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Mixing Apples and Oranges: Sociological Issues in the Process of an Academic Merger

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes and analyzes key sociological issues that arise during the merger of a campus with a college within a large university. The issues arising in this case study are analyzed within the framework of a model for reframing organizations. The skills that a clinical sociologist can bring to a merger situation to help minimize delay and failure are discussed

“Merger is not a process designed to make all participants happy.”

John D. Millett (1976)

Colleges and universities increasingly are merging with each other for a variety of reasons, such as mutual growth, expanding missions, enriching the quality of programs and services, building a shared vision, and cost efficiencies (Martin 1993-94). There are many types of mergers and restructuring models which range from “pure” or total mergers to joint ventures and educational affiliations (Samels 1994). Collaboration and coordination among colleges and universities are incrementally replacing competition and contention.

The literature indicates that mergers are most likely to be successful when they are a result of choice, and communication processes are in place (Cornett-DeVito and Friedman 1995). Yet, major difficulties can arise when trying to

merge two different organizational cultures even within the same industry (Buono, Bowditch and Lewis 1985). Merger success often depends on choosing good strategies of negotiation (Fisher and Ury 1983; Burkhardt 1994), yet the significance of the human side of a merger appears after the merger has occurred in the form of "merger syndrome" (Burke 1987). When attempts to resolve potential operating difficulties and to facilitate interaction between employees from both cultures are not completed before the merger, employees may work to sabotage the merger after completion (Buono, Bowditch and Lewis 1985). The success or failure of a merger often rests on the ability of the merger's planners to negotiate a new, blended culture from the previous distinct ones. Schein (1992:4-5) points out, "If we understand the dynamics of culture, we will be less likely to be puzzled, irritated, and anxious when we encounter the unfamiliar and seemingly irrational behavior of people in organizations, and we will have a deeper understanding not only of why various groups of people or organizations can be so different but also why it is so hard to change them."

Fulmer and Gilkey (1988) note that it takes two to three years for the trauma of an acquisition or merger to subside. One reason for merger trauma is that cultures, traditions, and life cycles, which are part of the lives of employees, are not easily forgotten and relearned. Intervention creates the sorrow associated with loss and the hope and anticipation of something new. A blended culture is not necessarily a combination of what is, or was, the best of two entities. The process of determining what to retain and what to give up is personal and traumatic for long time employees and is heightened by the time constraints of the merger. Gilkey (1991) discusses some key interventions for blending new entities. These include establishing a new structure and system of communication; clarifying job status, role, and reporting relationships; creating new boundaries; and building a new culture.

The present paper discusses a clinical sociologist's (the author) experience as a leader in the merger of a campus with a college within the same university system. Specifically this paper presents and analyzes some key issues in the merger, and suggests ways in which a clinical sociologist can facilitate the process of a merger and its effects. Since there never is a point in time when a merger can be said to be complete, this case study must end without the full story having evolved. Nonetheless, elements of this experience may be valuable to other clinical sociologists who will be consultants or participants in mergers.

Background Of The Merger

In 1995, a large, state-related university, which has 16 two year campuses throughout the state, decided to reorganize to enable its students to complete a college degree without having to relocate to the “main” campus. This decision was made in response to increased admissions to, and insufficient dormitory space on, the “main” campus, as well as the recognition that the demographic nature of students has changed and many working adults are “place bound” for their college education. Students had complained to the university board of trustees about not being able to earn four year degrees at the two year campuses. A new university president was charged by the board of trustees to reorganize the geographically dispersed campuses to better facilitate on site degree completion. The university president, in an attempt to be “open” about the proposed addition of new baccalaureate degrees at these campuses and the elevation of three of the two year campuses into new, four year colleges, mailed the reorganization proposal to the presidents of all private and public colleges and universities in the state. While the “openness” and sharing of the plan was acknowledged by the presidents, a firestorm of protest began. Small private colleges saw this action as an expansion of new degree programs in their geographical area, and therefore, as direct competition for students in a declining market. The public-supported system of higher education resented the establishment of new baccalaureate programs when they had imposed no-growth policies on their 14 campuses because of restricted state financial support. The governor of the state was asked to intervene by the private college and public university presidents to “control” the large state-related university. The state’s secretary of education was asked to investigate and arbitrate the conflict. The state’s association of colleges and universities held regional hearings throughout the state to elicit reactions to the reorganization. Meanwhile, the large state-related university mobilized its alumni and the members of its local advisory boards, which were composed of local business and political leaders, to write letters to the governor and secretary of education supporting the reorganization. After several months of regional hearings and “behind the scenes” politics, the large state-related university’s reorganization plan was approved by the secretary of education with minor concessions that limited the number of four year degrees to be implemented at the two year campuses and new colleges.

