codes.

When data collection ended, I conducted a second cycle coding process where I looked for repetitions in the data, emergent categories, similarities, differences, and connections with the literature and theoretical framework (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). In doing this thorough second pass through the data, I was able to derive descriptive codes, with detailed explanations and memos where appropriate (Miles & Huberman, 1994). From there, I was able to begin the process of pattern coding where I employed a "holistic" or "lumper" (Saldana, 2013, p. 142) method as a

means to group codes into categories that later emerged as themes (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used the analysis features in Dedoose to create visual displays of the codes, such as matrices, to evaluate how patterns emerge (Miles Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). It was through those emerging patterns and themes that I was able to present a thick description of this intrinsic case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Chapter 4 describes each of the themes and through analysis and discussion in Chapter 5, aligns those findings with the extant literature.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Issues of trustworthiness, reliability, and rigor of the research are central to any qualitative research endeavor (Yin, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Patton, 2002, 2015). In constructivist inquiry, issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and “confirmability” are of particular importance (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, pp. 76-77, as cited by Patton, 2002). Credibility is met when the researcher employs measures that ensure that the portrayal of the participants is aligned with the perceptions of the participants themselves (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Due to time constraints, I was not able to facilitate a prolonged engagement, use multiple investigators, or employ multiple data collection methods (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). However, I endeavored to enhance credibility and confirmability through triangulation of theories, primary data, and field notes. Member checking (sharing interview transcripts with participants for review) is also used frequently to ensure reliability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). IRB would not allow for transcripts to be emailed. When asked if they would like paper copies delivered or mailed, all participants declined. To ensure dependability, however, I took notes on paper and in Dedoose to capture and record each step of the research process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Qualitative research findings are not intended to be generalizable, but rather they are meant to be *transferable* (Creswell, 2013; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Patton, 2015). From this perspective, the findings have applicability in other settings and circumstances (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Patton, 2015). To help ensure transferability, I provide a rich, thick description of the case using emergent themes found in the data along with field notes and memos (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002). Additionally, I used Creswell's (2013) criteria for good case study reporting as a checklist throughout the study.

*Issues of Bias:* As stated earlier, I was an employee at Wake Tech and involved with the EPIC program as a member of the program assessment team. My involvement may give the appearance of a conflict of interest, bias, and the perceived inability to separate myself from the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Though valid concerns, the overarching goal of this study was to examine stakeholder perceptions of a major institutional change, and I believe that present those findings thoroughly and truthfully. Given the nature of the types of questions that were asked, study participants shared both positive and negative perceptions during the interviews. I did not approach this study with a positive or negative outcome in mind, but rather with the goal of teasing apart some of the nuanced perceptions and mental constructs that were being formed among stakeholders and to understand what factors were contributing to those feelings. Major institutional change is complex and dynamic with many moving parts. If institutional leaders want to learn how the process is working, it is imperative to uncover how stakeholders are responding to it. All relevant findings are presented in the following chapter, including those that may be perceived as "negative."

Though the previously described benefits and drawbacks align with research that takes place “in your own setting,” having a previously established close proximity to the institution and the phenomenon being studied can be considered positive in terms of the quality of a qualitative study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 106). In this case, I was (and still am) very knowledgeable about the program and college and can, therefore, gained entry into the location(s), developed rapport with the participants involved, and drew I what I believe were more precise conclusions and interpretations as a result (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I contend that my closeness to the institution and to the EPIC program did not negatively impact the study design or the presentation findings.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter provided a detailed description of how I carried out a qualitative, intrinsic case study designed to understand how stakeholders develop perception around major organizational change. Through the lenses of organizational learning and constructivism, I was able to garner how study participants were engaging in sensemaking during this major change. This three-pronged approach enabled me to take a thorough and in-depth approach to qualitative inquiry on this subject. Through using interview data and conducting an iterative coding process, I present a rich, thick description of how individuals develop perceptions and how those perceptions evolve over time. The following chapter will describe the themes uncovered in the data.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Through a three-pronged lens of constructivism, organizational learning, and sensemaking, this qualitative, intrinsic case study endeavored to answer the following research question and sub questions:

1. In what ways are relevant stakeholders developing perceptions around a major organizational change?
  - a. How are attitudes and perceptions of the QEP being formed among key stakeholder groups within the institution and why?
  - b. What are stakeholders learning about the change?
  - c. In what ways have their beliefs and/or assumptions about the QEP changed over time and why?

In Fall 2017 (October – December), I interviewed 18 individuals at Wake Technical Community College (Wake Tech). Of the total, 17 held teaching roles with 5 of those individuals also holding roles of influence over staffing (Lead Instructor, acting or former Associated Department Head). One participant was a staff member. Interviews generally lasted 30-45 minutes and were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol aimed at answering the research questions. Each of the faculty members had completed EPIC certification and was teaching online at the time of the interview. These findings are presented in aggregate with no identifying information such as years of service, gender, division, or department. Instead of using gendered pronouns, I use the plural “they” as a singular pronoun for individual. Furthermore, I opted not to use long quotes by individuals, but rather words or phrases I found repeatedly occurring in the data or descriptive words or phrases that illustrate a specific point.

## **Perceptions Formed Through Multiple Experiences: An Overview of the Themes**

Through analyzing the data, it became evident that perceptions about EPIC were influenced in several ways. Each participant discussed multiple experiences with EPIC itself and other non-EPIC encounters with or beliefs about the institution more broadly. As the major categories of influence over the beliefs and assumptions emerged through analysis, five overarching themes with several sub-themes materialized as significant influencers. The five overarching themes are:

1. Communication as a complex contributor to perceptions
2. Experience with the certification process
3. What individuals learned
4. The evolution of beliefs and assumptions about EPIC
5. Change, innovation, and culture

Theme 1, *communication*, surfaced in the data in several ways. The interview protocol included a question asking about the communications participants received about EPIC; however, issues of communication also arose as participants discussed aspects of EPIC about which they did not believe they received adequate communications. Accordingly, I identified areas in the data where it was apparent that participants' concerns or beliefs were a direct result of communication (or lack thereof). As will be discussed later, communication, is a complex theme with several sub-themes.

For Theme 2, *experience with the certification process*, participants shared a great deal of feedback and perspectives. Although it represented one explicit question in the protocol, the certification process emerged as a significant topic for participants, presumably because the certification process (a.k.a. professional development) was a major component for online faculty

and staff associated with EPIC as it was a required 30-hour, multi-module series representing a long engagement with the training. As will be presented later, the certification process emerges again as many participants associated EPIC with training.

As participants were asked about what they were learning or had learned, the overarching theme of *what individuals learned* materialized as a strong contributor to how participants developed perceptions around EPIC (Theme 2). This theme also contributed to answering research question 1.b about what individuals are learning about change. As will be presented later in the discussion and analysis section, the learning that took place for participants in terms of EPIC was largely *first order* or *single loop learning*, as participants discussed learning new strategies and tools but did not necessarily describe a transformation of their assumptions and beliefs associated with *second order change* or *double loop learning* (Argyris & Schon 1978, 1996; Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2014).

Research question 1.c asks how participants' beliefs and assumptions about EPIC evolved over time. Indeed, they were found to evolve for individuals as they described beliefs and assumptions today versus earlier in the earlier implementation phases of EPIC (Theme 4). Though this emerged as an overarching, stand-alone theme, it relates to the other themes, as those themes are influencers in the evolution of the beliefs and assumptions about EPIC.

Because this major change was taking place in the context of an institution composed of *loosely coupled systems* (Weick, 1976) it would be remiss not to situate the beliefs and assumptions of individuals in that broader, dynamic context. In order to understand how individuals described change and culture in a broader sense, the interview protocol included questions around views about *change, innovation, and perceptions of organizational culture* (Theme 5). Through examining culture and change, I believe I was able to present a more

complete representation of perceptions and beliefs around this change as EPIC, though a significant endeavor, is merely one component of what individuals experience at the institution at any given time. That inquiry also enabled me to draw conclusions about EPIC in terms of what type of change it really is and how it influences beliefs, assumptions, and practice at Wake Tech.

The following sections will describe each theme and sub-theme in details with examples from the data. Tables and figures are used to in lieu of direct quotes to display participant perspectives about their beliefs and assumptions about EPIC, their perceptions of organizational culture, and their perceptions of innovation and change at the institution. The final section of this chapter is a discussion and analysis of the themes, with connections to the literature.

### **Theme 1: Formal and Informal Communication as a Multifaceted Contributor to Perceptions**

In examining the development and reasoning of attitudes and perceptions around a major change, several themes emerge. The themes are really components of EPIC that individuals found influential in their thinking. Communication emerged as the broadest and most complex theme. After nearly 4 years of communications about EPIC from formal and informal channels, participants had a lot to say regarding communication. This section will describe communication as an influence on thinking in three parts, focusing on communications during the early phase the program, about the results of the implementation, and around reviews of faculty effectiveness in implementation.

*The evolution of communication over time.* Several participants reflected on the early communications they heard about EPIC, formally and informally. Some recalled the communications they received three to four years ago and remembered feeling enthusiastic about it. They recalled signs and banners around campus and formal communications from the QEP

leadership team through email. However, several participants reported that their supervisors did not view EPIC favorably and discouraged them from getting involved in the initiative. Those participants seemed to view that as good advice as they indicated they had full schedules already. One person recalled their supervisor announcing that “this is coming” and anyone who was not certified by the deadline “will not be teaching online anymore.” Accordingly, a few instructors indicated they were enthusiastic early on until they learned about the (unpaid) professional development requirement associated with EPIC (more details about this later). Others admitted to feeling a bit negatively about the amount of work involved and some were concerned that EPIC would be “just another thing to do” and did not see the value of the initiative despite the “big push” early on to foster enthusiasm and support.

Nearly every participant indicated that they no longer hear anything (or very much) about EPIC. A small number of participants reported they read the EPIC newsletter distributed monthly by the QEP director. However, most indicated they did not receive, did not read, or skimmed the newsletter. One person indicated they have not heard anything about EPIC since getting certified earlier in the year. A few participants believed that, since faculty certification had been completed by everyone, there was no need to communicate about it any longer. One participant described EPIC as having “disappeared” since everyone was certified. Another said, “I really don’t hear much about EPIC anymore.” A couple of individuals felt that the reduction in communication was good as it was overkill and that “they” are allowing certified faculty to get to work updating their courses.

Despite a noticeable level of indifference among participants about EPIC-related news, nearly all participants wanted to receive information about whether EPIC was “working.” It seems the newsletter was not viewed as a medium for that information. Multiple participants

reported that they and their colleagues wanted to know the latest “numbers” because there was concern that they had gone through a lengthy training and deserved to know whether the program was working as intended and/or whether students are getting the intended benefit of EPIC. The lack of data also influenced their thinking about sustainability of the initiative.

*Concerns about the future of EPIC.* Nearly every participant expressed concern about the future of EPIC. Several participants asked, “What’s next?” or “Is there a plan for the end of the QEP?” When asked about the sustainability of EPIC, several participants said they were unsure because they did not know if the initiative was working (as stated above) or if funds would be allocated to sustain it. Many participants were concerned about plans for updating faculty on new technologies and online strategies as they emerge in the field of education, including one person who had heard that Blackboard would be “changing” in the spring. A few participants expressed concern that they would need retraining or whether there would be a process of maintaining certification. The majority of those interviewed indicated they wanted some communication about what the next steps would be for the initiative and how it would affect them. This may be closely linked to the perceived lack of communication that participants indicated they were currently receiving.

*EPIC Course Reviews and Certification.* One participant described a change in “tone” of the communications around EPIC when it came to the certification requirement and course reviews, with one person describing it as “politicized.” As discussed in Chapter 1, course reviews are a component of the assessment process for EPIC. Courses are confidentially checked by reviewers (faculty certified to review) for compliance with EPIC standards. Individual faculty are not evaluated and their information remains confidential. The reviews are reported in aggregate as a means to inform further training associated with online teaching (Scott, 2014).

Many participants recalled being told by their supervisor of the requirement for certification as something they had to do to continue teaching online. They reported fear of “losing” their online courses. For those involved in staffing decisions, it was concerning because it was not immediately clear how this would affect adjuncts who teach many online courses in some divisions.

An overwhelming majority of participants expressed concerns over course reviews, which they seemed to have been unaware of until recently. In describing their reaction to the course reviews, they used words and phrases such as “comply/compliance,” “audit,” “punitive,” “rules,” “stringent,” “pass/fail,” “EPIC requires,” “get in trouble,” “sneaky,” and “snooping.” Several individuals expressed concern that course reviews would affect their performance reviews, ability to apply for faculty rank, or even cause dismissal. Individuals mentioned “fear” by either themselves and/or their colleagues or direct reports. Some interviewees asked me if I knew about the course checks and what the “penalties” would be for non-compliance. One person was worried about making all of their courses compliant with accessibility standards, as they had hundreds of pieces to address including documents, PowerPoint presentations, videos, and assignments. Another person asked if they or their colleagues would lose their certification if they did not “pass” the course check. One participant described faculty as being “fearful” of evaluations in general and said this was no different. To most participants, it seemed unclear what the course reviews entailed, who would receive the results, and how the results would be used.

As discussed earlier, the formal lines of communication seemed to have tapered off in recent months. To paraphrase one participant, the informal lines of communication (colleagues, immediate supervisors) are more frequent and more influential than the formal lines at this point

in time. Nearly all of the recent communication people have received about EPIC components have been informal, with a few people indicating they read the newsletter. In reflecting on the communication of training and course checks, many participants used phrases like, “I was told,” “I heard we had to do X,” or “I found out that...” However, when asked about specifically about communication they received about EPIC, most referred to the newsletter which was unevenly perceived as useful or still in distribution.

