Meaningful Change

making sense of the discourse of the language of change

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Dedication

To my father, William Harrison Thurlow IV (1942-2004),
who always spoke truth to power.
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Abstract
Meaningful Change: making sense of the discourse of the language of change
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This thesis is a poststructuralist account of the language of organizational change and its
significance in producing and maintaining a discourse of change. Approaching change
management as a process which has emerged from a specific set of language, beliefs and
events, this study draws upon the work of Foucault (1966; 1972; 1978) to locate the
discourse of the language of change among other social discourses of organization.
From that perspective, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the effects of the discourse
of the language of change within two organizational settings. Specifically, this analysis
asks the question, how does the discourse of the language of change become meaningful
to individuals in organizations? In the investigation of this question I offer a discussion
of the ways in which individuals make sense of change and experience the discursive
power of the language of change at work, and the implications for the management of
change.

To most effectively analyse discourse within these two organizations, a Canadian health
centre and a community college, I have used a framework of critical sensemaking (Mills
& Helms Mills, 2004; Mills, 2003) to focus on social psychological properties. I have
also used techniques of critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1993) in order to emphasize
power and privilege in the production and reproduction of the language of organizational
change. By focussing on language and power as central to the analysis, this method
creates a bridge between the broader socio/cultural discourse and the local sites.

Through this method of analysis, this thesis makes four important contributions to our
current knowledge of organizational change. First, it responds to the need for methods
which incorporate agency in the study of the process of change (Caldwell, 2005).
Second, to support this focus on individuals in the process of change, this thesis provides
an empirical investigation of the discursive objects produced by, and producing, the
language of organizational change. Third, it deals with the under-theorization of
“change” within the organizational change literature (Grant, Michelson, Oswick, &
Wailes, 2005; Grant, Wailes, Michelson, Brewer, & Hall, 2002; Pettigrew, Woodman, &
Cameron, 2001; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) by problematizing change through its
contextualization within discursive practices. Fourth, by engaging participants in a
process of active “sensemaking” (Weick, 1995) as they share their narratives of change,
this study contributes to the creation of space for multiple voices in the investigation of
the language of organizational change.
Chapter One

Making sense of language, power and identity in organizational change

Introduction

This thesis is a poststructuralist account of the language of organizational change and its significance in producing and maintaining a discourse of change. Approaching change management as a process which has emerged from a specific set of language, beliefs and events, this study draws upon the work of Foucault (1966; 1972; 1978) to locate the discourse of the language of change among other social discourses of organization.

From that perspective, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the effects of the discourse of the language of change within two organizational settings. Specifically, this analysis asks the question, how does the discourse of the language of change become meaningful to individuals in organizations? In the investigation of this question I offer a discussion of the ways in which individuals make sense of change and experience the discursive power of the language of change at work, and the implications for the management of change.

To most effectively analyse discourse within these two organizations, a Canadian health centre* (CHC) and a community college, I have used a framework of critical sensemaking (Helms Mills, 2003; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004) to focus on social psychological properties. I have also used techniques of critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1993) in order to emphasize power and privilege in the production and reproduction of the language of organizational change. By focussing on language and power as central to the

* The names of the organizations and individuals presented in this thesis have been changed to protect the confidentiality of those who participated in this research.
analysis, this method creates a bridge between the broader socio/cultural discourse and the local sites.

Through this method of analysis, this thesis makes four important contributions to our current knowledge of organizational change. First, it responds to the need for methods which incorporate agency in the study of the process of change (Caldwell, 2005). In his historical review of agency in organizational change, Caldwell illustrates the debate between rational conceptualizations of agency, which lack a structural analysis, and the constructionist view of the subject which lacks agency. He points out that, “there have been no successful attempts to link the micro-level understanding of agency to macro-level structural… change” (Caldwell, 2005: 109). This linkage is an important one in our understanding of organizational change. As Newton (1998:442) reminds us, “If we are to make sense of both ourselves and organizations, we need plausible accounts of subjectivity which can explore how changes in the self relate to changes in discourse and… practice.”