The Reorganization Plan

The reorganization plan gave the two year campuses of the large state-related university several options, which included remaining as they were, merging with another college in the university, forming consortia or coalitions with other institutions in their region, forming a new college, or changing their missions. Existing colleges in the university were not permitted to recruit affiliates from any of the two year campuses. Each of the two year campuses was asked to announce its intentions by a stated deadline. Campus B was given the option to "become part of" College A in order to obtain immediate four year degree programs at its location. Campus B, which was one and a half hours by car from College A, had a smaller student body, was less financially well off, had fewer doctorally prepared faculty, and was located in a culturally different area of the state than College A. Faculty at College A were not attracted to Campus B and ignored its first overtures to merge which were signaled by votes to do so by the faculty senate and the Board of Advisors at Campus B. After the second vote of the faculty senate at Campus B to "become a part of" College A, the Dean of College A told the faculty senate of College A that they needed to respond to the votes to merge by the faculty senate at Campus B. While no formal vote endorsing a merger was ever taken at College A, the majority of College A's faculty acquiesced to the mandate of the university for the two institutions to merge. Meanwhile, as Campus B publicly announced its intentions to merge with College A, the university board of trustees approved the merger plan for all campuses and colleges of the university and announced a date at which all changes would be official. At about the same time, the university announced a new fiscal model for College A (and for the other new four year colleges), which had previously been funded by a specific allocation each year, but would become "tuition driven" on the final date of the implementation of the merger. Campus B, as part of a larger university budgetary unit, was already "tuition driven." The outcome of the new university plan was that College A would incorporate Campus B into its culture over the next eight to ten months. There was no turning back; the university had approved the proposed changes; the realities of the merger of Campus B with College A began to set in. As one faculty member from College A said, "This was an arranged marriage!" The author, as administrative leader of College A, was expected by the university administration to see the merger to a successful end.

Merging Cultures

Campus B and College A, while they were part of the same university, were markedly different. Campus B, which was established in 1934, is the oldest of the university's many geographically dispersed campuses. Campus B is located in a mountainous coal-mining region and is the only higher education institution in a four county area, offering a variety of associate degrees to approximately 1,000 students, the majority of whom are commuters rather than resident students.

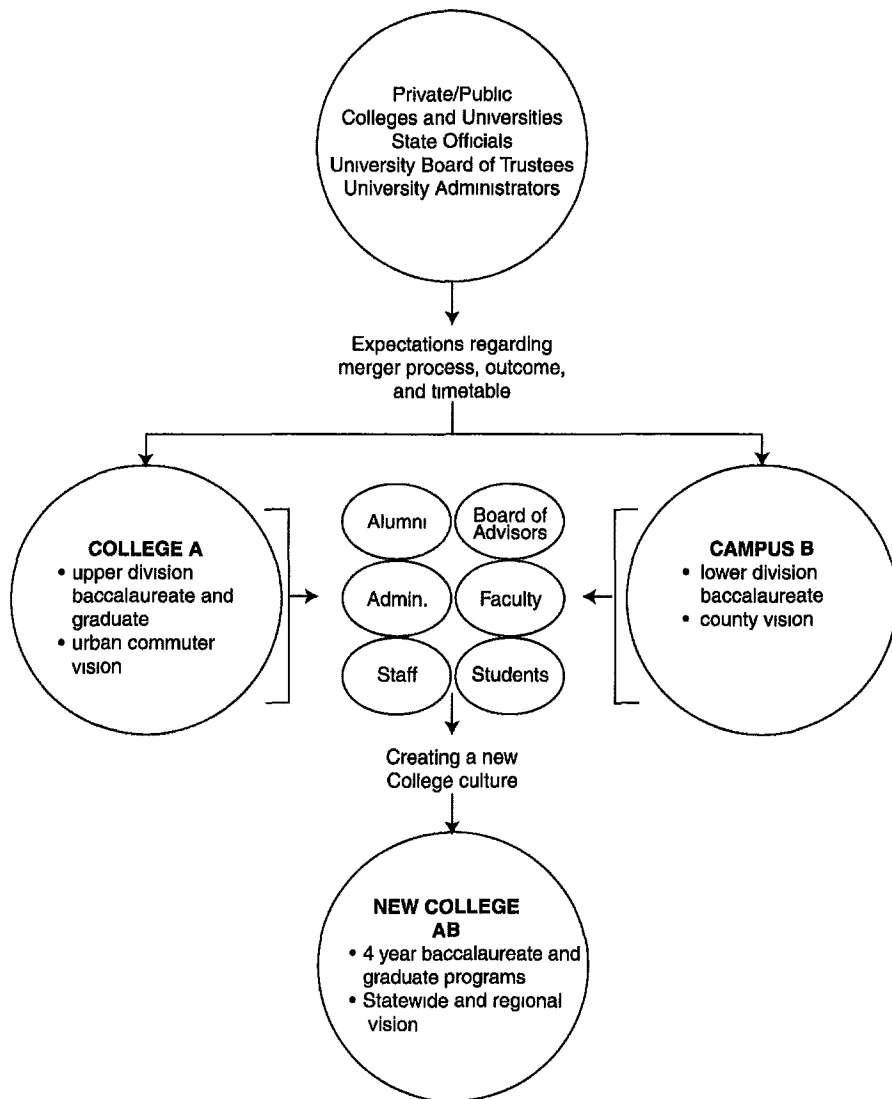
College A was established, in 1968, on the site of a former Air Force Base that is approximately 200 acres in size and is located near the airport of the state's capital. It is surrounded by numerous small private colleges, several campuses of the state supported university system, and a large community college. College A was founded as an upper division and graduate institution and serves about 3,500 students most of whom are part-time commuters.