*Conclusion.* As indicated earlier, the theme of communication emerged as a complex, multifaceted theme as there were both explicit and implicit references to communications about EPIC. When asked about communication, participants referenced specific communications (newsletters, banners, etc.); however, participants discussed several aspects of EPIC such as the future and course reviews with concern or inquiry that may be attributed to a lack of communication or a lack of reception on the part of the participants. Notwithstanding, there appears to be an issue with communication regarding some aspects of EPIC.

## **Theme 2: Perceptions of the Faculty Certification Process**

The online faculty certification (aka professional development or EPIC 30) was the most frequently discussed topic among participants (occurring over 60 times in the data). This is not surprising since this was the first major engagement with EPIC that all online faculty had to complete by Fall 2017. Overall, participants reported having a positive experience with the certification process. However, nearly all offered feedback and suggestions for improvement.

*Faculty Want More Rigorous Training.* For most participants, EPIC 30 was largely composed of information they believed they already knew. Several participants said they wished they could “test out” of certain modules, particularly those centered on Blackboard and course design since they already knew how to do that. One person mentioned that accepting “transfer

credit” from previous professional development would be helpful. Participants (particularly individuals who had been at the college for longer than a couple of years) felt the training could have been more rigorous and would have liked more of a challenge. A few people indicated they were able to finish most of the modules quickly because the assessments were easy and quick. Others said that their colleagues were simply in a rush to finish the courses and not concerned with learning the content. There was a suggestion to add elective courses to the training so faculty could choose courses that aligned with their perceived needs as an instructor.

*The Training Format and the Grading Process.* Several participants said they would have liked the courses delivered in a different format. Many participants wanted a seated option. Some chuckled a bit when they said that the online environment did not work well for them as a learner. They also wanted an opportunity to engage with classmates in discussion about best practices. Several participants suggested offering the training as a standard 16-week course (versus the current 2-week-per-module model, 1 week in the summer). Some viewed breaks between courses unfavorably as they said they would forget things in between.

There were also some criticisms of courses as not following EPIC standards for things like accessibility, student engagement, and course design or best practices in terms of assessment and grading. For instance, several participants indicated they lost several points off the final capstone assignment for what they believed were small infractions and said they could not understand why the required grade was higher for that than the other courses. Others reported that they liked the format because it was flexible and appreciated the recognition for completing the certification (a certificate, t-shirt). Another indicated they were happy to finally take an online course in Blackboard as it enabled them to empathize with students and their challenges navigating the online environment.

*A Desire for Reference Materials.* A high number of participants indicated they wanted a take-away from the training. Words like “repository,” “checklist,” and “cheat sheet” were used to describe potential takeaways from the training that they believed would be helpful. Several people indicated that they were unable to remember much from the training and/or did not have to apply their training right away so they did not retain the information. Many reported having so little time to do the training that they “cheated” or rushed through it and did not internalize the information. Several individuals mentioned that “refresher” courses would be helpful for those who may have forgotten elements of the training.

*The Training Was Stressful.* Many participants discussed finding the training stressful for them or their colleagues. This issue seemed to be raised regarding newer faculty, grading, and time. Faculty participants who began employment after EPIC was launched expressed feeling very stressed that in their first semester of teaching they were being told they had to complete a 30-hour certification program when they were still learning the nuances of their job and their way around campus. Some people indicated that new faculty in their departments were not required to complete the certification until they had taught at least one class or more. Others expressed sympathy for new faculty who were scrambling to complete the certification by the deadline. It seemed that the certification process for new online faculty was unevenly communicated across the college.

When the certification was launched, there were shortages of staff in the eLearning department at the college where the courses were administered. Several participants reported feeling stressed about a lack of available courses due to that shortage. Others felt stressed because it was viewed as a significant time-commitment and they either thought they needed to complete it right away or decided to wait until the last couple of semesters to go through the

certification process. According to several participants, the grading aspect of the training added a layer of stress as many people worried about “passing.”

*Conclusion.* As stated earlier, the training component of EPIC was significant in the minds of the participants, as it was perceived to be long and time-consuming. Although participants gave constructive feedback, much of that feedback was framed as potential improvements to the EPIC 30 process rather than a disdain for the training altogether. Participants also expressed a desire to learn more and interact with the training in different ways, indicating a desire to continue to enhance their online teaching skills.

### **Theme 3: What Individuals Learned**

*Mindfulness.* Most participants indicated they approached online instruction more thoughtfully than they had before engaging with EPIC, be that in course engagement, course design, or both. Several participants indicated that the courses that dealt with instructor presence in online courses resonated with them. Some indicated they had thought they were doing a good job with this until they took the course and realized they could be doing more. Several people said they started being more “purposeful” in their interaction with students, softening language in emails and assignment feedback to sound encouraging, creating personal videos to humanize themselves for students, and including personal messages with their contact information in Blackboard. One participant described how, after engaging with EPIC training, they became “more aware of teacher presence and students’ perception of that teacher’s presence.” That same person described how they were making efforts to humanize instruction through using videos and personalized messages. They indicated they were noticing a positive change in student’s response. Another participant stated, “I’ve grown there, in terms of making sure they know I am encouraging them.”

Many participants said they were much more “mindful” of how students navigate their courses and were more thoughtfully placing assignments and lesson materials where they can be easily accessed by students. One participant indicated the “incremental changes” to the course structure made communication and content delivery easier for students and for the participant. Another participant described feeling “humbled” as they believed they were technology savvy, however, they were still able to learn a considerable amount about using technology to deliver online course content. Similarly, another participant described how engaging with an online course as a student in the training enabled them to understand how students navigate their courses and the challenges they may face. Overall, most participants reported that they were using and liked the Blackboard template that all online faculty are asked to use, though there was a perception among a few that it was not well-suited for their course or teaching style. One person, who indicated the training did not contain “...a whole lot that was new,” described the course navigation components of training as “...what ultimately sold me on EPIC,” as they learned new strategies for improving their course structure.

*Knowledge of Accessibility and Challenges of Implementation.* Accessibility was among the most discussed topics in terms of learning with all 18 participants discussing accessibility training as a central component of EPIC. When asked to describe EPIC, nearly half of all participants mentioned accessibility in the description. Of the 18 participants, 17 of them (including those who viewed the training negatively) said that they learned something about accessibility in the training. One participant described accessibility training as “a big wakeup call” as they were unaware of any accessibility considerations for online learners prior to the launch of EPIC. Several people indicated they became more aware of colorblindness and vision

impairment issues among students and refrained from using colors such as red and green on documents.

Though all participants indicated they learned new information about accessibility, there were mixed feelings about implementing the accessibility requirements per EPIC standards. There was concern that there were not enough time and resources to make all of the course videos and PowerPoint presentations accessible. Several participants indicated they were “nervous” or fearful that their courses would not be accessible. Accordingly, multiple individuals stated that they were not accessibility experts and believed there should be more support for meeting the standards (such as instructional designers, for instance). There was also a perception among some participants that the time required to meet accessibility standards was disproportionate to the number of students served by the changes. Some expressed concern that courses would become less interactive for students as faculty opted to avoid using videos and multimedia for fear of “failing” course reviews. One participant found it “insulting” that “they” told them not to use a specific tool in their course because it did not meet accessibility requirements. That same person believed that faculty could use reassurance that EPIC was not a punitive program where associated personnel would be those “who aren’t going to make you feel that you’re doing something wrong.”

Participants found the requirement of transcripts for all videos a cumbersome task. While there was widespread agreement that videos (made by the instructor and third parties) make the course more engaging for students, several people spoke negatively about the requirement to have transcripts. Participants who knew how to transcribe videos (some did not) found it time consuming and one person did not want to use transcripts for fear of enabling students to cheat by scanning a transcript for answers to a quiz on a video. Some expressed disappointment that

some accessibility standards had changed since they took the course and were concerned that they were not using current standards. Two participants said they were told that accessibility standards were the “law.” While accessibility standards were one of the biggest take-aways from the training, they also created the most concerns among participants as many did not believe they had the skills and/or the time to implement them properly.

*Conclusion.* The major things that participants learned were being more mindful in their approach to communicating with online students, designing courses, and considering accessibility. This is interesting given that accessibility training was one of seven modules offered in EPIC 30 (see Appendix F). Notwithstanding, participants had the strongest reaction to the accessibility portion of the training, presumably because it called for some perceived significant changes in practice. As is discussed in the following section, EPIC 30 and the accessibility requirements are highly influential in terms of how participants frame their beliefs and assumptions about EPIC today.

#### **Theme 4: The Evolution of Beliefs, Attitudes, and Assumptions Over Time**

A few participants indicated that their beliefs about EPIC had not really changed at all over time. Those participants felt positively about the initiative from the start and continue to feel positively now, believing that EPIC is a good program for faculty and students. Among the participants, two groups emerged: those that felt negatively or skeptical at first and then became positive and those that felt positively at first and became less positive, apathetic, or negative. Most of the individuals who initially felt negatively were concerned about the amount of work involved, believed this was “just another thing we have to do,” or felt that this was another project that would “sink.” Some participants who had been teaching online for a long time said they did not think they needed additional training. Because students were required to take

preparedness modules to register for online courses, some faculty and those in staffing-related roles indicated that faculty were concerned about drops in enrollment as the modules could be barriers for students.

Those whose beliefs and assumptions became more positive over time attributed that to several different factors. It seemed that initially, there was substantial uncertainty among faculty about what EPIC would require and how it would affect day-to-day work life. However, once participants said that once they started taking the training, their attitudes changed because they found value in all or some of the courses. Others indicated that they noticed a difference in their courses because of changes they implemented. One instructor noted that students were coming to them with better questions while others noticed general overall improvement in students' ability to navigate their courses. Another person said, "...it ended up being a positive experience" in reference to EPIC training. Another commented, "I don't really think there's as much, if any fear about EPIC as there once was."

The participants who were initially positive about EPIC indicated they felt that way because it was something the college needed and they believed that online instructors needed training. One person said, "I was thrilled. I was so excited." That participant said they changed their thinking when they perceived that EPIC placed more emphasis on following a set of rules than on improving instructional techniques. Other believed it was a good idea but are skeptical about possibly having to retake the certification in the future or what the course review process entails. Several mentioned that EPIC would best serve new employees. Several participants in this group described EPIC as something that was "supposed to be" or "intended to be" a program for improving online teaching skills but then cited issues such as accessibility requirements or poor training quality as characterizing what they perceived the initiative became.

One participant was initially very excited about EPIC and stated they had many students in online classes who were ill prepared for online learning. Those feelings were tempered when they perceived that EPIC had become complicated and would not be successful. Since then, this person and a few others describe EPIC implementation teams as having worked out the “kinks” resulting in their feeling more positively about it. Still, at least two participants indicated they knew people who left the college because of EPIC professional development requirements and a perception that it was not worth doing. However, nearly every participant said they enjoyed their jobs with one stating, “I love to come to work every day.”

*Today: EPIC = Training + Compliance.* Almost all participants equated EPIC with the EPIC 30 training for faculty and the course reviews. While all participants spoke passionately about students and student success, only 5 of the 18 participants mentioned the student preparedness portion of the initiative. When asked if they had noticed a change in their students since EPIC was launched, most participants indicated that they had not noticed a difference (a couple of which had started during or after EPIC launched). Some felt they were getting fewer questions from students about Blackboard or computer-related issues, but mostly attributed that to “kids” now having more digital literacy than they had in the past. One participant described student technical issues as being “way less” in the last two to three years. Another person said that although they noticed a reduction in technology-related questions shortly after EPIC launched, they are starting to see the questions come up again and mentioned the student preparedness component of the initiative by name. That participant also believed that because of state-level changes in recent years enabling larger numbers of students to bypass developmental coursework than in previous years, the student preparedness component of EPIC should be revisited in consideration of those changes. Accordingly, several individuals stated that they still

noticed issues with time management, withdraw rates, and success rates among their online students.

When asked how they viewed EPIC, nearly every participant responded with neutral or positive attitudes with one exception. That participant, who was initially enthusiastic about EPIC, expressed disappointment in the training for lacking rigor. That person also perceived there was inaccuracy in the training content around best practices for teaching and expressed disappointment that the initiative appeared to shift from training into a punitive program for faculty. For those who gave positive or neutral responses, nearly all of them included a qualifier such as, “It’s a good idea, as long as...” or, “I think it’s a good program, but I don’t like....” or they gave a reason unrelated to EPIC specifically such as poor success rates for online community college students in general. Table 9 briefly summarizes beliefs of and attitudes toward EPIC of each participant.

*Table 9: Beliefs and Assumptions about EPIC*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Beliefs About and Attitudes Toward EPIC</b>
1	Heard students complain about faculty being inconsistent online. Believes EPIC is good thing.
2	Mostly indifferent but feels class is less fun and interactive because of EPIC accessibility requirements.
3	Likes consistent message and Blackboard template*. Implementing has been difficult as much of training was forgotten.
4	It's a good thing but is curious about how successful it can be.
5	It's become routine. Everyone was worked up at first but it's accepted now.
6	Excited at first but feels like it changed along the way, got too complicated. Believes "they" are working out the "kinks."

Table 9 (continued).

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Beliefs about and Attitudes Toward EPIC</b>
7	Feels good about EPIC but wishes there was more focus on course design rather than on teaching. Likes consistency across courses but believe it "oversteps" a little with teaching requirements.
8	Good intentions but it's getting too "into the weeds" with teaching and people designing EPIC are not understanding how classes are actually taught.
9	Has become too big. It is not what was originally communicated. Focuses too heavily on "compliance."
10	Feels good. Believe college is committed to this initiative.
11	Feels positive and believes it was well planned and implemented. Some concerns about measuring success.
12	Feels like it's "top down" and faculty input isn't being included. Concerned that some common teaching tools are not EPIC "compliant."
13	Good program. Good "overview."
14	Mixed feelings. Liked accessibility training. Concerned that EPIC will be "punitive."
15	Feels good "most days" but there are some days where they are "not happy with EPIC" because of the amount of work involved in meeting accessibility criteria.
16	Thinks EPIC is good for new faculty but feels existing faculty should be able to test out of training. Did find that training exposed to them faculty they had not met before.
17	Positive for students and faculty. Believes that online education can always improve.
18	Likes EPIC, especially that students must be prepared. Believes EPIC is needed as success rates in online courses are low.