Second, to support this focus on individuals in the process of change, this thesis provides an empirical investigation of the discursive objects produced by, and producing, the language of organizational change. Although the study of discourse has become a growing field in organizational studies (Fairclough, 2005; Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 1998), there is still much to learn about how individuals in organizations negotiate, construct and transform meaning during change (Anderson, 2005). Through the
framework of critical sensemaking, this research offers an approach that will focus on the processes that make the discourse of change meaningful to individuals in organizations.

Third, it deals with the under-theorization of “change” within the organizational change literature (Grant, Michelson, Oswick, & Wailes, 2005; Grant, Wailes, Michelson, Brewer, & Hall, 2002; Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) by problematizing change through its contextualization within discursive practices. This approach is consistent with the aim of Foucault’s work, “to grasp the conditions which make certain practices acceptable (and sometimes unavoidable) at a given historical moment” (Rossi, 2004:22). Consequently, the language of organizational change in this study will be viewed as a process that has emerged from a specific set of power/knowledge relationships. By deconstructing the totalizing nature of the discourse of change, this study contributes to the genealogical understanding of change as resulting from specific conditions of possibility.

Fourth, by engaging participants in a process of active “sensemaking” (Weick, 1995) as they share their narratives of change, this study contributes to the creation of space for multiple voices in the investigation of the language of organizational change. This inclusion of the voices of those involved in change is of particular importance to me as the original motivation for this research comes from my personal experiences as a former employee of the two organizations featured here. As a result, this is a reflexive piece that represents a process of sensemaking for the researcher as much as the research participants. The central elements of my research strategy include a focus on agency,
discourse, language, power, and identity, and are pursued through the theoretical lens of poststructuralism, and the methods of critical discourse analysis and critical sensemaking.

Towards a critical approach to organizational change

In her analysis of the processes of organizational change at a Canadian power utility company, Helms Mills (2003: 73) argues that “organizational change as imperative has become an important management discourse . . . that can be witnessed in the discursive practices of companies throughout North America and Europe” (see also Cooke, 1999). Elsewhere she goes on to argue the need for new methodological strategies for studying the discourse of change and its effects on those involved, strategies that focus on both the (post)structural and social psychological aspects of discursive practices (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000).

The discourse of the language of change

Building on the work of Helms Mills, an important starting point for the study of discourse is Foucault’s work on discourse analysis (1978). Foucault introduces the concept of a discourse “as a set of ideas and practices which condition our ways of relating to, and acting upon, particular phenomena”. As Knights and Morgan (1991: 254) explain it, discourse “is shorthand for a whole set of power/knowledge relations which are written, spoken, communicated and embedded in social practices. These relations have power and truth effects and it is the consequences that follow which are a major concern of a discourse analysis.”
Drawing on this approach, the thesis explores the language and practices associated with organizational change strategies in two organizations, focusing on how the discourse simultaneously empowers and disempowers the actors involved, and on the related role of identity construction (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This focus on the impact on, and the perspective of, those individuals experiencing change addresses a peculiar gap in the literature. Although the management literature has produced evidence that organizational change initiatives place significant pressure on individuals (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997; Cook & Yannow, 1996; Cooper, 1998; Cooper & Quick, 1999; Robinson & Griffiths, 2005) the focus has been on the costs of individual stress to organizational goals (Schabracq & Cooper, 2000:227). Similarly, the pressure on organizations and individuals to embrace change goes virtually unquestioned in the mainstream management literature (du Gay, 2003). Organizational change has become a requirement of modern business management, with firms routinely struggling to manage, embrace, facilitate, or embark upon change. And as Sturdy and Grey (2003:653) point out, the underlying assumption that connects the vast literature on organizational change is that change “should, can and must” be managed. This assumption reflects the dominant perspective which “gives voice to managerial perspectives but neglects others.” Sturdy and Grey also voice a concern “about the dominance of the view that organizational change is inevitable, desirable and/or manageable and that this view seems to be taken for granted, receiving relatively little critical attention” (2003:659).