The merger would create a new College AB that would enable Campus B to offer baccalaureate and graduate level courses on its campus and enable College A to offer selected lower division courses on its campus. The new, blended four year College AB would have one administration, one budget, one curriculum, and one faculty. The challenge was to create one new college from two units that had different cultures and were at different stages of their respective institutional life cycles.

College A is in its adolescence, forming its identity and establishing relationships with other institutions. Campus B is in its early adult years with an established identity backed by a strong Board of Advisors with community pride and high expectations for the campus' future. However, it has been struggling to retain financial viability in a geographical region with a declining economic base and increased competition from small colleges and state university campuses with expanding outreach programs. Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between the key players in the merger.

FIGURE 1

The Interaction of Key Players and Issues
in the Merger of Two Academic Institutions



The Merger Process

The Provost and Dean of College A and the C.E.O. of Campus B appointed a 12 person steering committee to determine what needed to be done to accomplish the merger and to make recommendations to them within four months. Meanwhile, the presidents and executive committees of the two faculty senates met to explore various forms of faculty governance. Members of the faculty from College A visited Campus B to become familiar with that institution. The two student governments and the two Boards of Advisors met to explore whether they would combine, remain separate, or adopt other modes of merging. The heads of the various support units such as enrollment management, bursar, human resources, maintenance and operations, police services, and student services met to discuss common functions, the number, type and location of personnel needed in a merged institution, and how they would administer their offices at a distance. As would be expected, anxiety ran high, especially among the staff at both sites who feared that they might lose their jobs. This was a realistic concern since Campus B had lost six staff members through downsizing several years previously, and College A had lost three staff members due to a 10% budget reduction caused by enrollment declines in the preceding two years. A prevailing rumor at Campus B suggested that it would be “taken over” by College A, that the staff at Campus B would be reduced, and that supervisory personnel would be located at College A. The rumor had political ramifications which will be discussed later.

A critical piece of the merger process was the determination of the “tenure home” of the faculty from Campus B, who were either tenured or in the tenure track of a college at the university’s “main” campus. Faculty members in College A had tenure at College A. University officials determined that faculty members at Campus B could choose to change their tenure or tenure eligibility from the “main” campus to College A or keep their tenure status at the main campus. Once a decision to change one’s tenure home was made, no further changes could be made. All new tenure track hires at Campus B, however, would have tenure at College A.

University officials also determined that after the official date of the merger, a budget would be given to College AB, all tenure track lines would be budgeted at College AB, and all faculty members would be appointed to one of the schools in College AB, irrespective of their tenure home. It was advantageous, therefore, to accomplish as much of the merger as possible rapidly so that administrative reorganization and budget planning could proceed. Additional pressure was created by the need to generate a “bottom up” five year strategic plan for College AB that would represent the shared vision of the

two sites. The strategic plan was to be submitted to university officials before the official merger date and implemented during the process of the merger. Few people across the two institutions knew each other well enough to make the strategic planning process more than one of good intentions. Needs, priorities and aspirations of Campus B and College A differed, yet the highest priority at both sites was to offer students a quality education and graduate competent, satisfied alumni.

Administrators at College A assumed that since it was larger and more specialized, the administrative control for all support functions would rest at College A, while the administration of Campus B assumed that except for the fact that the CEO would report directly to College A's Provost and Dean rather than to an official at the "main" campus as was previously done, there would be little change in day-to-day operations. In the view of personnel at College A, the merger was an opportunity to "re-engineer" operations at both sites with supervisory control located at the most reasonable site. Initially, all of the meetings of the various service components of the two institutions were called by staff at College A. Because many of the staff at Campus B held two or three jobs as a result of previous downsizing, staff members at Campus B were asked to wear several hats and attend many meetings to dialogue with their counterparts at College A where staff members were more numerous and specialized. This helped to heighten the anxiety level of the staff at Campus B about a "takeover" and the frustration level of their counterparts at College A who were trying to design reorganized support service operations.

There was no official time line for the completion of this merger, but university officials expected it to be completed in about one academic year. As the process proceeded, it became apparent that some components of the two institutions were making progress, while other components were stymied. Some aspects of the merger might be expected to evolve over months or years, but the critical components, such as the administrative and fiscal structure, would have to be in place as soon as possible. This relieved some of the pressure on people to make decisions without first getting to know each other.

The C.E.O. at Campus B was included in all key administrative, academic, budget and planning activities at College A from the date when the merger was first announced. The academic officer of Campus B became the associate dean for undergraduate studies for College AB and has helped to mold the reorganization. The Provost and Dean from College A makes periodic visits to Campus B for open discussions with faculty, staff, and students to listen to their concerns and questions. Employees at both campuses are included in social events at both campuses and special, all college events are rotated between the two locations. People from both campuses have tried to

equalize inconveniences in travel time and economize by utilizing interactive video for meetings and classes.