*\*According to EPIC standards, all faculty teaching online must use a template in Blackboard, which is the college's learning management system (Scott, 2014).*

In terms of feedback and suggestions, participants described things they viewed positively about and offered a few ideas. One person stated that a “tiered” training model would better meet the needs of instructors at varying levels of comfort and experience with online teaching. That person perceived that such a model would “contribute not just to student success, but also faculty satisfaction.” Another participant said that they and their colleagues appreciated the exposure to new “ways of thinking about online learning.” Several people who expressed support also referred back to the amount of time and work associated with implementing EPIC (particularly in reference to meeting accessibility standards) when asked how they perceived about it. One participant, who had changed from initially skeptical to highly supportive, did perceive that EPIC had changed from a “front line” initiative to one that was more top down where considerations for the way faculty teach were sidelined for considerations of policy implementation. That person cited issues using technology that is considered “ubiquitous” in online teaching but would not be compliant with EPIC standards.

A couple of participants described concerns about EPIC “telling us how to teach” and believed that the program should focus more on instructional design rather than specific teaching strategies. One instructor either experienced or knew someone who experienced receiving criticism of a rubric and believed that was not appropriate given that EPIC 30 training facilitators (and possibly reviewers) were not subject matter experts in that discipline. Other participants went back to previous statements about not knowing whether EPIC was working and expressed some concern that “other projects overlap with EPIC” making it difficult to know for sure if EPIC was successful. Criticisms and feedback notwithstanding, several participants described EPIC as “a good thing” and as “very much needed” and reflected on their experience with the training as “good” and “positive.”

*Conclusion.* While EPIC was overall perceived to be a good program, several participants described concerns or included caveats in their responses. However, the perception of EPIC as being largely about training and compliance is worth noting given that the college designed EPIC to align with strategic institutional goals centered on student learning outcomes and addressing the learning needs of students (see Table 1). The final theme examines the role of institutional culture and the perceptions of individuals about change and innovation in the context of this significant change that affects them.

### **Theme 5: Beliefs About Change, Innovation, and Institutional Culture**

Because it has been established that large-scale changes like EPIC are difficult to facilitate at institutes of higher education because these institutions are fragmented and decentralized (Kezar, 2014), it seemed prudent to examine stakeholders' general perceptions of change, innovation, and culture at the college. This approach enabled me to situate the perceptions of EPIC by participants in a broader context, looking beyond this change to try and understand how participants feel about change in general and to uncover to what extent those general feelings may contribute to their beliefs and attitudes about EPIC and other changes.

*Are Change and Innovation Encouraged at the Institution? It Depends on the Circumstance.* When asked whether they believed change and innovation were encouraged at the college, only 3 of the 18 participants unequivocally said they believed both change and innovation were encouraged at Wake Tech. Of those 3 participants, 2 of them cited professional development opportunities as the reason for their thinking. None of the 3 participants offered examples of large-scale changes like EPIC as an example of change and innovation. In fact, none of the 18 participants explicitly mentioned EPIC in response to change-related questions, though a few participants mentioned EPIC-related changes in their responses.

Each of the remaining 15 participants responded to these questions with caveats. Table 10 displays findings for each participant in terms of whether they believed change and innovation are encouraged and their general attitudes toward change at the college. Many participants viewed change and innovation as things that are encouraged at the departmental-level with most of those participants expressing skepticism about whether they are encouraged and/or happening college-wide. Accordingly, many participants indicated that they believed ideas were encouraged but rarely materialized as change.

Generally speaking, there appeared to be fatigue among participants with regard to change. Several participants indicated that faculty felt overwhelmed and confused by the number of changes happening at the college. Participants used phrases such as “too many changes” or “change for change’s sake” to describe their perspectives of change at the institution. Others believed that change happened without faculty input or that it failed to consider the differences across departments and disciplines. For many, changes seemed to happen without an explanation why they were happening and without consideration for the long-term effects it may have.

Each participant offered a unique perspective of change; however, there is an overarching uncertainty among the participants about whether change and innovation are encouraged college-wide. Accordingly, most participants offered a tepid response to change in general with some referring to benchmarking and faculty rank requirements somewhat negatively. This is particularly noteworthy given that they were not presented with any questions specifically mentioning those two things. As one participant noted, it is possible that when changes were presented, as “non-teaching related,” they may have been interpreted less favorably than EPIC (again, not mentioned in response to these questions) because EPIC was viewed as contributing positively to teaching.

*Organizational Culture and The Relationship to Perceptions of Change.* Once again, organizational culture is described as the shared values, norms, beliefs, and assumptions among a group (Kezar, 2001; Lakos & Phipps, 2004; Schein, 1996; Tierney, 1988). When asked to describe organizational culture at the college, many participants' descriptions aligned with their perspectives of change. For many, their perceptions of skepticism about appeared again when asked about culture. Several participants indicated that decisions were made with little or no faculty input and/or they believed "the college" or "administration" was unaware of or out of touch with faculty and their workloads. Moreover, some participants discussed the organizational structure as a factor in considering culture using words and phrases like "territorial," "protective," and "turf wars" when describing collaboration across departments at the college. Four participants used the word "silo" to describe the organizational culture. Some of those participants used the term in reference to the college attempting unsuccessfully to encourage collaboration across departments.

Despite some negative feelings about culture, several participants indicated they perceived that they were highly supported within their department. Many participants spoke highly of their departmental colleagues and their supervisors. These findings also align with the sentiment of several participants that change and innovation are encouraged within their department, but seemingly less so at the college level. Some people cited the inherently bureaucratic nature of an educational institution as the reason for more localized attitudes about change, innovation, and culture. Holistically speaking, it appears that most participants identified much more closely with their department than with the institution. Moreover, there seemed to be a lack of trust among participants for institution-wide activities and changes, indicating that feelings about organizational culture and change may be closely linked.

When examined together, perceptions of change, innovation, and organizational culture appear to align with one another. As stated earlier, participants make a distinction between their department and the college as they consider change and organizational culture. Participants who answered questions with statements like, “In my department, yes” exhibited skepticism toward the institution. For instance, a participant who describes being supported at the departmental-level but not necessarily at the institutional-level described the culture either in a negative way or in a somewhat positive way but with caveats such as, “It’s positive but...” Others who felt supported by their department indicated there was too much change or that change happened without consideration for the way faculty “actually teach in the classroom.” When participants made references to changes and policies, they were in an institutional context whereas when they made references to support, that seemed to be in a departmental context. A couple of participants perceived the culture had changed in recent years due to additional layers of management and “top down” decision-making (see Table 10, participant 12).

There were also perceptions among some participants that change needed supervisor approval or that immediate supervisor support was necessary to facilitate change indicating that culturally speaking, individuals may not feel empowered to lead change in some cases. Another person described “bureaucracy” as a barrier to facilitating change and described the culture as one in which faculty were encouraged to “stay” in their “silos.” While the influence of institutional leadership is alluded to by many participants, the stronger influence on their views about their role and the institutional culture is derived from departmental experiences and structures.

Through examining the findings around change, innovation, and culture, it seemed appropriate to situate the beliefs and attitudes of participants about EPIC alongside their beliefs

and attitudes about change, innovation, and culture as a means to potentially illuminate some connections between these elements. Table 10 combines the beliefs and attitudes (B/A) of participants about EPIC with their beliefs and attitudes about change, innovation, and culture.

Table 10: Change, Innovation, Culture, and Beliefs and Assumptions (B/A) about EPIC

<b>Part.</b>	<b>Change and Innovation</b>	<b>Change in General</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>B/A About EPIC</b>
1	In their department, yes. Not necessarily college-wide.	Careful about suggesting changes because they would "own" it.	Openness, learning organization, supportive	Heard students complain about faculty being inconsistent online. Believes EPIC is a good thing.
2	Change is encouraged in the department, but indicated they weren't sure about the rest of the college. Said they are "tired" of benchmarking* and would rather do something they enjoy doing.	Not open to another change in online teaching. Feels that there are "too many changes" and finds it "frustrating."	Feels strongly supported by department but doesn't have a sense for the rest of college. Doesn't know anyone outside of their dept. Feels the school is so big, it's hard to know everything.	Mostly indifferent but feels class is less fun and interactive because of EPIC accessibility requirements.
3	Yes, they are encouraged. "They encourage us to look for ways we can be better at our jobs."	Cited benchmarking* as an example of change and innovation.	Feels there is a strong emphasis on "keeping the student happy" that overshadows good pedagogical practice.	Likes consistent message and Blackboard template***. Implementing has been difficult as much of training was forgotten.
4	It is encouraged but ideas don't go anywhere. Ideas stop with immediate supervisor. College encourages grass roots efforts but nothing comes of it.	Would like to see larger scale involvement of stakeholders in decision-making around change. Would like multiple viewpoints acknowledged and shared. Feels "stressed and frustrated" with so many changes.	Fatigue. Realized that changes are not faculty driven even if that's what they are being told. "We're just trying to do whatever they tell us to do."	It's a good thing but is curious about how successful it can be.

Table 10 (continued).

<b>Part.</b>	<b>Change and Innovation</b>	<b>Change in General</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>B/A about EPIC</b>
5	Yes, the college encourages people "to try and fail." But people not encouraged to do anything outside of their immediate area.	Feels overwhelmed and confused by all initiatives. Would like to see a list of initiatives underway along with the committees and who is on them. Senses "secrecy" among upper management about what's coming in terms of changes.	Collaboration discussed and encouraged but people are "territorial." "We say one thing" but don't live them in practice.	It's become routine. Everyone was worked up at first but it's accepted now. Never discusses EPIC anymore.
6	Yes, change and innovation are encouraged but they are not always sure it happens. Professional development is always encouraged.	Change is welcome. Participant has been encouraged to develop professionally. Would like the college to do "a better job" of generating excitement over fear (accessibility and course reviews, for example).	Very positive culture. Finds that people work together in their department. The college is similar to corporate culture in a good way where people get things done.	Excited at first but feels like it changed along the way, got too complicated. Believes "they" are working out the "kinks."
7	Yes, cites technology training available at the college (professional development)	Fine with change as long as it is "thought out" and people understand benefits. Sometimes the college "jumps on the bandwagon" but people don't know why.	"Favoritism." Administration is out of touch with the classroom and faculty. Many big non-teaching projects (such as benchmarking) and it is difficult to balance everything.	Feels good about EPIC but wishes there was more focus on course design rather than on teaching. Likes consistency across courses but believe it "oversteps" a little with teaching requirements.

Table 10 (continued).

<b>Part.</b>	<b>Change and Innovation</b>	<b>Change in General</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>B/A about EPIC</b>
8	Change yes, innovation less so.	Change happens more than innovation. Easy to change policy but harder to change how people do things because departments are very different from one another. Departmental-level innovation is much more likely. Feels there is often too much change and makes it difficult to do their job effectively.	Many layers of management. There is a "formal atmosphere." Feels supported by department but still does not feel that they (the individual) can facilitate change.	Good intentions but it's getting too "into the weeds" with teaching and people designing EPIC are not understanding how classes are actually taught.
9	Change and innovation are encouraged and displayed by top leaders but there is too much bureaucracy to make things happen.	Always reacts to change initially with panic but tries to stay open-minded and find something like they like about it.	There are silos and people are encouraged to stay in those silos. People are helpful and there is sense of community. Institution "tries" to encourage collaboration. Enjoys the job and feels that others do also.	Has become too big. It is not what was originally communicated. Focuses to heavily on "compliance."
10	"Yes and no." At the departmental level yes. Benchmarking has become something to cross off list and "goes nowhere." Ideas are encouraged, but nothing happens with them.	Acknowledges that change is "scary" but tries to accept as fact and be open-minded. Believes change is inevitable and tries to find positive. Feels that sometimes change comes without warning and does not like "surprises."	Very happy here. Feel like input is valued. With some changes, wonders if "they" understand what faculty do every day. Some policies that don't align with reality of teaching (required hours on campus for example).	Feels good. Believe college is committed to this initiative.

Table 10 (continued).

<b>Part.</b>	<b>Change and Innovation</b>	<b>Change in General</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>B/A About EPIC</b>
11	Yes, sees a lot of innovation and believes it is rewarded and encouraged.	People who aren't involved in planning changes aren't included or given an opportunity for input. There is little opportunity to be involved with implementation. Eventually if enough people get on the "bandwagon" everyone wants to be on it. Large institution with many "moving parts" and it is hard to facilitate change.	Resourceful culture where people take initiative	Feels positive and believes it was well planned and implemented. Some concerns about measuring success.
12	Yes, as long as supervisors approve.	Need to communicate with supervisor about things they are involved in. Sometimes changes are made without considering nuances of individual disciplines.	Feels culture has "changed in the last couple of years." "Top down" changes with little input from faculty, Changes lack discussion.	Feels like it's "top down" and faculty input isn't being included. Concerned that some common teaching tools are EPIC "compliant."
13	Yes, within their department	There are many changes that happen frequently but acknowledges that college is always looking to "do things better."	Culture of "continuous improvement," but that means a lot of changes occur. Departmental leadership was in flux so feeling a bit isolated.	Good program. Good "overview."

Table 10 (continued).