But “to criticize organizational change management for being managerialist is hardly a profound contribution – indeed it is almost a tautology” (Sturdy & Grey, 2003:656).
What is needed is space for alternative voices in the study of change. In searching for a more complete understanding of the nature of change, alternative forms of analysis such as critical discourse analysis and critical sensemaking may indeed offer insights that have eluded mainstream research to this point. Likewise, as researchers have moved away from the traditional behaviourist theories of organization to more social constructionist approaches, the need to understand the relationship between language, power and identity has come into sharper focus (Fiol, 2002; Kornberger, Clegg, & Carter, 2006). Although organizational change theorists have acknowledged the relevance of language to change initiatives, research on the relationship between language and organization has really begun to expand in popularity in the past several years. As a result of this increased attention to the field, language and communication are now seen as central to any discussion of organization, and thus to change.

**Critical discourse analysis**

In order to ensure that language remains central to this research, I have employed techniques of critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1993). Critical discourse analysis has emerged in a manner similar to critical sensemaking (see below) as a response to the inability of traditional discourse analysis to deal with the issue of organizational power. Critical discourse analysis has built on the social constructionist perspective of discourse analysis to specifically address the issues of inequality, dominance and legitimation (van Dijk, 1993:249) reproduced through the language of organizational change. To that end, techniques of critical discourse analysis are most useful in their ability to analyse the role of “language, language use, discourse or communicative events in the (re)production of dominance and inequality” (van Dijk, 1993:279).
The language / power relationship

A focus on the language of organizational change helps us to understand not only how people construct an "ongoing sense" (Weick, 1995) of organizational reality but also a sense of identity. For example, despite the widespread acceptance of organizational change as an essential component of management discourse (du Gay, 2003) there is little empirical evidence to indicate that change programs are able to achieve the objectives they espouse (Champy, 1995; Choi & Gehling, 1997; Hammer & Champy, 1993; Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Higgs & Rowland, 2000; Kotter, 1990). Even though empirical evidence points to the perceived failure of organizations to realize change, the language of change is still powerful in its ability to produce and maintain a discourse of change. In a move from an "old to a new discourse of change" (Oswick, Grant, Michelson, & Wailes, 2005:387) the discourse of change management has altered its focus from one of outcomes to one of language. Oswick et al. describe this transition as "a subtle shift of emphasis from the substantive to the discursive" (2005:387) and identify a discourse of change which focuses almost exclusively on meaning, conveyed through language, as opposed to tangible management outcomes. The study of language-use at the two selected organizations – the CHC and the College – explored the way that significant organizational events were "enacted" (Weick, 1995) and the implications for those involved.

Foucault, Agency and Change
Poststructuralism, particularly the work of Foucault, is a useful starting point for the study of organizational change because not only does it draw attention to the significance of power/knowledge in shaping identities and understandings but also provides the
methodological tools for making sense of how organizational change is constructed through discursive practices. Specifically, it draws attention to the role of language and discourse.

Nonetheless, there are some limitations in Foucault's poststructuralism, not least of which is his approach to agency. Foucault asserts that, "It is not power, but the subject, that is the central theme of my research" (Foucault, 1982:209). And in his later work (1982; 1988b), there is some consideration of the effects of discursive practices on individuals. Elsewhere he emphasises that "power is only exercised over free subjects" (Foucault, 1982:221), he discusses the role of agency in resistance (Foucault, 1982, 1996; Knights & Vudubakis, 1994) and contends that "the minimal assumption from which all his substantive analyses proceed is that the parties implicated in power relations are always thinking, reflective actors with potential for acts of imagination and invention" (Barratt, 2003:1077).