Eight months after the official date of the merger, faculty from College A are offering several undergraduate and graduate courses on Campus B, the new combined faculty senate is meeting regularly with minimal problems, the two Boards of Advisors hold joint meetings twice a year, faculty members have been assigned to academic units in College AB, although not all faculty at Campus B have chosen to switch their tenure from the “main” campus to College AB, and the student enrollment at both sites has shown a 2-3% gain for the first year of the merger. The problems that remain are largely in the service areas and are being coped with as issues arise. The major remaining areas that need to be merged soon are student recruiting, course scheduling, and marketing. As the need to increase enrollment is the key to an increased budget, the two campuses have drawn closer together.

A Model For Reframing Organizations

Bolman and Deal (1997) present a four frame model to guide the reframing of organizations, i.e., structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. While organizations vary in complexity, there usually is interaction between those four frames. These authors point out that “multi frame thinking” is necessary if organizations are to be flexible and adapt to change. This theoretical framework provides one way in which to examine the major issues in this merger.

Structural Issues

The major structural issues in the merger of Campus B with College A can be phrased in terms of three questions asked by the faculty and staff: 1) What is our new purpose (mission)? 2) What is our individual status and position (tenure and promotion, titles) in the new college? 3) What resources will we have to do our jobs (budgetary and personnel)?

1. Mission

This merger involved combining two distinct missions into the new, blended mission of a four year baccalaureate and graduate college. Campus B had been in the business of educating freshman and sophomores who would receive associate degrees and then seek employment or go on to complete a baccalaureate degree elsewhere. College A had been in the business of receiving transfer students from community colleges or two year campuses within the university and maintaining graduate programs. A new college would en-

able the faculty from College A to teach upper division and graduate courses at Campus B and the Campus B faculty to teach undergraduate courses at College A. This would be facilitated because the faculty at the two locations would be integrated into one college.

The concern that the College A faculty raised was, would this merger of courses and faculty result in a "watering down of quality?" Campus B faculty who did not have doctoral degrees feared that their academic progression would be jeopardized by the doctoral degreed faculty sitting on their promotion and tenure committees. Thus, while the faculty at each site wanted to receive the benefits of a four year and graduate level college, faculty members at each location personalized the perceived outcomes of a merged mission. The merger leader dealt with these concerns by focusing on the importance of better meeting the needs of the students at both locations, increasing the strength of the schools' programs by integrating the faculty, and achieving the ability to offer new courses and programs at both locations, which should, in turn, enhance the recruitment of students.

2. Tenure, Promotion, and Status

A second structural issue was the status and position of the faculty and staff in the new college. Faculty members at Campus B were apprehensive about being evaluated by faculty members at College A, not only because more of the latter had doctoral degrees, but because the faculty at College A emphasized the importance of research and scholarly publications, which were valued somewhat less than teaching at Campus B. Staff members feared that they would become extensions of the "main" offices at College A and would have to report to and be evaluated by new supervisors. Staff members also perceived that some of their titles might change, and both the faculty and staff feared that their seniority at Campus B was being threatened. A few faculty members at Campus B left; the majority have adapted to a new academic home, but have not transferred their tenure as yet, and a few have transferred their tenure to become full fledged members of College AB. Many service units have not been merged as yet, so anxiety among the staff remains, but as several units have been merged, with the integrity and titles of personnel at Campus B retained, anxiety has lessened somewhat. The merger leader has responded to all of these concerns by making frequent campus visits and holding open meetings with no planned agenda for all employees.

3. Budget and Resources

A third structural concern deals with resources. Campus B has a history of operating with insufficient resources; its faculty and staff would like to

have resources equal to those of College A. College A faculty and staff are concerned that if they have to tighten their budget to “bring Campus B up to where we are,” College A will suffer a loss in quality. Furthermore, the faculty and staff at both locations are concerned that total resources might be decreased if enrollment falls at either or both locations. Faculty members at College A ask whether College A will have to bail out Campus B if their enrollment falls. The merger leader has had to emphasize that the two locations are now one college and that personnel at both locations should work together to strengthen the efforts and initiatives of teaching, a common goal benefiting everyone. Since the C.E.O. at Campus B takes part in all budgetary decisions, the fear that Campus B will not be treated fairly has been reduced.

Human Resource Issues

Human resource issues have been expressed in two major sets of questions, the first of which is a continual concern of all the employees of Campus B, their Board of Advisors, and the local citizens: 1) Will Campus B lose its identity? Will the C.E.O. of Campus B remain as a C.E.O.? How much autonomy will the C.E.O. and employees at Campus B have in day-to-day operations?; and 2) How will the power and authority for decision-making be reflected in the new organizational chart? How will friendships and coalitions be affected by new merged relationships?