Part.	Change and Innovation	Change in General	Culture	B/A about EPIC
14	Too much change happening over time. Can't get used to things before something changes again. Feels college-wide changes may not be practical given the size of the institution and cultural differences across departments and campuses.	Feels faculty get overwhelmed and their voices aren't heard in the change process. Believes requirements like faculty rank** and benchmarking are too much. Would like the college to "ease up" on deadlines. Describes each change as "one more thing to do." Many changes happening at once with messages evolving over time; causes faculty to lose focus.	Some inconsistency with student-related policies across departments (such as withdraw policies). Policies aren't always student-centered and differs by campus and department.	Mixed feelings. Liked accessibility training. Concerned that EPIC will be "punitive."
15	Yes, at the department-level. Not necessarily at the campus-level because not every supervisor is supportive of employees in the same way.	Change is easier for people who feel their supervisor is supportive because they "trust" the process and want to be more innovative.	"Turf wars" where departments are protective of themselves. Resistance occurs when certain areas of college are not included in decision-making.	Feels good "most days" but there are some days where they are "not happy with EPIC" because of the amount of work involved in meeting accessibility criteria.

Table 10 (continued).

<b>Part.</b>	<b>Change and Innovation</b>	<b>Change in General</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>B/A about EPIC</b>
16	Ideas are welcomed and entertained but not necessarily followed up on.	Faculty rank** system puts employees in a competitive position and there is not enough money available for rank. Finds that rank lacked of vision. Believed it was initially good but ultimately bad for community-building among faculty. Believes people get involved with changes because of rank not passion. Finds there is "change for changes' sake" with reasons being unclear.	Has become more bureaucratic (changed over time). Feels like faculty rank has created a culture of competitiveness and college is less collegial. Leadership makes decisions that do not consider realities of faculty lives in the classroom.	Thinks EPIC is good for new faculty but feels existing faculty should be able to test out of training. Did find that training exposed to them faculty they had not met before.
17	Yes, but it depends on your dean and department head. Can do individual things but larger things need approval.	Needs dean or department head approval to do anything change-related.	Supportive and positive but changes should be purposeful with explanations of why they are happening.	Positive for students and faculty. Believes that online education can always improve.
18	Ideas. yes. Not sure about actual change.	Needs to be well planned. Needs buy in. Feels college should gauge feelings before introducing change. Believes change is instituted from the "top down."	Supportive and inclusive. Very happy within their department.	Likes EPIC, especially that students must be prepared. Believes EPIC is needed as success rates in online courses are low.

*\*" Benchmarking" refers to the college initiative called "Applied Benchmarking." On an annual basis, all full-time employees are required to identify an area of improvement in their area and benchmark those ideas against other institutions. It is expected that employees apply what they learn to their practice (www.waketech.edu). \*\*Faculty rank is a system of promotion to "reward" faculty members and "are determined by a rigorous set of criteria, including innovative teaching strategies, leadership, community service, advanced credentials, and Applied Benchmarking initiatives" (www.waketech.edu). \*\*\*According to EPIC standards, all faculty teaching online must use a template in Blackboard, which is the college's learning management system (Scott, 2014)*

Whereas beliefs and attitudes about change and culture seemed to be largely be negative or concerning, qualified with a caveat, or departmental, those about EPIC were more evenly split with about 1/3 of participants falling into each of those categories (see Figure 2). It would appear that participants felt more positively about this specific change than about the institutional contexts of change and culture. As stated earlier, almost no participants mentioned EPIC when asked how they viewed change and instead referenced other changes such as technology, procedures, and even campus building names. When participants reacted negatively or with concerns about change, it seemed to largely be due to the belief that a change happened inexplicably. Even participants that mentioned changes that happened seemingly without warning or simply for “change’s sake” were frustrated because they did not understand how the change factored into their work and believed decisions were made without their input.

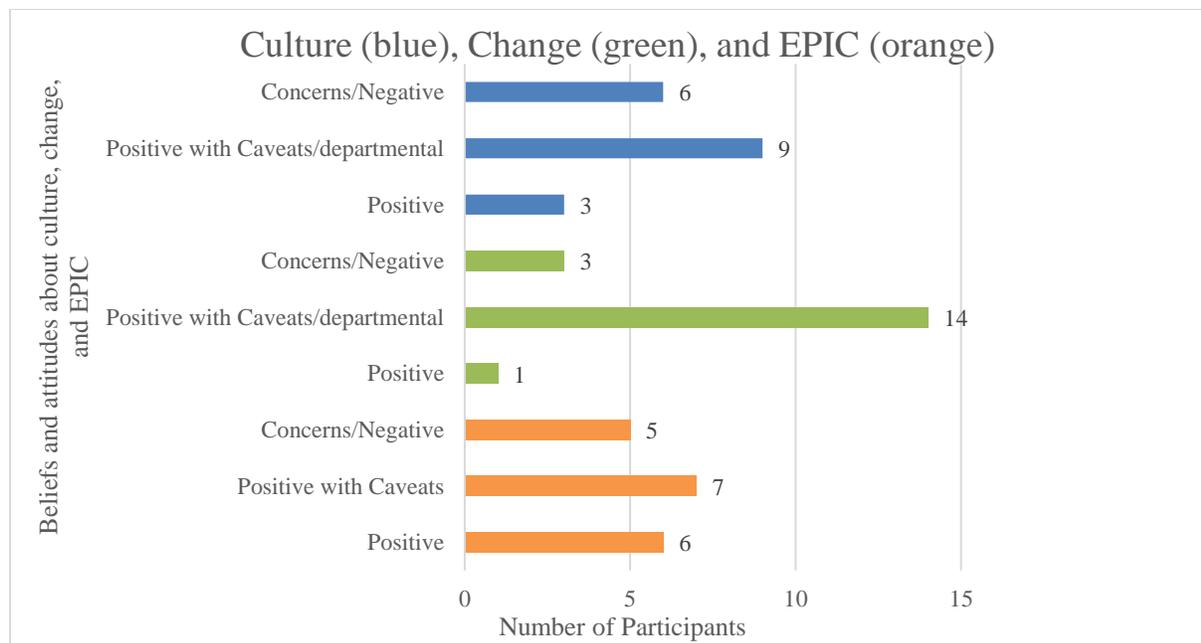


Figure 2: Culture, Change, and EPIC

In contrast to beliefs and attitudes about change and culture, many negative or concerned beliefs or assumptions about EPIC centered largely on things like whether students were well served by the initiative, the time and rigor (or perceived lack thereof) of the training requirement, or factors like elements of EPIC they felt had changed, did not fully understand, or they that were unaware of (such as course reviews).

Once again, when asked about culture or change many participants couched their responses in terms of their own department. While this may not necessarily signal an outright negative attitude toward the institution from a change or cultural standpoint, it is noteworthy that participants purposefully situated their beliefs in that context. When describing attitudes toward EPIC, however, participants did not associate their beliefs and assumptions at the departmental-level although many offered caveats as discussed earlier. Participants expressed frustration at meeting standards and facilitating courses effectively, but by not couching EPIC in departmental terms, it would appear that participants understood this change in an institutional context which may indicate that participants understood (made sense of) the change even if they did not like every aspect of it.

*Conclusion.* This two-part section has presented findings regarding EPIC as a major change and participants beliefs and attitudes about change, culture, and EPIC. While each participant had a unique perspective, all reported that, a) EPIC communications and participation in the program informed their perceptions of the change, b) they learned something about themselves, online teaching and pedagogy, and/or the college, and c) they developed perceptions around change and institutional culture over time. The following chapter will examine the findings based on the research questions and theoretical framework, connecting them with the literature and illuminating areas of further discovery.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Through in-depth interviews, this study aimed to qualitatively explore the following research question and sub-questions:

1. In what ways are relevant stakeholders developing perceptions around a major organizational change?
  - a. How are attitudes and perceptions of the QEP being formed among key stakeholder groups within the institution and why?
  - b. What are stakeholders learning about the change?
  - c. In what ways have their beliefs and/or assumptions about the QEP changed over time and why?

Through interviewing 18 relevant stakeholders, the findings reveal that perceptions and attitudes around change develop in a few different ways. This is not necessarily surprising given the large-scale nature of the change; however, multiple experiences with the change contribute to how individuals situate the change in their context. Furthermore, perceptions were not static and evolved over time for better or for worse. Once again, that evolution occurred based on experiences and exposure to components of EPIC such as training, communications, and personal experience with online teaching.

*Multifaceted Perceptions.* Because participants were experiencing EPIC in several ways, they developed complex perceptions of it. They did not view it as simply good or bad, but rather as a series of elements that had their own properties. For instance, EPIC was most frequently described as a training program when in fact it was an initiative that included training among other things. It could be possible that perceptions of change may form based on what is perceived as the most dominant aspect of it from that viewpoint of stakeholder groups.

Furthermore, general perceptions about change and culture also appear to vary based on context. For instance, two faculty members who teach online and experience EPIC similarly may formulate entirely different views of change and culture depending on their departmental experience. This calls to mind the concept of *loosely coupled systems* where many autonomous units operate with generally weak connections to one another (Boyce, 2003; Clark, 1983; Scott, 2014; Weick, 1976; Kezar, 2014). Once again, each unit is varied in terms of decision-making, priorities, and overarching goals (Kezar, 2014). In thinking about those systems, it seems reasonable that individuals would develop perceptions that align with their department or close colleagues.

*Loose Coupling.* Interestingly, perceptions around EPIC did not develop in a way that demonstrated the qualities of a loosely coupled system. Rather, individuals described experiences with communication and training as factors contributing to their perceptions. That may also explain why there was a different distribution of attitudes among participants about EPIC than culture or change. As discussed in Chapter 2, Weick (1976) found the insular nature of the loosely coupled system can lead to resistance to large-scale organization-wide change, even if individuals within those systems develop strong self-efficacy as they have autonomy in their areas (Weick, 1976).

This also brings to mind the concept of departmental association discussed in Chapter 2. Despite the fact that EPIC was presented in an institutional-wide context, individuals did not associate EPIC with their departments as they did with general beliefs about change and culture. The latter aligns with the literature that presents strong evidence that individuals most closely associate norms, beliefs, accepted behaviors, and beliefs about culture and climate with their department versus the larger institution (Campbell & O'Meara, 2013; Lindholm, 2003, Peterson,

1976). However, beliefs and attitudes about EPIC were not couched in this context, indicating that participants did not apply departmental associations to EPIC in the same way they did with culture and change in general.

Although individuals had constructive feedback about EPIC and some complaints, this study did not reveal major resistance. There were concerns and complaints, but all participants expressed a willingness to change *something* as a result of EPIC. This may have to do with the sentiment that a “punishment” may be applied if “compliance” was not detected; however, it may be attributed to many other things such as communication, belief that EPIC was a good initiative, or personal belief that EPIC contributed to the acquisition of valuable knowledge as several participants acknowledged. It is also possible that because participants spoke negatively about change and issues that were not teaching related, they felt differently about EPIC because it was an initiative designed around enhancing teaching practices and improving student learning outcomes.

*The Learning That Took Place.* Chapter 2 introduced the concept of Kezar’s *social cognition* structure wherein an organizational learning process takes place that changes the way individuals think about existing “norms, goals, and structures” changes in small or significant ways (2014, p. 31). Using this approach, organizational leaders can strive to help stakeholders develop modified or new mental models around the change. This is a useful approach for leaders when experiencing resistance to change (Kezar 2014). Through examining this from an employee perspective, change may cause some individuals to develop a sense of incompetence as they go from being experts in their fields to being novices in a new configuration (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The findings in this study did not necessarily align with this theory, though most participants indicated they learned new things. Holistically, however, many participants

indicated the training validated or built upon what they already knew or enabled them to get a review or refresher on things like Blackboard tools. This may indicate that while EPIC was a major change initiative in many respects, it did not upend the thinking of relevant stakeholders about their own competence, but rather reinforce previously held beliefs about their competence and add to an already robust repertoire of knowledge. It would appear that EPIC designers (purposefully or inadvertently) followed Bolman and Deal's suggestion that organizations can mitigate feelings of incompetence or newness by providing training on the new ways of doing things (2013).

Research questions 1b and 1c ask what participants learned about the change and how their beliefs and attitudes evolved over time. Because the professional development component dominated the conversation in both of these areas, it seems appropriate to look at them together as they may be closely related. Once again, EPIC is in its 4<sup>th</sup> year of implementation, and it is appropriate to infer that when people reflect on their attitudes about EPIC over time and what they have learned, they will draw on their most dominant experience with the initiative, in this case the professional development experience.

*Double Loop and Single Loop Learning.* Once again, Argyris and Schon (1978, 1996) theorize that because organizations are composed of individuals, organizational learning occurs through individual learning. Participants in this study experienced two major categories of learning: mindfulness and accessibility training. For both of these categories, participants described the learning as building on knowledge and skills they already had. Essentially, they learned new processes and procedures but did not describe a transformational change within themselves or a change in how they viewed the organization based on their experiences with EPIC. Through reflecting on Argyris and Schon's (1978, 1996) concepts of *single loop learning*

and *double loop learning* as a means through which organizations solve problems and facilitate change, it would appear that participants in this study experienced single loop learning. Once again, single loop learning occurs when individuals alter their actions such as improving on a process or finding a new way to do something. Their beliefs about the organization, however, remain the same (Argyris, 1990; Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2014). Single loop learning is often associated with *first order* change or that which is often considered structural or procedural in nature and is accomplished using familiar formulas or processes (Boyce, 2003). Accordingly, professional development is described as a means of facilitating first order change. Because the EPIC 30 professional development piece was central to the attitudes developed about EPIC and the things they learned, it is reasonable to theorize that a first order change or single loop learning occurred for this group.

A deeper, transformational change is considered *double loop learning*, and it occurs when the beliefs and assumptions about organizational governance are challenged (Argyris & Schon 1978, 1996). In the case of double loop learning, the policies, procedures, cultural norms, and structures are understood to be at odds with the goals of the organization in solving particular problems and must be viewed as contributors to those problems (Argyris, 1990; Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2014). Double loop learning is often associated with *second order change* and is thought of as irreversible, as the underlying assumptions about the organization undergo a transformational change (Boyce, 2003). While study participants had perceptions and beliefs that somewhat evolved over time about EPIC and the institution as a whole, there was no indication that participants' attitudes had changed drastically over time or that their entire belief system about the organization had been altered significantly. Despite some complaints, participants said they enjoy working at the college and much of the feedback they shared centered on facilitating

the best possible course for their students. Responses varied in terms of whether EPIC was helping or hurting, but the overall commitment to the institution and to student success was evident. No participant reported a dramatic shift in thinking about the organization or its mission.