Notwithstanding, critics argue that Foucault's work either ignores agency or, ironically, conceptualizes it as a very narrow structural form of agency – driven by, embedded in, discursive processes. Shurmann (1985:540), for example, contends that "common opinion about Foucault holds that he is content with locating the subject within given structures." In this sense, agency within Foucauldian analysis is concerned with the discourses that produced subjects, not the implications of individual processes of sensemaking which make some elements of discourse meaningful, and others not. Other critics have questioned the relevance of Foucault’s work to organizational studies.
because of his focus on power relations at the expense of agency (for example: Benhabib, 1992; Mouzelis, 1995; Newton, 1998). Thus, arguably, while Foucault’s work focuses on ways in which power is exercised at the local level (Foucault, 1980) he does not offer a mechanism for understanding how individual decisions are made at the local level. “The problem is that Foucault leaves us with an inadequate framework to explore how agency is played out in particular contexts” (Newton, 1998:426). To that end, I was drawn to critical sensemaking, with its focus on the social psychological properties of action within structural influences, a framework of analysis to address this lack of focus on agency (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000; Helms Mills, 2003; Mills & Helms Mills, 2003). By viewing the social psychological processes through which change becomes meaningful to individuals, I attempt to offer insight into the ways in which individual subjects make sense of the language of change and subsequently “enact” (Weick, 1995) it as meaningful discourse within their organizations. In this thesis, agency is viewed as the ability of individuals to make decisions based on their own sensemaking in relation to discourse. As a result, individuals are not viewed as products of discourse. Rather they are seen to be actively engaged in sensemaking within discursive processes. This enactment of meaning on the part of individuals may lead to the production or maintenance of discourse or, alternatively, resistance to it.

**Critical Sensemaking**

Critical sensemaking emerged from Weick’s (1995) sensemaking framework, which introduced a series of social psychological “properties” through which individuals make sense of their complex environments. Taking this framework as a starting point, critical sensemaking argues that analysis of sensemaking needs to be explored through, and in
relationship to, the contextual factors of structure and discourse in which individual sensemaking occurs. In this way, critical sensemaking, as an approach to understanding the role of language in the process of change, offered an opportunity to view the discursive effects of change from the perspective of the individual employee. At the same time, it provided an important framework for investigating how individuals make sense of discourse and enact it on an individual basis. Through the sensemaking framework, this analysis presents a contextualization of how individuals reflect and interpret the experience of change in specific organizational environments. In essence, it identifies how the discursive effects of ‘change’ are mediated by local conditions.

One of the major concepts within critical sensemaking (and sensemaking itself) is the centrality of identity construction to sensemaking processes. Identity is also central to the concept of organizational change. The focus of any change initiative is essentially to re-define identities. From either an individual or organizational perspective, change initiatives endeavor to provide a new way of conceptualizing “who we are” as an organization. Arguably, identities result from prior beliefs and experiences, ongoing interactions, and the retrospective process of sensemaking that individuals use to reconcile changes in their social, organizational identities. Thus, new identities take form and exist as they are put into language by individuals and organizations.

The idea of creating “new” identities is an interesting one. Gioia and Thomas (1996:394) have found that organizational leaders readily accepted the idea of identity as ‘changeable’ over a fairly short period of time. This conceptualization of identity as fluid
was, in fact, what made the prospect of organizational change “plausible” (Weick, 1995). However the existing change literature does little to address the contradiction between this view of identity as fluid and the commonly held definition of identity as being quite stable and lasting (e.g. Albert & Whetten, 1985).

This departure from the traditional understanding of identity has important implications for those engaged in change. “The definition of identity as enduring obscures an important aspect of identity within the context of organizational change: for substantive change to occur, some basic features of identity also must change” (Gioia & Thomas, 1996:394). This suggests that identities may not be fixed either for individuals or organizations involved in change processes (Beech & Johnson, 2005: 32).

By highlighting the importance of identity in the relationship between language and power in organizational change, critical sensemaking offers a method of analysis, which privileges the role of the individual within organizational change. As I incorporate this framework within a poststructuralist approach, I am also able to addresses the reflective processes employed by individuals operating within the broader power/knowledge relationship of change. For example, although everyone in the organization may take part in sensemaking, there is an inherent inequality among organizational members that may affect the realities they construct (Helms Mills & Mills2000b:67). Critical sensemaking provides a lens through which to analyze the power relationships reflected in these inequalities and the consequences of those power effects for individuals.
The Research Sites
As this thesis will show, in the two organizations studied here language plays a central role in describing a significant organizational event. The CHC was formed as a result of a merger between two previously established hospitals, which took place over a number of years. Language in this case is central to the process of defining identities within the organization. At the same time, language was used to reposition the organization in the community. The college also experienced a merger when previously independent campuses were centralized into one college approximately 10 years ago. The new entity is now working to reposition itself within the marketplace. In 1998 the college also moved from within the provincial department of education to become an independent organization with a board of directors. This resulted in a re-positioning process that depends upon the reconstruction of a new organizational identity both within the organization itself and externally.