1. Autonomy/Identity

The C.E.O. and his administrative staff were concerned that all paperwork and decisions would be made by officials at College A, thereby relegating Campus B officials to the status of “pass throughs.” Local citizens and employees at Campus B have invoked the pressure of their state senator to obtain the assurance of the Provost and Dean of College A that Campus B will not lose its identity and will have full responsibility for day-to-day operations as well as participation in all budget, planning, and equipment decisions. Gilkey (1991) suggests that a merger involves the right balance between control and autonomy in a merged relationship. The difference in the histories and visions of the two locations make it difficult to “blend” what each site has been doing. It takes some trial and error and reframing or reengineering to construct a new mode of operating. A new trust must also follow which will take time to build.

2. Power/Authority

With respect to the second question, Gilkey (1991) points out that mergers disrupt mentoring, personal relationships, and old loyalties. Authority structures and systems of control change and, in turn, change turf, territories and boundaries. It is expected that it will take time for these to sort themselves out before a new unit can function smoothly. As friendship cliques or power coalitions in Campus B's former system of governance change, some faculty members may lose power or influence in the new shared system of governance.

It is interesting to see early evidence of change in coalitions and attempts to obtain power as the two separate faculty senates have merged to become a new senate. Faculty senators at Campus B were more aggressive and had anti-administrative attitudes, while senators at College A were more passive about issues. Indeed, finding faculty members to run for senate positions at Campus B has been a problem for several years. During the six months since the new senate was formed, senators from Campus B have become very aggressive and vocal, demanding that the Provost and Dean send a written memorandum to all faculty stating his endorsement of faculty governance and demanding faculty salary information and adjustments, as well as workload adjustments. Indeed, faculty members at Campus B have pushed faculty members at College A to become more active, questioning and demanding. Faculty members at Campus B are seeking peers in College A to form an anti-administrative coalition with a greater faculty voice in budget decisions, administrative and staff hiring, and space and construction planning.

As Fulmer and Gilkey (1988) point out, blending must occur in every merger, but what's blended and how it is blended is negotiable. When individuals perceive that their power, status and autonomy might change to their detriment, it is not surprising to see individuals fight to win even small concessions. It was not surprising therefore that several faculty at Campus B filed grievances regarding their salaries, workload or other issues. Some of these grievances are longstanding, but the parties are hoping that their grievances will reach a new audience and result in a different outcome.

Political Issues

Politics is certain to be an overt and covert issue in mergers within institutions, especially academic institutions. Politics is not always controllable in interventions, and clinical sociologists must often "work with" politics, as is the case here. Briefly, a state official representing the geographical area in which Campus B resides helped the president of the university obtain ap-

proval for the university reorganization. Two of the state official's relatives were employed at Campus B. When aspects of the reorganization did not please these two employees, they reported to the state official that College A was "taking over" Campus B and Campus B was losing its local identity. This resulted in the state official contacting the head of the university's office of governmental relations, who in turn called the dean of College A's supervisor, who in turn called the dean of College A to instruct him to meet with the state official and the C.E.O. of Campus B to resolve the issue. It was not clear to the dean of College A whether the C.E.O. of Campus B might also have helped to spur the takeover rumor to give him more bargaining power. The meeting was held at which time the state official emphasized that he was the "point person" in the legislature who had succeeded in getting approval for the merger, and he did not want Campus B to lose its identity. The dean of College A explained the process and opportunities for constructive input from Campus B about the merger, but pointed out that there was open resistance from some personnel including one of his relatives. An understanding followed, and it was agreed to follow up with a future meeting.

The overt politics has ceased, but the resistance and sometimes defiant attitude exists among a very few personnel at Campus B. In this case, innovation and change has to accommodate the political figure who is not only linked to the state legislature, Campus B, and the university president, but to a constituency that includes university alumni and substantial donors to the university.

Symbolic Issues

The major symbolic issues in the merger of Campus B with College A focus around their differing histories, cultures, and values. As noted previously Campus B is older than College A, is located in a coal mining, blue collar area of the state, and has focused on teaching lower division undergraduates. On the other hand, College A, with respect to its life cycle, is still in its adolescence. It is located in a capital city, and its focus has been on upper division and graduate level teaching and research. The histories of the two campuses cannot be blended. The lifecycles will have to be aligned so that the two campuses grow together in structuring a new college. Both sites value students and teaching, but research will be a new priority for Campus B faculty. Campus B faculty, on the other hand, bring a renewed emphasis and possibly new techniques in teaching to College A faculty. A new college vision, based on shared values, must be created. The merger leader has strongly emphasized what the two institutions have in common, their commitment to

learning and teaching. A new college committee on Teaching Effectiveness, which is composed of faculty from both locations, is helping to create new friendships and working partnerships. Some collaborative teaching relationships have already emerged and the use of technology in teaching is beginning to attract new interest. The committee is empowered to structure a Faculty Development Day each semester for all faculty members who wish to participate. This should help to reinforce common values.