*The Value of Single Loop Learning.* It may be tempting to view the single loop learning or first order change as being bad or worse than double loop learning or second order change, particularly given that double loop learning is associated with successful and sustainable institutional change (Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2014). I contend, however, that the findings from this study may offer a contrary perspective. Granted, I cannot look into the future and know whether EPIC will be sustained at the level it is today. Notwithstanding, findings in this study indicate that individuals have accepted the change, regardless of how they feel about it. Once again, a fear of punishment may factor in to that perceived acceptance, but every participant indicated they learned from EPIC training that they would use in their teaching, and most participants reported feeling positively about EPIC overall. In other words, while the learning may not have been transformational at the individual level, the group is mobilizing to make some changes and if that is happening for all 400+ faculty members who have gone through EPIC training, that could be viewed as a successful and potentially sustainable change initiative despite not being considered “second order.” Finally, as illuminated in Chapter 2, organizational learning is often associated with first order change as it is typically associated with a change or improvement in process or procedure is designed and implemented (Kezar, 2014).

*The Roles of Sensemaking and Constructivism.* In considering sensemaking and constructivism, the findings presented evidence of both frameworks. To quote Brookfield once again, “constructivism rejects universals and generalizable truths and focuses instead on the variability of how people make interpretations of their experiences” (2005, p. 15). Because

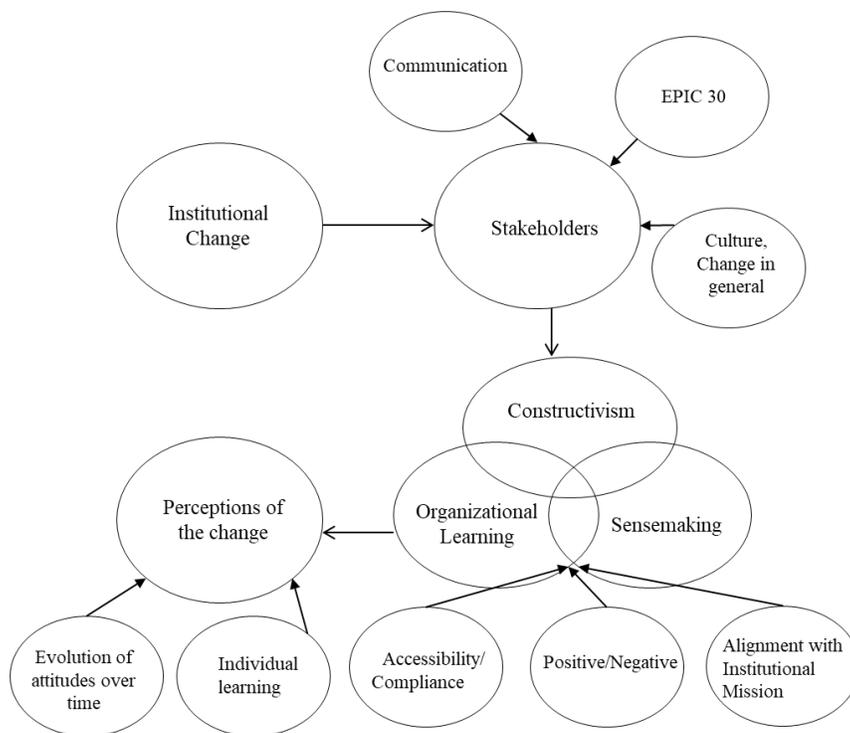
constructivist theory suggests that learning is an active practice of experimentation through which individuals develop perspectives about a change (Kezar, Gherke, & Elrod, 2015; Phillips, 1995; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2015), it is reasonable to conclude that participants engaged in this process as they applied their learning in practice through improving course structure, being more purposeful in their teaching, and considering new things such as colorblindness when designing courses. Furthermore, constructivist theory acknowledges past and present experiences with a phenomenon and how those experiences shape perspectives (Kezar, Gherke, & Elrod, 2015). This was particularly evident as participants described their experiences with training, communication, and implementation as they explained the evolution of their attitudes about EPIC over time and what experiences contributed to that evolution.

Although sensemaking is considered a significant component of double loop learning and second order change, it can occur through first loop learning and first order change as well (Kezar, 2014). Moreover, sensemaking is described by Kezar (2014) as a change in which individuals “only need to appreciate how a change might shape their identity and adopt the perspectives that emerge through the change process” (Kezar, 2014, p. 68). With that in mind, the data revealed that participants engaged in a reflective process of their identity as a teacher as they described more “mindful” and “purposeful” teaching as a result of the change. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of learning through the change may be considered a form of identity reflection as they acknowledged that their teaching could be improved with this new knowledge, whatever it may be.

In contrast to the way participants described their perceptions of EPIC, their descriptions of general change and organizational culture demonstrated qualities of the loosely coupled system where members operate within subgroups of the larger institution. Because participants

made a distinction from their department versus the college in terms of change and culture but not with EPIC, it appears that, indeed, cooperative and competing interests may exist at Wake Tech as they do for many educational institutions (Martin, 1992; Weick, 1976, 1995).

*Culture, Change, and a Reimagined Framework.* In trying to understand how this specific change was being interpreted by affected stakeholders, it helps to remember that individuals decipher events and activities within the context of "...the cultures they inhabit in order to address the contextual problems and events they must face" (Collins, 1998, p. 124). This study revealed that general change and culture were viewed somewhat negatively when applied to the institution and more positively when applied to their departments. This sentiment aligns with the concept that Kezar (2001) discussed when describing the collegium (faculty) and bureaucratic (administrative) values and how they may or may not contrast with one another. However, findings about change and culture differed from those about perceptions of EPIC, as participants were overall more positive and less polarized in their descriptions of perceptions of EPIC. It is likely, that despite the presence of a plurality of perspectives in the institution, that perceptions of culture and change did not negatively influence beliefs and attitudes about EPIC because EPIC aligned with the overarching goals and mission of the institution and possibly because it was perceived to contribute to teaching more so than things like benchmarking and faculty rank. It appears that EPIC was not viewed as going in the "wrong direction" (Killman et al., 1985) of the Wake Tech's mission and goals, thus enabling individuals to accept and execute the change, albeit begrudgingly in some cases. Figure 3 illustrates how the theoretical framework aligns with the findings from this study.



*Figure 3: Theoretical Framework with Themes and Findings*

*Conclusion.* This chapter presented findings by overarching categories and sub-categories focused on the formation of perspectives about a major change, the evolution of those attitudes and perspectives, and the learning that took place as a result of the change. The findings align with the literature and theoretical framework, albeit slightly differently than one may have expected. The following chapter will describe implications for research and practice, present a possible model for sustainable and significant change at a first order and single loop level, and offer recommendations to QEP leaders at Wake Tech and other institutions that may be useful in planning and implementing major change initiatives. The following chapter will provide concluding thoughts, implications for practice and research, and recommendations based on the literature and the data.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering that 270 (34%) schools of the 798 institutions that are accredited through SACSCOC are two-year institutions, it is noteworthy that very little empirical research exists focusing on how these schools undergo the *process* of change (SACSCOC, 2017). Those 270 institutions educate nearly 50% of all college students at a given time, thus elevating the importance of studying these colleges; understanding how they work, how they can improve, and how they design, implement, and sustain change (Bailey & Cho, 2010; Bailey, Jagers, & Jenkins, 2015; Wyner, 2014).

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) requirement for SACSCOC-accredited institutions presents an opportunity for scholars and practitioners to study and understand the process of change, assuming they have the resources to do so. Further, academic institutions are ideal settings for understanding strategic change as they embody a multitude of complex characteristics such as multifarious political, administrative, and decision-making structures, varying and often competing goals, and wide distributions of power (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

In an attempt to contribute to the small but growing body of literature about the QEP and change in community colleges, this study sought to illuminate the ways in which individuals developed perceptions of a major organizational change in an educational context. Because academic institutions are typically “bottom heavy” (Clark, 1983, p. 113), it seemed appropriate to examine change through the perspectives of individual stakeholders at the institution who were impacted by the change, but not directly involved in the leadership of the implementation. Through qualitative inquiry, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways are relevant stakeholders developing perceptions around a major organizational change?

- a. How are attitudes and perceptions of the QEP being formed among key stakeholder groups within the institution and why?
- b. What are stakeholders learning about the change?
- c. In what ways have their beliefs and/or assumptions about the QEP changed over time and why?

Through applying the three-pronged lens of constructivism, organizational learning, and sensemaking, this study endeavored to understand the process of change for individuals as they made meaning of new expectations, implemented required alterations to long-standing processes and procedures, and developed new understandings around online teaching. With this lens applied, the study focused heavily on how and why individuals made meaning and what elements (personal and institutional) influenced their beliefs and attitudes. The following section will summarize and conclude the findings of this study. Subsequent sections will present implications for research and practice and provide some recommendations for Wake Tech as it considers changes already in progress and those being considered for the future.

## **Conclusions**

As the findings presented in Chapter 4 revealed, Wake Tech stakeholders who are not involved with program implementation developed perceptions of change through a multitude of ways. The roles of organization culture and general perceptions of change, considered useful for contextualizing the perceptions and evolutions of attitudes and beliefs about EPIC, somewhat aligned with their attitudes toward EPIC. For instance, participants who felt overwhelmingly positive about culture and change also felt overwhelmingly positive about EPIC. Accordingly, participants with a more negative perspective of culture and change had attitudes toward EPIC that were mildly positive with caveats or somewhat negative in general. Of note, however, is that

individuals that described negative perceptions about culture or change generally felt less negatively about EPIC. In fact, nearly all participants believed EPIC was “a good thing,” some complaints notwithstanding.

One area of overwhelming positivity was that in which participants described culture, change, and beliefs about at the *departmental level*. While not all participants discussed their views in this context, those who did described their experiences and feelings of support as being positive. The departmental references by participants align with the idea of educational institutions being a series of *loosely coupled systems* in which many disparate units operate with little interaction or dependence on one another and tend to develop constructs around culture, processes, procedures, and innovation that remain insular (Boyce, 2003; Clark, 1983; Scott, 2014; Weick, 1976; Kezar, 2014). Therefore, it makes sense that many participants seemed to identify more strongly with their department than with the institution as a whole (research questions 1a and 1c).

In reflecting on how they were learning about the EPIC initiative, participants indicated that communications about EPIC seemed to have evolved to the point of being perceived as less frequent and, to some extent, less substantive. Early EPIC communications appeared to be more influential at the start of the initiative, igniting mostly enthusiasm among study participants. As the communications about EPIC were perceived to taper off, the actual experiences with EPIC (namely, the professional development component) appeared to be a dominant influence over individuals' perceptions about the initiative (research questions 1a and 1c).

In terms of learning (research question 1b), every participant indicated they learned something new through their experience with EPIC. Much of the learning was procedural in nature, such as how to develop accessible documents and videos or how to structure the

Blackboard template for an optimized and somewhat standardized student experience. However, some also reported developing more mindfulness toward their online teaching, moving the student experience to the forefront in designing and implementing their online courses. While this learning would not be considered transformational or *double loop learning*, it can be considered successful as a *single loop learning* or *first order change* as participants learned new skills and approaches through an intensive professional development engagement and reported applying those skills and approaches in practice (Argyris & Schon, 1978, 1996; Boyce, 2003; Kezar 2014). This is important as the term “transformation” is used frequently in describing the level of change(s) taking place at educational institutions and it is possible that the term may be used inappropriately to describe first order change.

It is likely that, because the EPIC initiative aligned closely with the institutions’ strategic goals (see Table 1), the change was not perceived as being out of step with the overall institutional mission by relevant stakeholders (thus, not triggering double loop learning or second order change). While the change was clearly disruptive and challenging in some ways for many participants, the overarching goals associated with EPIC were understood and accepted by participants even if some of the components seemed unappealing, unnecessary, and/or difficult. This brings to mind the successful QEP at GTCC (discussed in Chapter 2), where the elements of a strong commitment to the institutional mission, effective communication, professional development, and wide-spread participation among stakeholders were all found to contribute to the college’s success in implementing its QEP (Davis, 2009).

In thinking about second order change as being more closely associated with sustainable change than first order change (Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2014), this study (and that of GTCC) demonstrates that perhaps first order change can be associated with sustained change if it aligns

with the overarching goals and mission of the institution. Furthermore, while change is thought to be challenging in the context of loosely coupled systems (Boyce, 2003; Clark, 1983; Scott, 2014; Weick, 1976; Kezar, 2014), it is possible that if the autonomous units and individuals operating within that system have adopted the institutional goals and mission, changes that support the goals and mission may be less challenging to implement and sustain as they already align with existing constructs among groups and individuals about the institutional purpose. It is possible that not every successful and large-scale change that happens within an organization or institution is or needs to be second order or transformational.

The findings from this study indicate that big change may not need to be transformational in order to be wide-reaching and successful (at least in terms of garnering stakeholder cooperation). It is, therefore, possible that the phrase “transformational change” may be utilized in contexts where it is not appropriate, potentially creating a series of strong reactions when in fact individuals are simply being asked to modify or enhance an existing practice or set of practices. Institutional leaders, particularly those who must design and execute a QEP or something similar every few years, might benefit from considering the type of change they are planning for and how that they will frame that for institutional stakeholders who will be affected (see Implications for Practice for more about this).