In these two cases, the path of change has included a gamut of ‘programmed’ change, from Total Quality Monitoring (TQM) to communities of practice, the elimination of some work sites and some service delivery, layoffs, organizational restructuring, re-naming of employee positions and, in both cases, a name change for the entire organization. In both of these organizations the role of language was significant in defining the change agenda as well as in employee acceptance of or resistance to the change. These cases present an excellent opportunity to study the discourse of change that characterized the experiences of individuals involved in organizational change at these sites. In my capacity as a former employee of both these sites, I was also able to bring my own knowledge of organizational structures to the research process. This facilitated my access
to individuals who had experienced change initiatives from a variety of perspectives in the organizations.

**A Critical Approach to Change**
Organizational change is one of the most researched aspects of management theory and practice today (Sturdy & Grey, 2003). However, the majority of this work is located within a managerial perspective that does not offer a critical analysis of change. There is little attention paid to the paradox of change which asks for innovation and empowerment yet at the same time demands conformity to organizational goals and efficiency (Coopey, 1995; Wendt, 2001). In fact, the language associated with change itself over the past few decades reflects a vocabulary of mainstream efficiency and control. Butcher and Atkinson (2001:562) describe terms such as “transformation, intervention, change strategy, vision, facilitation, coaching, change agent, culture change programme” as representations of change that is planned and then done “to” organizational members. This designates change management as a technical process, which can be applied to an organization. The authors also emphasise the resulting isolationist nature of the jargon that surrounds change. “In this sense the language of change itself reinforces the inertia it is attempting to overthrow”(2001:562) . They further assert that the contemporary language of organizational change has failed to achieve its promise:

Fundamentally, the language of conventional change is striking in its inability to create change. It has failed as a call to action for practising managers, being either rhetoric that is divorced from the reality of organizational life, or else well worn phrases that have become banal ‘changespeak’ (Butcher & Atkinson, 2001:562).
As a public relations practitioner for the past 15 years, I have become familiar with the language of change and have often been responsible for communicating a vision for organizational change to employees. Unfortunately, the realization of this vision, and the promised transformation of power within organizations that will lead to equality, risk taking and empowerment has not been part of that experience. I have experienced a great deal of frustration with ‘change’ when attempting to navigate the language and processes of change within organizations. Although these experiences do serve to highlight the importance of language in the change process, the poststructuralist perspective of this study allows for a deeper analysis of the centrality of power to the production and enactment of the language of organizational change.

To achieve this purpose, this thesis proposes a new approach to the analysis of organizational change. This approach attempts to offer a more profound understanding of the relationship between organizational power, language, change and social psychology (Cooke, 2001), while employing the frameworks of critical sensemaking (Helms Mills, 2003) and critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1993) to study the inter-related influences of structure, power/knowledge, language and social psychological processes.

The order of things
This first chapter has provided a brief introduction to the study and laid out the importance of studying the discourse of the language of change. By emphasizing the centrality of language and power to an understanding of the discursive effects of change, this chapter has highlighted some gaps in the current understanding of how individuals make sense of the language of change.
Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant literature and outlines the discursive impact of the language of change on individuals and organizations. Chapters Three and Four are concerned with the methodological approach of this research. Chapter Three outlines the theoretical framework of the study in broad terms and provides context for the analytical processes used to both deconstruct and make sense of the language of change. Following in Chapter Four is detail on the specific method of critical sensemaking utilized in this research. Chapter Five introduces the two organizations which constitute the empirical element of this research, and provides background information and context to the change experiences represented in each. Chapter Six presents the language of change represented in the two case-study organization and contextualizes this language in terms of power and identity. Chapter Seven applies the method of critical sensemaking in an analysis of the language of change at two local sites and investigates the relationship between the broader discourse of change and individual sensemaking at these sites. Chapter Eight is the concluding chapter in this thesis and offers a discussion of the contributions of this analysis as well as the limitations of the study and recommendations for further study.
Chapter Two