Schein (1992) notes that the problem of blending cultures is complicated by the fact that the partners will not have any shared history, and that one of the partners will feel inferior, threatened, angry, and defensive (Buono and Bowditch 1989). If emphasis is placed on building a new, shared culture, and people from both locations act as equal participants, it will create an atmosphere of "starting over" for both partners. Morgan (1997) points out that organizations interact with projections of themselves. College A wanted to become a four year college by merging with a geographically closer partner. Campus B was facing possible closure or takeover due to a static enrollment in a static economic region. Hence, personnel at both sites faced the merger with some disappointment and anger toward university officials for making this merger a reality. Indeed, this merger has mixed apples and oranges.

It became apparent that this merger could not create one blended culture. Incorporating program and course offerings and faculty at Campus B into the academic departments at College A has been accomplished with relative ease. Combining service areas, which have been linked to traditions or the uniqueness of each culture, has been resisted. For example, police at Campus B have not carried firearms and integrating the two departments would violate the trust and informality that has existed at Campus B for many years. Some traditions, like commencement exercises, orientation sessions for new students, and awards will remain separate.

The advantage in this merger is that no specific date has been established at which the merger is to be completed, nor has there been an expectation that the merger would be total in all respects. This has enabled the merger leaders to test the boundaries and levels of resistance to what can be merged first and easily and what needs to be delayed and re-examined. The importance to Campus B of retaining symbols of their culture, and College A's willingness to go along with this, has minimized outright conflict. Yet, with no specific merger date established, some personnel at Campus B have used this to delay moving forward on re-structuring services.

FIGURE 2
Alignment of Organization Frames
in the Progression of the Merger

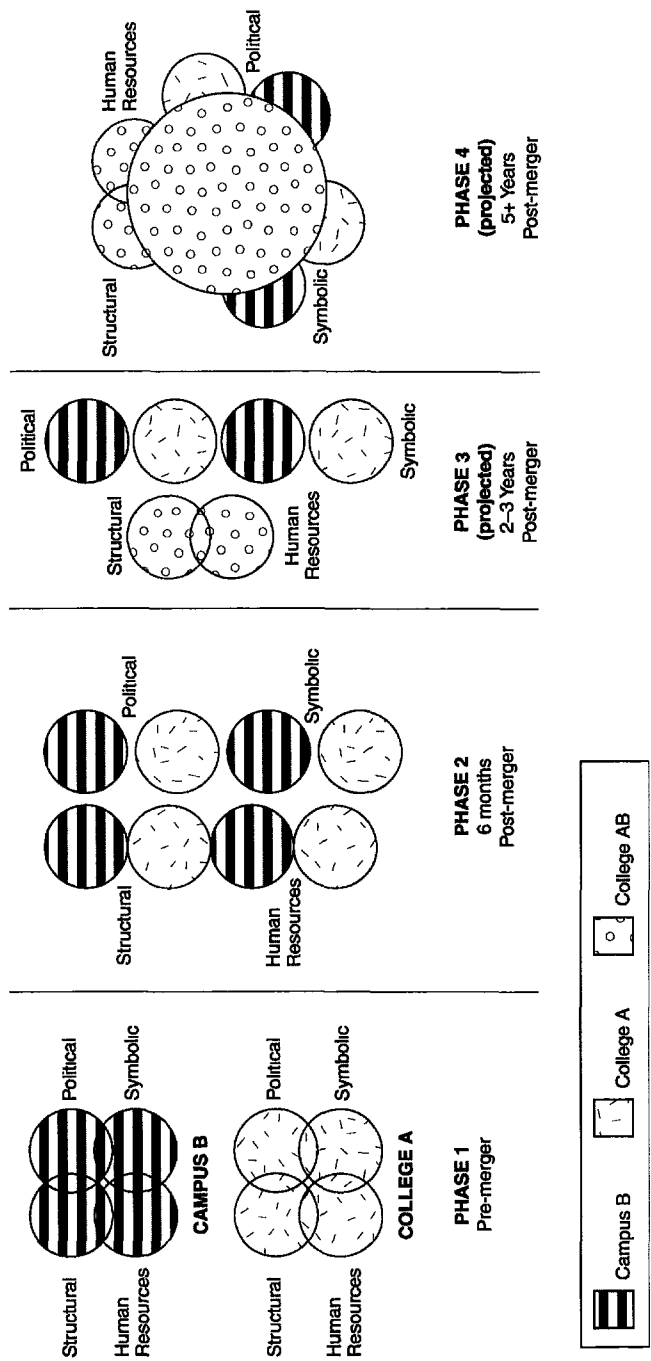


Figure 2 illustrates the various stages of the merger described here. This paper described Phases 1 and 2; Phases 3 and 4 are projected, based on our experiences to date. The prognosis of the merger described in this paper is "good." If an outsider were to ask faculty, staff, students, alumni and advisory board members at both locations whether they now think the merger is a good thing, the outsider would get different answers based on what the merger is perceived to have done for each constituent. Most likely, responses would be mixed and slightly negative because the merger is not yet complete and some expectations will not be met for several years. Probably, the greatest challenge for the leader of a merger is to frame and "sell" a new image of organization — a shared future that will respect and retain the best aspects of the cultures and lifestyles of Campus B and College A, while strengthening their common student-centered beliefs and values. As Figure 2 shows, it is likely that the basic structural and human resources frames of the two separate campuses will eventually be merged, but the political and symbolic frames, while a part of College AB, will maintain separate identities. This is largely because each site wishes to preserve some aspects of its traditions and culture and its respective political agendas and contacts. Overall, however, a new social system, labeled College AB, will emerge.