### **Implications for Research**

This study highlights areas of future research in several ways because so little is known about the ways that educational institutions change in general, and even less is known about how change occurs in two-year institutions. Furthermore, the QEP is, by design, a student success initiative, and garnering a better understanding of how that process plays out and what lessons were learned, can only further the possibility that future QEP initiatives could be more

thoughtfully planned, more efficiently implemented, and most importantly, scalable and sustainable. Therefore, I call on scholars (novice and seasoned) to work with SACSCOCS two-year institutions to further contribute to the small but growing body of knowledge of change in this context. Because two-year institutions typically do not have the internal research resources of 4-year institutions, it is likely that outside parties with interest in these colleges will be the only available resource to help these schools document their processes and possibly, in some cases, assess the outcomes of their QEP.

*Longitudinal Studies.* Through a longitudinal approach, I suggest that as changes are planned and implemented, the roles of organizational culture and overall attitudes about change be closely considered throughout the process. While this study found that perceptions around culture and change did not neatly align with perceptions about EPIC, a longer study that began early in the planning process would likely reveal more information about how the institutional context plays a role in the process of change and how it unfolds at the individual level. Because we know that differing sets of values, beliefs, and assumptions may exist for different groups at an educational institution (Collins, 1988; Kezar, 2001; Killman et al., 1985; Martin, 1992), the consideration of departments as autonomous units should also be included as attitudes and perceptions about change and culture seemed to largely reside within those contexts.

In keeping with a longitudinal framework, I also recommend that researchers examining the process of change try to begin their work as change is being planned and, if possible, follow a cohort of actors (involved and non-involved but affected by the change) to more closely understand how perceptions of a change evolve over time. This study presented an evolution of beliefs and attitudes over time, through a reflective context where participants recalled how beliefs and attitudes changed over time, and I was able to make connections with aspects of

communication and experience to understand the evolution of those constructs. While this study was a good start, a longer, more prolonged engagement with participants would enable the research to capture those influencers of beliefs and attitudes *as they evolve* and document how those elements contributed to acceptance or resistance to change.

*Capture the Process of Change as it Unfolds.* In reviewing the QEP literature, it was evident that very little empirical work has been done in this area. Because nearly 800 institutions fall under the SACSCOC umbrella (SACSCOC, 2017), it would be useful to examine the QEP *process* on a large-scale, utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods to attempt to uncover how QEPs are planned and executed, what constitutes long-term success, and how seemingly successful QEPs were achieved. For instance, it may be useful to revisit some of the universities and colleges described in Chapter 2 and retrospectively explore how their QEPs unfolded, what worked, and what challenges they faced. Moreover, garnering information about the measured success of the initiative(s) may illuminate some possible best practices for other colleges and universities to utilize in their planning. Such contributions to the scholarly literature could be useful to QEP planning teams, institutional leaders, and possibly to SACSCOC as it evaluates Quality Enhancement Plans during the reaffirmation process. Once again, the QEP requirement has been in place for just over 10 years so there is much that is still unknown about this new, but highly impactful, requirement (SACSCOC, 2017).

*Consider the Loosely Coupled System.* As stated earlier, participants in this study seemingly identified more strongly and positively with their departments than with the institution on the whole. This is an area that may need further exploration as educational institutions (considered *loosely coupled systems*), are composed of series of subcultures, each with their own normative behaviors and constructs and, likely, their own ways of processing change (Boyce,

2003; Clark, 1983; Scott, 2014; Weick, 1976; Kezar, 2014). Scholars may consider exploring the process of change for subgroups (not just individuals) within an institution through lenses such as social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), or social network theory (Daly, 2010). Through applying a socially-related lens to understanding how individuals and groups make meaning of change, researchers may more completely understand how change occurs among groups and potentially identify strategies that may help leaders plan and implement change with a framework of subcultures. Further, scholars may consider examining change in the context of these smaller subcultures to see patterns exist between beliefs about large-scale change and the beliefs and attitudes about change at the local levels of the institution.

*Apply Additional Theoretical Lenses.* From a theoretical perspective, there are several other appropriate ways to examine change in educational settings and two-year schools specifically. As open-access institutions, community colleges are appropriate settings for research framed with social justice, equity, finance, policy, and student success lenses. Because the process of change may be largely influenced by the alignment of the change with overarching mission and goals of the institution, other lenses from disciplines such as business may be fruitful in understanding how change comes about for institutions. From a change management perspective, other grassroots lenses (such as Kezar, Gallant, & Lester's (2011) theory of *tempered radicals*) along with leadership-based lenses could be revealing, as both the upper end and lower end of educational institutions contribute to change in significant ways. Scholars could consider facilitating comparison studies within an institution or multiple institutions exploring how leadership and institutional stakeholders affected by change develop perceptions and how those perceptions may deviate from and/or overlap with one another.

*Apply Sensemaking in First Order Change Contexts.* Finally, because sensemaking is often associated with second order change or transformational change, I suggest that researchers apply sensemaking to understanding change processes in a variety of contexts. Though a change may not be transformational in nature, sensemaking may likely occur for affected constituents as they develop perceptions around something new. If leaders and planning teams can better understand how individuals develop perceptions and attitudes initially and over time, they could develop informed plans around things like communication, stakeholder feedback, and the evolutionary stages of the change (and thus perceptions of the change). Developing informed plans may be difficult, however, if scholarship focuses primarily on things like program assessment and leadership versus the *process of change* and how it unfolds for the largest group of affected stakeholders.

### **Implications for Practice**

As revealed in Chapter 2, SACSCOC-accredited institutions approach the QEP process very differently from one another, albeit in alignment with accreditor requirements. Because every institution is unique and, therefore, designs and implements changes that fit its institutional profile and meet its needs and the needs of its students, it would not make sense to develop a one-size-fits-all approach to change for a QEP (or any change for that matter). Moreover, this study did not aim to develop an approach to change, but rather examine how affected parties make sense of the change. Notwithstanding, the findings from this study present some opportunity for change leaders and stakeholders alike to consider how change occurs for individuals.

*Consider the Type of Change Proposed.* Early in the planning process, leaders may consider asking themselves what kind of change it is they are considering (first order, second

order, something else). This may be an important step that could inform subsequent decisions about communication, infrastructure supports/changes, and staffing. It's worth restating that first order is not bad or less impactful than second order change. It just means that the change, though something considered "new," aligns with the mission, normative practices, and beliefs at the institution. It is not a change that challenges individuals to completely reevaluate their assumptions or beliefs about something. Rather, it is intended to be an improvement or enhancement of existing structures.

*Involve a Representative Group of Stakeholders.* In terms of bridging the gap between departments and the institution as a whole, change leaders may also consider thoughtfully involving department heads in the planning and implementation of the change and recruiting individuals from the affected departments to participate on committees. While this may not play out perfectly (as some departments may not be affected by a change, for instance), such an effort may demonstrate that leaders want a representative sample of affected constituents at the table for the process. Some participants in this study indicated they felt like portions of EPIC did not neatly align with their teaching philosophy or strategies. Generating equitable (or as equitable as possible) participation from stakeholder groups across the institution at all phases may alleviate some of those negative reactions because people have an opportunity to offer feedback along the way. Accordingly, they may become champions of the initiative and can communicate their positivity within their department, a seemingly safe and influential place for many participants in this study and, in accordance with the literature, a space through which faculty feel the strongest affiliation (Campbell & O'Meara, 2013; Lindholm, 2003; Peterson, 1976).

*Examine the Cultural Context and Readiness for Change at the Institutional and Departmental Levels.* Because change and culture were found to be somewhat contentious topics

for some participants and may have had some influence on their attitudes about this change, it may be worthwhile for change leaders to do a thorough examination (both qualitatively and quantitatively) of perceptions of change and culture among institutional constituents and departments. If leaders find, for instance, that stakeholders are experiencing fatigue or expressing difficulty understanding institutional changes within their departmental context, those leaders can take steps early in the process to address existing issues and design things like communications, supports, and timelines with those perceptions in mind. In addition to informing the change design, it's possible that the process of engaging stakeholders in conversations before the planning and implementation phases of change begin may have other positive consequences such as enabling stakeholders to feel that their voices are heard and providing them a forum where they can express themselves to a captive audience of decision-makers.

*Develop Learning Objectives for the Change.* This study revealed that *some* learning took place for all participants, regardless of their position on EPIC. As participants develop new constructs around a change and make sense of those new constructs, learning occurs in some way – either single loop or double loop (Argyris, 1990; Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2014). The type of learning notwithstanding, institutional leaders planning change may consider developing a set of learning objectives for stakeholders that are affected by the change. These may be broader in nature than, say, learning objectives for a professional development session or module. Rather, the learning objectives in the broader context of the change can be developed for varying stages of the change. Further, the objectives can inform assessment instruments that can capture the process of change (e.g. are people learning as we thought they would?) in addition to the objectives of the change itself (e.g. are we improving student learning outcomes?). In other

words, leaders may consider designing a two-fold assessment plan, one for the process and the other for the program.

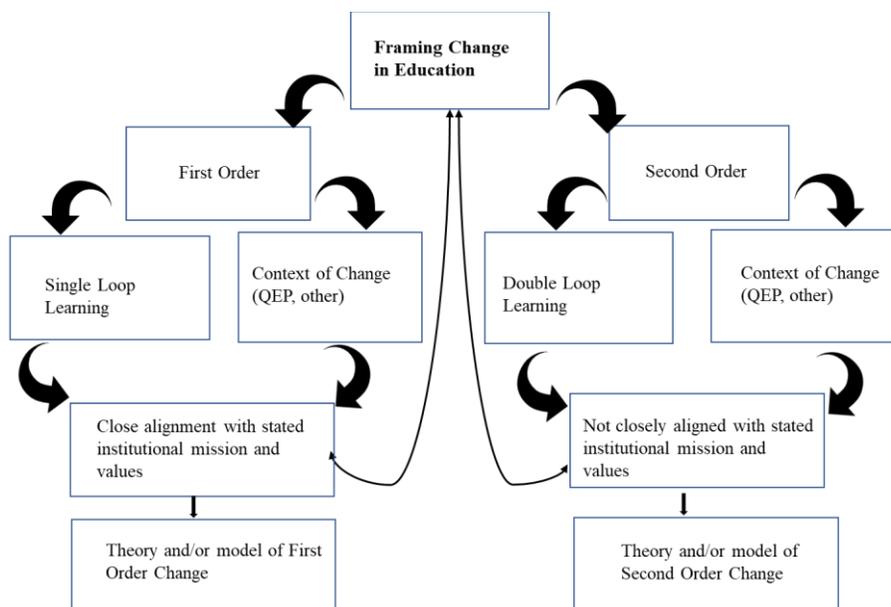
For two-year colleges, in particular, I recommend that these institutions attempt to partner with a nearby university or research organization to assist in evaluating and documenting the process of change. Such an arrangement could provide several benefits. Community colleges typically have far fewer researchers on campus than their four-year counterparts, so research resources may be limited anyway. Additionally, someone or a team that is not affiliated with the institution may be considered less biased than an internal researcher and would likely not be constrained by the internal political environment to the extent that an employee may be. However, it is recommended that an outside party partner closely with an internal counterpart so they can be guided in terms of navigating the complexities of the institution, as establishing trust is important when garnering feedback about institutional policies and changes from stakeholders.

### **Implications for Theory and Policy**

*Implications for Theory.* This study applied a three-pronged lens of constructivism, sensemaking and organizational learning to a major change in an educational context. I believe this was a useful lens in this context, as it allowed for flexibility in terms of structuring the interview protocol and data analysis for the Wake Tech-specific context. However, I encourage more widespread use of this lens in other change contexts to see if a more targeted theory or model emerges as appropriate. For instance, there may be an appropriate model or theory of change in the context of a QEP, particularly given the specific requirements put forth by SACSCOC.

As discussed in Chapter 2, schools like Guilford Tech (GTCC) and Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) designed and implemented successful QEPs that closely aligned with their

institutional mission and values. It is possible that theories may emerge around connecting institutional mission and values with those associated with change initiatives and/or the QEP. However, this study revealed that such changes may be first order and, therefore, did not necessarily meet the threshold for deep, transformational change. Thus, there may be theories or models that surface as they pertain to the type of change, the context of change, and the alignment of change with the institutional mission and values. In terms of thinking about to frame change and begin to think about theories and/or models, Figure 4 proposes a potential starting point for leaders as they plan for and initiate change and for scholars as they consider new models and theories of change in educational contexts.



*Figure 4: Proposed Model for Framing Change*

The model proposes first considering either, a) what type of change is being considered and/or b) whether the change aligns with stated (or possibly perceived) institutional mission and values. From there, scholars and leaders may consider developing and testing theories of first

order and second change to see how they play out differently in the contexts of a QEP (2-year and 4-year) and outside of the context of a QEP. Because each of these scenarios calls for unique approaches to planning and implementation, a stand-alone theory for each may give leaders and scholars some direction in terms of leading and studying change in educational settings.

*Implications for Policy.* Though this intrinsic case study explores a major change in a single context (Wake Tech's QEP), there are implications for policy at the institutional and, potentially, at the regional accreditation level. The findings, analysis, and conclusion portions of this study illustrate that there may be many things for leaders to consider as they implement change. However, leaders may also consider writing policies around change that includes the requirement of things such as milestones for planning, stakeholder involvement, alignment with institutional goals, communication strategy, sustainability strategy, etc. If it is determined that a change is beyond first order, leaders may consider reexamining the stated (and implied) mission and values of the institution and determine what communication strategy may be needed in order to link the change as closely as possible to the mission and values and/or be ready to explain why this change may appear not to align if that is the case.

In terms of SACSCOC, there may be policies or guidelines it can provide to schools to help colleges and universities determine what type of change they are considering and how to go about planning and executing it. Though SACSCOC provides guidelines on the change itself and encourages institutions to involve a wide range of stakeholders and develop an assessment plan, the requirement does not provide guidance on how to frame and communicate about change at the institutional level. It may be useful for SACSCOC to develop some overarching guidelines or procedures (based on empirical work) that can serve as a playbook for designing and managing a large-scale, multi-year change.