Deconstructing organizational change

Analysis of the discourse of the language of organizational change has been under researched in the existing literature (Butcher & Atkinson, 2001). Within most of the managerialist literature, language is viewed as a management tool that leads to successful outcomes. Organizational leaders are advised to manage language and communication by choosing the ‘right’ vocabulary to reflect the desired organizational identity. Typically in this perspective language is teamed with other management tools to facilitate a more efficient change process. Fiol (2002) suggests that;

Words must be consistent with resource allocations and other leadership behaviors. However, behaviors themselves do not have meaning without the language we assign to them. It is through rhetoric that leaders make a series of powerful change tools more powerful – selection systems, budgets and the like. Language gives them all specific meaning (Fiol, 2002:655).

Ford and Ford (1995:541) suggest that the traditional mainstream view of the relationship between organizational language, communication and change misses the point. They point out that the dominant view of language as a tool that is used within a change process fails to recognize that “change is a phenomenon that occurs within communication.”

This definition of change as occurring within a process of socially constructed understandings of language and organization demands a deeper look at the relationship between language and change. It also underscores the importance of power and identity in this relationship as these elements are evident in the language associated with change.
From the critical perspective, discourse analysis offers an alternative to the traditional analysis of change, and is seen “as a way of providing a different voice in OCM [organizational change management]” (Sturdy & Grey, 2003:657). Discourse analysis has emerged to redefine the organization as socially constructed and language is central to this characterization of organization. Tietze (2005) describes organizations as “ongoing social processes” that are constructed and performed in language (Doolin, 2003). Language, in this sense, becomes much more than just a vehicle of communication. It is the process that generates and changes organizations by shaping individual understandings of identity and meaning (Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000).

Although poststructuralist accounts of change have addressed issues of power and identity (for example, du Gay, 1996) they have not provided a thorough discussion of the role of the language of change in the process of organizational change. As well, the current literature on the discourse of change has not adequately addressed the role of the individual in the production of, maintenance of, and resistance to change (Caldwell, 2005; Poole & Van de Ven, 2004).

Taylor and Robichaud (2004:397) describe the role of language in sensemaking processes in two ways. They contend that organizational members “use language to name events and influence each other as they act; but they also use it to stand back from it and understand it.” Critical sensemaking informs us that this interpretation of the role of language must be understood within the context of organizational power (Helms Mills,
Some language will be privileged and some silenced within that context. Although sensemaking is enacted through language, it occurs within a discourse that at once produces and is produced by that same language. As such, the discourse of the language of change imposes order not only on individual sensemaking, but on the language itself.

This chapter suggests that although the framework of critical sensemaking provides insight into how individuals enact the language of change, it does not offer a complete analysis of the discursive effects of language within this process. This thesis attempts to contribute to this debate on the interconnectedness of language, power and sensemaking by investigating the relationship between the discursive effects of this language and the individual enactment of the discourse as meaningful. To meet this challenge, I have extended the poststructuralist approach of discourse analysis to include a perspective of critical sensemaking. This approach may allow a greater understanding of the actions, beliefs and language of individuals within a broader context that reflects the discursive effects of the language of change.

A brief history of change
Organizational change has emerged over the past two decades as one of the most prevalent topics of management theory and practice (Doolin, 2003; Pettigrew et al., 2001; Sturdy & Grey, 2003; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). The demand for more and better information on how to manage change continues. Organizational change has become a requirement of organizational management, with firms routinely struggling to manage, embrace, facilitate, or embark upon change. As Sturdy and Grey (2003:653) point out, the underlying assumption that connects this plethora of work on organizational change is
that change “should, can and must” be managed. From this perspective, change management typically includes “managerial requests, orders and commands (rewards and punishments) stemming from the authority relationship managers possess in organizational hierarchies” (Tsoukas, 2005:96).