Managing the myths surrounding a merger is a continual process. McCann and Gilkey (1988) point out that myths and paradigms are severely disrupted during mergers. Therefore, leaders need to articulate a vision that links the past with the present, and the present with the future. The greater the sense of continuity and the clearer the vision, the more likely a new culture and new values are to emerge, reducing the chaos of the transition.

The emotions involved in a merger are lasting, even when support and intervention mechanisms have been put in place before, during, and following the actual merger. The mix of emotions is, in the author's experience, much like getting married and divorced in the same day. Time, some turnover of personnel, making new friends and colleagues, finding mutually satisfying "ways of operating," are all factors in the healing process.

MERGERS: THE CLINICAL SOCIOLOGIST'S TOOLBOX

What can clinical sociologists learn from this case study and what skills are key in working with merger situations?

Statistics indicate that up to one-third of all mergers fail within five years, and that as many as eighty percent never live up to full expectations. In some types of organizations, e.g. educational institutions, it may take five to ten years before accomplishments can be realized (Millet 1976). Many of the short falls and delays in mergers are due to human factors (Levinson 1979;

Wheeler 1981; Fulmer and Gilkey 1988; Buono and Bowditch 1989; Senn 1994).

The key skills clinical sociologists possess that can increase the success of mergers relate to: 1) developing cultural profiles of the merging organizations; including their missions, visions and shared values; 2) assessing organizational structures and leadership characteristics and their possible conflicting qualities; 3) identifying patterns of communication, networking, and social support; and 4) developing a plan for systematic integration (a timetable of expected problems and how they will be resolved, and by whom) and handling of post merger problems.

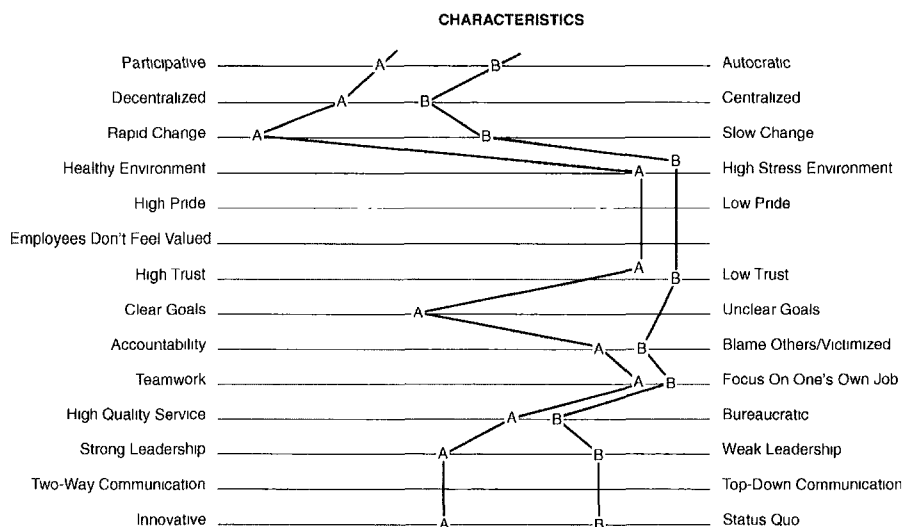
CULTURAL PROFILES

It is critical to analyze the culture of merging parties and determine the qualities of culture that will conflict and those that will complement the merging parties. Not all aspects of culture are visible or easily determined by asking. A thorough cultural assessment requires a look at an organization's history, current stage in its life cycle, belief and value systems, and typical past ways of coping with change and crises. Clinical sociologists can produce valuable cultural profiles to assist in planning and implementing a merger that is built on the strengths, shared values, and common goals of the merging parties. Mergers may involve more than two parties each of whom may have different intended outcomes. This makes the use of cultural profiles an important tool for the clinical sociologist.

Senn (1994) discusses what he calls some "deadly combinations" of qualities in leadership and organizational characteristics in mergers. For example, one organization may have a strong culture of participation and a flat organizational chart, while the organization with which it is merging has an autocratic leader with a hierarchical organizational chart. Typically the controlling organization wants to impose changes, and sees its counterpart as highly resistant to change. As Senn (1994) points out, the most frequent complaint of organizations that are being merged is that the new "owners" don't appreciate them and people began to tally which organization won or lost in the merger. Each organization sees the merger through its own cultural filter, and the leadership styles of the two organizations reinforce their respective cultural beliefs and values. This makes the use of cultural profiles an important tool for the clinical sociologist. Senn's (1994) version of the cultural profile is adapted and applied to College A and Campus B, both of which need to enhance their healthiness. The profile helps to point to clusters of characteristics that College A and Campus B share and provides a basis from which to work to reformulate a healthier newly merged college.