## **Recommendations for Wake Tech and Others**

*For EPIC.* There are three critical implications for Wake Tech based on this study. Because EPIC is in its fourth year of implementation (of five total), I will provide suggestions that apply to EPIC but also suggestions that may help inform future QEP development. From a professional development perspective, many participants expressed concern that they forgot their training, would need future professional development as technology evolved, and were concerned about whether EPIC could be sustained. With this in mind, I suggest that EPIC leaders consider assembling a representative sample of individuals across departments to begin discussing and possibly designing an ongoing professional development plan for online faculty members. Because participants indicated that communications about EPIC were sparse *and* because many participants indicated they felt more positively about culture and change in their departments, a representative sample across departments will help ensure that every major stakeholder subgroup is represented in the design, planning, and implementation of a sustainability program for EPIC.

Additionally, I suggest that EPIC leaders communicate the sustainability effort to the larger constituency of stakeholders, inviting widespread participation and support, and emphasizing the student success component of EPIC and its successor. Again, the perception is that communication is waning so an effort to reinvigorate the communication effort may ignite some enthusiasm for EPIC, particularly given that participants in this study indicated they associated EPIC with training and compliance initiatives, giving little mention of student success in online courses. From an overarching standpoint, I recommend that leaders brand this as a sustainability plan (with a powerful name like Successful Online Learning Outcomes– SOLO) that would ultimately encompass all future professional development, change initiatives, and

communications around online learning and online teaching. Branding this as an ongoing effort to support online students may assuage the concerns of stakeholders that EPIC is not sustainable and/or that EPIC is a one-time program will fall by the wayside at year five. This aligns with Bolman and Deal's (2013) contention that changes or disappearance of symbols can lead to a sense of loss and tendency to mourn. They suggest formalizing the *transition* from one symbol to another through a ritual of passage by arranging for an official celebration of welcome for the new symbols - all as a means to help participants avoid shutting down and resisting the change (in this case, the rebranding) altogether. Further, a rebranding effort may potentially influence the way individuals think about change, as a one-time initiative to a new way of doing things going forward (note also that *initiative* is the in the full name of EPIC).

Moreover, moving away from the EPIC name may enable stakeholders who associate EPIC with training and compliance (as many participants in this study did) to move on from that and begin to see the sustainability plan as something more student-focused and supportive of continuous improvement in teaching, and, therefore, less frightening and cumbersome. A name like SOLO (or something similar) implies there is less focus on compliance and more attention brought to autonomy and agency in terms of continually improving one's online teaching skills, building new knowledge around online teaching, and focusing on student success in online courses.

This study also illuminated beliefs and attitudes amongst participants about course reviews. As discussed in Chapter 4, participants used words and phrases such as, "punitive," "compliance," and "audits," and expressed concern they would "get in trouble" or lose their online teaching privileges if their courses did meet all EPIC standards. Despite the fact that course reviews are confidential and faculty names are never known to anyone other than the

reviewers (Scott, 2014), faculty were concerned that the review results, if negative or “non-compliant”, would influence their status in a negative way. I recommend that EPIC leaders devise a communication strategy around course reviews that has broad reach, describing the process and reassuring individuals that they will not be punished if their courses are reviewed and issues are uncovered. The course reviews were meant to inform the EPIC assessment and plans for future iterations of professional development (Scott, 2014). However, participants in this study seemed unaware of that and expressed fear about potential repercussions as a result of the reviews. This issue may be urgent, as reviews are underway in this year of implementation.

*Future Wake Tech Initiatives.* This study and the review of the literature indicates that initiatives, when aligned with the institutional mission and goals, can be successfully implemented (regardless of program outcomes). It is possible that, because EPIC was framed as a program that supported specific, strategic institutional goals, participants understood and accepted the underpinnings of the program, despite some complaints about its components. As revealed in Chapter 4, participants spoke of their commitment to their students, with many stating that online student outcomes needed improvement and that EPIC itself was needed. As Wake Tech leaders consider other changes, I recommend replicating the communication strategy used for EPIC by linking the change (even smaller scale changes) to the mission and goals of the institution *and* sharing outcomes results along the way. If participants believe the change aligns with the larger-scale institutional values and they are able to see the impact of their efforts, individuals may be less inclined to be critical of a change.

In alignment with the implications for practice discussed earlier, I encourage Wake Tech leaders to consider the type of change they are proposing and how that will be framed for stakeholders. For instance, if a change is described as transformative and it ends up being an

enhancement or improvement to existing processes or procedures, it may, a) needlessly frighten people and, b) dilute the idea of transformative change for stakeholders. If individuals associate transformative change with say, learning new Blackboard tools, they may be ill-prepared for a truly transformational or second order change that triggers an intense evaluation of everything they know or believe about something (Argyris & Schon, 1978, 1996; Boyce, 2003; Kezar 2014). Moreover, through framing a change as first order (if indeed it is), stakeholders may be less fearful about it and develop faster and stronger acceptance of a change that is framed as an enhancement to existing processes and/or building on existing knowledge and constructs (versus completely breaking them down and rebuilding them).

Through participants' feedback and stories about the EPIC 30 professional development requirement, I recommend considering future professional development initiatives that are associated with enhancing or improving practices in a way that meets people where they are. As discussed in Chapter 4, one participant this study recommended structuring a tiered training program where individuals have flexibility to test out of modules or take more advanced modules, while others indicated they would have liked to "test out" of modules such as those involving basic Blackboard training. It is worth noting once again that many participants indicated that the professional development was a "review" or described a few new things they learned. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it may indicate that people might feel more positively about training if they could demonstrate existing expertise and engage more fully in topics with which they are less familiar or do not know at all. It is also possible that through testing out of modules, individuals may develop feelings of confidence about their knowledge on a topic and thus, exhibit stronger feelings of efficacy in their teaching and course design. This calls to mind the importance of repetition in fostering the evolution of normative practices

described in Chapter 2 (Kezar, 2014; Weick, 1979). However, in thinking about theories of sensemaking and constructivism, individuals tend to resist or opt out of participating in change if it does not align with their values or they are unable to identify a connection with the change (Kezar, 2013). In this case, the association with training as a “review” for some participants may have influenced their ability to associate EPIC with a change in approaching online learning versus a building on existing knowledge and skills and not offering, as one participant indicated, “much that was new.”

Similar to the earlier suggestion of assembling a representative group of stakeholders for the sustainability effort, I recommend that leaders considering additional change at Wake Tech devise a plan for gathering a group across the college with representatives from each affected department. Because that may be fraught politically and emotionally as some participants expressed concern about time spent on non-teaching activities, it may be worth allowing change-related committee members to serve in lieu of completing a benchmarking project for that academic year. Several participants mentioned benchmarking as a time-consuming activity, so offering a year off may be appealing for people and could possibly appeal to individuals that may normally choose not to get involved with change initiatives because of time concerns. Chapter 2 described how leaders negotiate and build alliances, working to overcome resistance to change by identifying influencers among change supporters (Kezar, 2014). Through incentivizing participants, Wake Tech leaders may be more quickly able to assemble a diverse group of supporters and influences across all affected areas of the college.

This study also revealed that institutional culture and general beliefs and attitudes about change, a) were strong amongst participants and, b) may uniquely influence the way that individuals develop perceptions around each change. Once again, the data revealed that

participants were skeptical of change at the institutional level, believed it was discussed but not followed through, and/or related their attitudes and beliefs about change and culture to their departmental-level experiences. In light of this, I suggest that Wake Tech leaders attempt to collect data within the institution about perceptions of culture and change during the early planning phases of a change. This could be executed through a survey to all institutional stakeholders collecting data on things like departmental versus institutional culture, readiness for change, scenarios where change was welcomed and accepted and those in which the change was not accepted or welcomed. Findings from that survey could be disseminated to stakeholders through a report with talking points that address major findings (positive and negative). Findings could also inform future professional development for or communications to institution stakeholders in areas such as change management, community-building, cross-disciplinary work group opportunities, and similar initiatives.

*Recommendations for Community Colleges.* Although this study was situated in the nuanced context of Wake Tech, these findings revealed some broader implications for community colleges. For one, community colleges tend to have fewer on-campus for internal research than their four-year counterparts. The lack of research resources may create barriers and delays when these schools are designing and implementing changes. As stated earlier, I suggest that community colleges attempt to partner with nearby universities or research firms to facilitate the research needed to assess the institutions readiness for change (culture, existing policies, etc.), assess the change as it evolves and, as importantly, assess the process so that successes, challenges, and lessons can be captured and considered along the way and in the future. As the institution collects data over time, the process of change may become easier as a knowledge base

is developed at all levels of the organization about change; what to expect, how to communicate, how to facilitate learning and adoption, etc.

Because the findings in this study indicate that first order change can be large-scale, impactful, and potentially successful, I recommend that community colleges consider the type of change being proposed and how the scale of the change will be communicated. As community colleges balance accountability from their states, legislators, communities, and internal constituents, they will likely have a multitude of initiatives going on at once. Introducing a major, “transformative” change may be interpreted as disruptive to other changes and/or feel like a burden as so many other things are being asked of stakeholder at any given time. If a change is first order, I suggest framing it as such (in lay terms) so that individuals who are affected by the change can see the change in the context of other changes and in the context of their roles. For instance, it may be easier for someone to accept they may need to change a procedure rather than to accept a complete overhaul of their roles and responsibilities. While those overhauls may be necessary sometimes, leaders should consider framing non-transformative changes in a simplified and palatable way.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This intrinsic case study at Wake Tech illustrated that change, while challenging, complex, and not without some flaws, is possible when the change aligns with the real and perceived mission and values of the institution and is accompanied by supports through training. Further, the alignment and support components provide a foundation for first order change whereby individuals are asked to adjust attitudes and beliefs and, somewhat significantly, change processes and procedures. The concepts of learning, sensemaking, and constructivism all hold in this scenario, but they are not transformative in the sense that beliefs and attitudes were upended

by a completely new concept or experience. This is important because it implies that change does not *need* to be branded as transformative to be impactful, large-scale, or successful. Not only is that incorrect in some cases, it may be detrimental to an effort that is not transformative, as individuals may apply previously held beliefs and constructs to a situation inappropriately and, thus, may resist.

For this study, participants offered constructive feedback about training, communication, culture, change, and how their beliefs were formed and evolved over time. While I contend that they engaged in single loop learning in the context of a first order change, I encourage the college to revisit issues of culture and change after the EPIC sustainability plan is in place and underway. If they find, after talking with stakeholders, that feelings about change and culture evolved as a result of experiencing a change that “worked” and became part of the institutional lexicon, that may indeed be transformative.

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**APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Initial Email to Solicit Participants

Greetings! ~

My name is Lauren Pellegrino and I am a part-time faculty member at Wake Tech and a doctoral student at NC State in the College of Education. I am writing because I am conducting a qualitative research study to garner feedback from Wake Tech stakeholders regarding EPIC. You may recall that last year I conducted a similar study that examined stakeholder perceptions around SAIL and EPIC.

This year, I am focusing solely on EPIC. I endeavor to examine the ways that stakeholders across the institution are internalizing EPIC and collect feedback about what people are learning, what they believe is working well, and gather recommendations for improvements. Up until now, I have been talking with folks who have been directly involved with EPIC planning and implementation.

At this time, I would like to garner feedback from employees who are not directly involved with the program (sitting on committees, etc.). The purpose of this portion of the study is to garner information regarding how non-EPIC involved stakeholders perceive the program today and how your perceptions of EPIC have evolved and continue to evolve as program implementation continues.

I have attached with letter with some additional information. If you would like to participate in this valuable study, please let me know and we can schedule a time to talk in person or via telephone. Generally, the meetings will last anywhere from 20 to 30 minutes. Please email me at [lnpellig@ncsu.edu](mailto:lnpellig@ncsu.edu) if you would like to schedule a time to talk.

If you would like to view the report that I supplied last year, click here: [EPIC Report 2015](#)

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Thank you!  
Lauren

Lauren Pellegrino  
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Teaching Assistant, Qualitative Methods I & II  
Department of Educational Leadership, Policy and Human Development  
College of Education  
Poe Hall Rm. 530  
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[lnpellig@ncsu.edu](mailto:lnpellig@ncsu.edu)

## Appendix B: Follow-up Personal Email to Solicit Participants

Good afternoon Mr./Ms./Dr.

You may have received an email from me concerning EPIC research. I wanted to follow up with a personal request to participate in this research study. As a reminder, my name is Lauren Pellegrino and I am a part-time faculty member at Wake Tech and a doctoral student at NC State in the College of Education. I am writing because I am conducting a qualitative research study to garner feedback from Wake Tech stakeholders regarding EPIC. You may recall that last year, I conducted a similar study that examined stakeholder perceptions around SAIL and EPIC.

This year, I am focusing solely on EPIC. I endeavor to examine the ways that stakeholders across the institution are internalizing EPIC and collect feedback about what people are learning, what they believe is working well, and gather recommendations for improvements. Up until now, I have been talking with folks who have been directly involved with EPIC planning and implementation.

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Thank you in advance for your consideration.

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Lauren

Lauren Pellegrino  
Doctoral Student  
Teaching Assistant, Qualitative Methods I & II  
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Poe Hall Rm. 530  
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## Appendix C: Participant Letter

Dear Participant,

My name is Lauren Pellegrino and I am a doctoral student in the department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Human Development at NC State University. I also serve as a part-time faculty member and research intern in the EPIC office at Wake Technical Community College. You are being invited to participate in a **voluntary** research study.

The purpose of the study is to gain knowledge about your experiences with the EPIC. I would like to garner an understanding of your experiences with EPIC, directly and/or indirectly. I would like to ask you about those experiences, how you have developed perceptions of the change, and what you have learned as EPIC is being implemented.