Organizational change has a long history, but it has been often represented through the language of organizational development or human relations management. In general terms, the concept of change emerges after WWI in the form of Human Relations. Building on the concepts of personnel administration that had been applied to manage masses of workers in the war production effort, Human Relations provided some insights into how employees might be ‘managed’ to increase productivity. This perspective became more well known through the Hawthorne studies conducted by Elton Mayo in the late 1920s (Drucker, 1954).

The idea of change processes originated with the work of Kurt Lewin (1948) however it is his three-stage model of change that is more readily cited today (Higgs & Rowland, 2005). Lewin’s ideas about how to apply participative methods to small group development was seen to have implications for improving attitudes and commitment to the group, thereby leading to higher performance. Management theorists became interested in Lewin’s work because of its potential to create change in organizations (Cooke, 2001; Greiner & Cummings, 2004:376), but there is recent evidence that the work was open to more radical intent that was quietly ignored and almost lost to history (Cooke, 2006).
“Lewin’s work created a framework for a profoundly rationalist approach to change agency and organizational change. All three of his core concepts of ‘force field analysis,’ ‘group dynamics’, and ‘action research’ involved an overriding search for a rational and participative methodology of behavioural change” (Caldwell, 2005:88). Although Lewin’s work focused on change, it wasn’t until almost 20 years later that managers, and management theorists, began to label this work as organizational change. Bennis, Benny and Chin (1969) contributed to the establishment of this ‘change’ literature with their book, *The Planning of Change*.

In more recent years, Organizational Development has, for the most part, lost its prominence as the language describing change initiatives. The focus of attention on ‘change’ has shifted from the language of organizational development to one of change management (Oswick et al., 2005:385). In 1985 Pettigrew critiqued the change literature as being “largely, acontextual, ahistorical, and aprocessual”(Pettigrew et al., 2001: 697). Sixteen years later, he acknowledged that the situation had changed somewhat and a number of authors had contributed to studies on the relationship between context and action, the continuity of change, and the pace and sequencing of action in change processes (:698). The research in this period has also tended to distinguish between micro-level change and “frame breaking” or “quantum” change (Greenwood & Hinings, 1993; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985). A number of studies have also investigated the nature of continuous change (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997) or a punctuated equilibrium where periods of relatively incremental change are interrupted with moments of radical
change (Gersick, 1991; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). Feldman (2000) looks at continuous change from the point of view of organizational routines that may be changed at a micro-level. The discussion of organizational context has also been expanded in the literature, not just in the sense of the type or sequencing of change, but also in the ways in which organizational members make sense of change. For example, Bartunek's (1984) research on change in a religious order highlights the significance of the actions of organizational members and their emotional responses to change.

However, this expansion of interest and analysis within the academic community has not necessarily translated to the practitioner press. Miller, Greenwood and Hinings (1997) emphasise the differences in the presentation of change in the practitioner press versus the academic literature. While the academic literature may acknowledge that change is risky and potentially costly and disruptive to organizations, the practitioner or guru literature tends to maintain a presentation of change that is positive and essential. “The normative literature written for practitioners has as its objective to show that change is a very normal, universally necessary, and urgent aspect of organizational life. The normative literature assumes that managers have the information to change their organizations in a very reasonable, systematic, and rational way” (Miller et al., 1997:71).

The influence of the practitioner focused change literature really became visible in the mid-1970s as US organizations began to struggle with international competition. The practice of organizational change became a serious force for managers in the 1980s, and by the 1990s, approximately 70 percent of companies in North America and Europe had
engaged in at least one change (e.g. TQM, culture change, reengineering) process (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). The language that characterized change at that time often referred to downsizing or 'rightsizing' to reflect the organizational restructuring occurring at that time. The practice of change at this point was influenced by the work of Peters and Waterman (1982), which launched a wave of how-to books for managers engaged in leading change. In this context, effective change begins to be demonstrated through narratives of successful companies, and managers are identified as the leaders of change. As a result, managers or most often responsible for change related outcomes. Most of the work on change developed in this time period falls into the managerialist approach to change, which is functional and prescriptive (Doolin, 2003:753). This approach tends to offer recipes for change and prescriptive advice for managers. The focus here is on leadership and culture management (Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson, 2000). Three fundamental assumptions about change characterize this dominant approach to change management within the literature. First, there is an unquestioning acceptance of change as essential to organizational survival (French & Bell, 1999). Second, change is characterized as a threat to organizations. The language of change in this vein is often couched in a context of fear or failure, and the motivation to “embrace” change is a fear of being destroyed by the change if unable to adapt to it (Peters & Waterman, 1982). And third, change is represented as an issue of leadership (Bass, 1999; Woodward & Hendry, 2004).