FIGURE 3

Cultural Profile. College A and College B



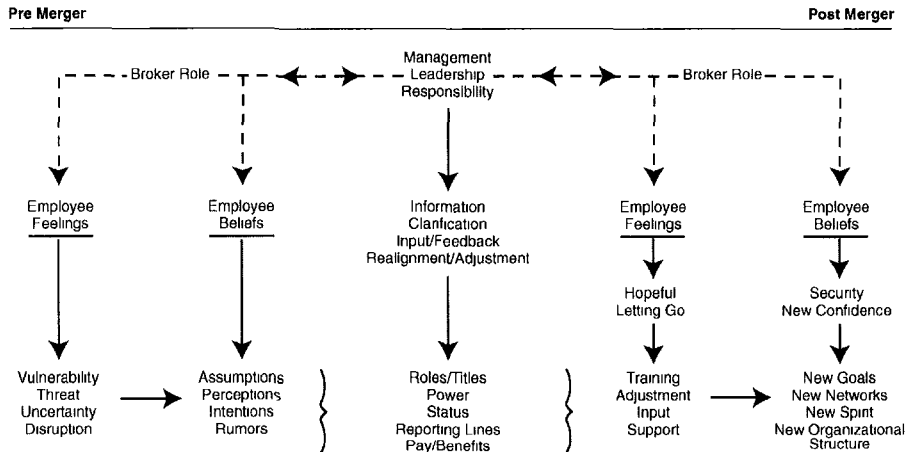
Adapted from L. E. Senn, pages 240-241

An assessment of the organizational structure in the merging parties needs to be carried out to determine what variation of merger is intended, that is, a complete acquisition or total merger, or partial merger where parties retain some degree of autonomy, or whether a new entity will be created, or whether the merging parties will co-exist merging only some functions. A plan assembled by a joint team can help to move toward a new acceptable culture if all parties are participants. Clinical sociologists can determine the organizational characteristics and support systems that are critical in reshaping a healthy culture and assist in stabilizing leadership in the newly merged organization.

Brokering Communication and Networks

An important role for the clinical sociologist in a merger is serving as a broker-consultant. In this role the clinical sociologist can assist both management and employees in the pre- to post-merger process. Basically this process is an interpersonal one and the advantage of having outside assistance is evident. A broker can represent all parties in the merger without bias and can facilitate both the personal (feelings, beliefs) as well as helping to put the new cultural and structural aspects of the new organization in place. Figure 4 illustrates some of the key aspects of the brokering process and its elements.

FIGURE 4
Brokering the Interpersonal Aspects of a Merger



Communication is essential in mergers. Often the dominant leadership does not communicate fully or frequently enough to satisfy merger partners. Brokers can facilitate communication by helping to establish the types, composition and frequency of person to person and group interchanges. Conflict must be dealt with as it arises. If not, it will accumulate and resurface in the post merger phase. This is the most vulnerable phase in a merger, when, seemingly the new structure is in place, but the new goals of the organization have not yet crystallized in a new organization ethic. Not everyone is satisfied with their new roles. Uncertainty persists. Clinical sociologists can help put together a post merger plan which will help to insure a greater degree of success. O'Toole (1996) points out that when changes like mergers occur, leaders need to attract new followers. Indeed, leaders of merged organizations themselves often change. Hence, there is a need to reconstitute trust among leaders and followers as well as a direction for the new organization.

Integration and the Post Merger Process

Mergers have emotional cycles ranging from pessimism to optimism. These emotions are expected to vary as the partners continue the process of merging. There is probably no single point in time when a merger is said to be complete as social change is a continuous force in organizations. This is the reason why a long-term plan is necessary following up on the implementation

of the major goals of the merger. Employees will come and go as they adjust to a new organization. There will be a continual need for orientation, opportunities to hear grievances, for self-help and support groups, and for leaders to reconsider actions in the merger. A postmerger plan should be considered at the beginning of a merger and refined as the merger proceeds. A postmerger plan should provide input to the organization's leaders to continuously "fine tune" the merged organization. Viewed in this way, postmerger planning should be a part of total planning for the new organization at the onset. Clinical sociologists can assist organizations in how to involve and stabilize all components of an organization in order to strengthen morale, reduce turnover, and create a sense of shared values.

Summary

Mergers are planned interventions; some are planned more thoroughly than others. However, even with planning the failure rate of mergers is high because it is not possible to plan for and predict human responses to change and intervention. Yet, in today's climate of mergers and acquisitions, it would seem that using the expertise of social scientists such as clinical sociologists, who are experts in social intervention, can reduce merger trauma and failure.

This paper presented a case of an academic merger, which is less common than mergers in business and industry, but, nonetheless, shares common elements with them. The author suggests that clinical sociologists have a clinical toolbox of experience, techniques and skills which would be valuable for merger partners both inside and outside of academia. The involvement of clinical sociologists as consultants, advisors, mediators, evaluators, brokers, or therapists, could help to prevent some of the common human relations faux pas and reduce real costs in planned mergers.

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