I will ask 10-15 questions and some follow up questions. You are welcome to share as much or as little information as you wish. You are NOT required to answer any questions. If you prefer not to answer, you can choose not to answer and you may end the interview at any time.

If you agree to participate, I will conduct one (1) interview that will last approximately 20-30 minutes. The interview will be recorded with an audio recorder. There will no video or still photos taken. If you wish, I will provide a written version of the recording for your review. If you would like to make changes or clarifications, you are certainly welcome to do so. I will provide a list of questions beforehand. You are able to withdraw from the study before, during, or after the interview. I may ask if you would like to participate in a follow up interview or ask clarifying questions after the initial interview. Again, you are under no obligation to agree to participate.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and any personal information obtained about you will be kept **strictly confidential**. I will store the audio recording and transcripts in password-protected folders on a password-protected computer and there will be no identifying information associated with the files. When findings are shared, all names and identifying information will be changed (including academic discipline, gender, etc.).

If you have any questions or need further clarifications, please let me know. If you wish to view the report that I provided to Dr. Scott and the executive team at WTCC last year, you can access it here: [EPIC Report 2015](#)

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lauren Pellegrino

Doctoral Student, North Carolina State University, [lnpelle@ncsu.edu](mailto:lnpelle@ncsu.edu)

## Appendix D: Interview Protocol

### High-Level Questions – Key to answering research questions

1. Tell me about EPIC. (make note about what they choose to focus on)
2. How do you feel about EPIC?
3. In what ways has your thinking about EPIC changed over time? (probing question(s) about what or who influences their thinking)
4. What are you learning? (probing questions about pedagogy, technical skills, self-reflection, things they did not know before EPIC launched)

### Probing/Additional Questions

1. When did you first hear about EPIC?
  - a. Do you recall how learned about it?
  - b. Do you recall how you initially felt about this program?
2. How do you believe EPIC has/will impact your work here?
3. Tell me about the communications you receive concerning EPIC.
4. If you were asked to participate in EPIC, would you do it? Why or why not?
5. What concerns you about EPIC?
6. Is there anything that you want WTCC administration to know with regard to EPIC?
7. Do you believe EPIC can be successful? Why or why not?
8. If you could change anything (or several things) about EPIC or the process, what would it (they) be?

### For faculty members:

9. Describe your experiences with EPIC certification.

- a. If you are EPIC certified (or getting certified), how has that influenced your teaching?
10. Are you noticing any differences in your online course(s) since EPIC was launched?

**For supervisors**

11. How do you communicate with your employees about EPIC?
12. How do employees respond to communication about EPIC and other changes?

**Change Management Questions**

1. Do you believe that change and innovation are encouraged at the institution? If so, in what ways? If not, describe why you believe they are not encouraged.
2. Describe the organizational culture at WTCC.
3. In what ways have you been involved with the change management process?
4. Please describe the communications you receive about change at the institution.
5. Do you feel you were prepared for the change? If so, how? If not, in what ways?
6. Generally speaking, how do you feel about large-scale changes like EPIC?
7. Do you think you would want to get involved with future changes? Why or why not?

## Appendix E: Informed Consent

### North Carolina State University INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study Complex Contributors to Perceptions of Major Institutional Change

Principal Investigator Lauren Pellegrino      Faculty Sponsor (if applicable) Audrey Jaeger and Chad Hoggan

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#### **What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this voluntary study is to garner feedback and perceptions from Wake Tech stakeholders about the eLearning Preparedness Across the College (EPIC) initiative that is currently being implemented. The goal of this study is to understand how perceptions are formed among stakeholders who are not currently involved with the planning or implementation of the program.

#### **What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a private interview that will last approximately 30 minutes. We will agree on a time and place that works best for you. We can also arrange to conduct the interview via telephone. In either case, I will record the interview using a recording device. Again, this study is voluntary and you can opt not to answer questions or end the interview anytime. The recorded data will be transcribed by a third party that is not affiliated with the community college or the university. I will provide you with a copy of the transcription for review and proofreading. You are welcome to make any changes you wish. At any time before or during the study, you are free to opt out of the study (including after the interview is conducted).

#### **Risks**

The risks associated with this research are minimal.

#### **Benefits**

Because I am capturing perceptions from stakeholders across the institution and will present those findings to college leadership, it is possible that the findings could inform policy or procedure changes that may benefit employees that are impacted by major change (this change or future changes). Accordingly, it is my hope that as people share their experiences and perceptions, they feel empowered to influence the way change is designed and executed at their place of employment.

#### **Confidentiality**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in a password-protected laptop in a password-protected folder. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide. I acknowledge that during the conversation, you may reveal your name, department, or other identifying information. I will take great care to omit that information from transcribed data and thus, ensure that no identifying information is included in the final reports. I will only use direct quotes if I deem they are “generic” and could not link the reader back to a department or a person.

**Compensation**

You will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

**What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Lauren Pellegrino at [lnpelle@ncsu.edu](mailto:lnpelle@ncsu.edu) or 813-503-0357.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at [dapaxton@ncsu.edu](mailto:dapaxton@ncsu.edu) or by phone at 1-919-515-4514.

**Consent To Participate**

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: EPIC 30 Course List

## EPIC Curriculum Faculty Online Teaching Certificate

- **EPIC Objective 2 - Faculty Preparedness:** Help faculty design and deliver online courses in accordance with Wake Tech's Quality eLearning Standards.

It is recommended that faculty take the PD courses in the order listed on the checklist. The pre-requisite courses provide the skill to help faculty gain a better understanding of Blackboard functionality. Blackboard Skills Training courses taken more than 3 years prior to completion of *EPIC 101: Best Practices in Course Navigation and Design* will not be counted towards earning the EPIC Curriculum Faculty Online Teaching Certificate.

## EPIC Curriculum Faculty Online Teaching Certificate Courses

EPIC Curriculum Faculty Online Teaching Certificate Courses	PD Credits
<p><b>ACC 101: Introduction to Accessibility</b>            This self-paced, online course provides a basic overview of accessibility guidelines that will help you gain an understanding of how to make your course content accessible to all learners. This course will include: core accessibility concepts as well as instruction on how create accessible documents, accessible presentations, accessible multimedia, and accessible Blackboard content. Resources to facilitate the creation of accessible course content will be provided.</p> <p><i>Course Objectives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, describe, and explain core accessibility concepts.</li> <li>• Create basic accessible documents, presentations, and multimedia.</li> <li>• Identify resources to facilitate the creation of accessible course content.</li> </ul>	3
<p><b>TLS 101: Introduction to Universal Design for Learning</b>            This course introduces learners to the Universal Design for Learning theory and offers participants tips and resources for applying UDL in their own courses. After completing this course participants will be able to explain the principles of UDL.</p> <p><i>Course Objectives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and explain the Multiple Means of Representation principle.</li> <li>• Identify and explain the Multiple Means of Action and Expression principle.</li> <li>• Identify and explain the Multiple Means of Engagement principle.</li> </ul>	4
<p><b><i>BBD.101: Blackboard Skills Development – Course Structure and Navigation</i></b>            This one-week online course provides an overview of how to customize your Blackboard course environment and access resources used to effectively present course materials in a logical manner. Upon completion of this session participants will be able to: customize the course menu, create course menu items, identify and apply course themes, and change the Course Menu color schemes.</p> <p><i>Course Objectives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize Wake Tech's recommended default course menu.</li> <li>• Identify the steps to add and delete menu items.</li> <li>• Identify the steps to rename menu items.</li> <li>• Recognize recommended course themes.</li> <li>• Identify the steps to apply a new course theme.</li> <li>• Identify the steps to change the color scheme of the course menu.</li> <li>• Describe online learning resources provided to faculty and students.</li> </ul>	1

<p><b><i>BBD.102: Blackboard Skills Development: Managing Instructional Content</i></b></p> <p>This one-week online course provides an overview of Blackboard’s course areas, content types, and the Course Files area. The session will help instructors learn how to present and manage course materials, content, and files in a Blackboard class. Upon completion of this session participants will be able to: create tool links and contact profiles, create folders and organize files in the Course Files area, upload course files and link to content items, differentiate between types of content in Blackboard as well as create content items for an effective and efficient course design.</p> <p>Pre-requisite course: BBD 101</p> <p><b><i>Course Objectives:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add various content to a course.</li> <li>• Manage and organize the Files Area in a Blackboard course.</li> </ul>	1
<p><b><i>BBD.103: Blackboard Skills Development: Communication Tools</i></b></p> <p>This one-week online course provides an introduction to online course communication and an overview of Blackboards most commonly used communication tools: Announcements, Discussion Board, Send Email, Groups, and Course Messages. Upon completion of this session participants will be able to: create and manage announcements, create forums and manage discussions, send emails to students within a course, and create groups with collaboration tools.</p> <p>Pre-requisite courses: BBD 101, BBD 102</p> <p><b><i>Course Objectives:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create, edit, and reorder announcements.</li> <li>• Send an email to a course member using the Send Email tool.</li> <li>• Develop a Discussion Board forum.</li> <li>• Demonstrate how to create a group using the Blackboard Groups tool.</li> </ul>	1
<p><b><i>BBD.110: Blackboard Skills Development: Managing Assignments and Tests</i></b></p> <p>This one-week online course provides an overview of Blackboards most commonly used assessment tools: Assignments and Tests. Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to create, manage, and grade assignments and tests. Topics include assignment creation and management, assignment deployment and settings, assignment grading and feedback, question pools, test question types, test creation and management, test deployment and settings, and test grading and feedback.</p> <p>Pre-requisite Courses: BBD 101, BBD 102, BBD 103</p> <p><b><i>Course Objectives:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create, distribute, and grade an Assignment.</li> <li>• Develop, deploy, and score a Test.</li> </ul>	2
<p><b><i>BBD.120: Blackboard Skills Development: Managing the Grade Center and Student Grading</i></b></p> <p>This one-week online course provides an overview of the Blackboard Grade Center. Participants will be introduced to organizing the Grade Center, recording student grades, weighting grades, running grade reports, and using the various tools available to instructors.</p> <p>Formerly titled: Blackboard Grade Center</p> <p>Pre-requisite Courses: BBD 101, BBD 102, BBD 103, BBD 110</p> <p><b><i>Course Objectives:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify components of the Grade Center.</li> <li>• Create, edit, and delete columns in the Grade Center.</li> <li>• Hide a column from the instructor's view and the students' view.</li> <li>• Reorder and freeze columns in the Grade Center.</li> <li>• Enter, edit, include feedback, and override grades.</li> <li>• Establish weighted grading by category.</li> <li>• Create Smart Views.</li> </ul> <p>Create a grade report.</p>	2

<p><b>EPIC 101: Best Practices in Course Navigation and Design</b></p> <p>This online course provides an overview of the Wake Tech’s standardized course menu. Participants will learn about Wake Tech's eLearning Preparedness Initiative across the College (EPIC) and how it will help in effective and efficient course design. Participants will gain information regarding the course menu design and how to customize course menu items for best practices in online learning. Pre-requisite courses: BBD 101, BBD 102</p> <p><i>Course Objectives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the structure and components of Wake Tech’s default course menu.</li> <li>• Identify content areas and tools for effective and efficient course design.</li> <li>• Identify how the college-wide design of the course menu contributes to student success.</li> <li>• Identify organizational and design strategies for structuring content items.</li> <li>• Identify organizational and design strategies of collaboration tools.</li> <li>• Recognize the purpose and function of the Tools and My Grades areas.</li> </ul>	4
<p><b>EPIC 102: Best Practices in Online Communication &amp; Collaboration</b></p> <p>This online course provides an overview of the Wake Tech’s quality communication standards as part of eLearning Preparedness Initiative across the College (EPIC). Participants will gain information regarding effective communication and collaboration in online courses and fostering student engagement. Pre-requisite courses: EPIC 101, BBD 101, BBD 102, BBD 103</p> <p><i>Course Objectives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify how best practices and educational theory influenced the communications standards.</li> <li>• Explain how interaction and engagement lead to student success.</li> <li>• Identify strategies and tools that foster student-student and faculty to student interaction.</li> <li>• Produce a communicative activity that fosters student engagement.</li> <li>• Identify strategies and tools that provide effective, high-quality feedback to students.</li> <li>• Identify engaging activities that support a growth mindset.</li> </ul>	4
<p><b>EPIC 103: Best Practices in Online Assessments</b></p> <p>This online course provides an overview of the Wake Tech’s quality assessment standards as part of eLearning Preparedness Initiative across the College (EPIC). Participants will gain information regarding creating and administering effective assessments in online courses. Pre-requisite courses: EPIC 102, BBD 101, BBD 102, BBD 103, BBD 110, BBD 120</p> <p><i>Course objectives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the principles of effective assessments for online learning.</li> <li>• Describe components of an effective grading rubric.</li> <li>• Produce sample assessment for an online course.</li> <li>• Explain how to create measurable student learning outcomes (SLOs).</li> <li>• Explain how to align student learning outcomes (SLOs) with lesson/week/module/unit level objectives.</li> </ul>	4
<p><b>EPIC 104: EPIC30 Capstone</b></p> <p>Pre-requisite courses: ACC 101, TLS 101, EPIC 101, EPIC 102, EPIC 103, BBD 101, BBD 102, BBD 103, BBD 110, BBD 120</p> <p>This online course requires participants to use skills and information gained from previous EPIC courses to develop course components which meet Wake Tech’s quality course standards as part of eLearning Preparedness Initiative across the College (EPIC).</p> <p><i>Course Objectives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate understanding of Universal Design for Learning practices in an online course.</li> <li>• Demonstrate best practices of an instructor's role in facilitating communication in online course.</li> <li>• Demonstrate the ability to create an effective online assessment.</li> <li>• Demonstrate knowledge of accessibility concepts in an online course</li> <li>• Create components of an online course according to Wake Tech’s Quality Course Standards</li> </ul>	4
<p><b>Total Hours</b></p>	30