*Change is essential*

There is no doubt that the discourse of change is significant in present day management theory and practice (Helms Mills, 2003). Most textbooks on organizational change today
begin with an “obligatory reference in their introductory preamble to the fact that we live in a turbulent and rapidly changing world” (Oswick et al., 2005:383). In the management literature, and in the rhetoric of consultants, the pace of change today is typically described as unprecedented. This statement characteristically sets up the assumption, either explicitly or implicitly, that this situation is a natural outcome of the evolution of society. And an acceptance of organizational change, therefore, is characterized as a naturally occurring requirement of business in today’s world.

‘Change’ in today’s management terminology, is frequently represented as an unalloyed good. Indeed, it has become a matter of serious criticism to accuse an institution or an individual of being incapable of adjusting to – or, better still, ‘thriving on’-change, or of failing to grasp its multitudinous ‘opportunities’. Change here means transformation, not piece-meal reform but radical transmutation: those who cannot or will not accede to its demands are ‘history’ (du Gay, 2003:664).

In his recent contribution to the discourse of change, change management guru, Tom Peters (2003) compares an organization’s ability to embrace transformational change with the US war on terror. He suggests the inability of US security organizations to adopt change was an important factor in enabling the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. And he describes the demand for change in the modern world as outpacing the capacity for change in North American organizations. The introduction to his book “Re-imagine! Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age” (Peters, 2003:13) states,

This is not a book about the war on terror. But it is a book about the war on terror. It is about the failure of organizations invented for another era...The concept of the ‘virtual organization’ is essential to understanding how new business works. And I repeat: The New Terrorists have proven to be masters of that concept. How we will deal with terrorist “associations” is more than a little relevant to... how business must deal with new forms of competition.
The implication is clear. If organizations do not adopt change, they will be destroyed. Change in this analogy is represented as a force that is bigger than just business. It is a global force which is essential to American freedom, nationalism, and survival. Peters concludes that, “the stakes are higher in the military than they are in, say, retailing, but the issues and the models, the friends and the foes, that are in play in each situation are exactly alike in character” (Peters, 2003:13).

In building this connection between organizational change and the threat of terrorism, the need for change is further entrenched in management literature. In that sense the rhetoric employed in the positioning of the war on terror is transferred from military discourse to a language of organizational change. It is virtually impossible to separate the argument for change as essential to organizational success from one that positions change as essential to survival. Organizational change from this perspective is characterized through a language of fear.

**Change as a threat**

In this context, the concept of organizational or individual employee, survival is prevalent in the literature and underscores the level of organizational anxiety that is typically associated with change. For example, “If people in an organization can't change, that organization will die” (Byrne, 2005:12). This approach to change is even more compelling when combined with a fear-inducing description of the changes going on in a broader social context. French and Bell (1999: xiii) introduce their textbook on change with this warning: "Organizations face multiple challenges and threats today – threats to
effectiveness, efficiency, and profitability; challenges from turbulent environments, increased competition, and changing customer demands."

DuGay (2003:667) refers to some of Peters’ earlier work (Peters & Waterman, 1982) as an example of this.

the basic narrative informing all of Peters’ many works is that organizations and their management are operating in an increasingly chaotic environment. This chaos has the capacity to destroy businesses and managers if left uncomfotred. The ‘threat’, in the form of global competition is at the gates and threatens to lay waste the promised land, which has been betrayed by inflexible, complacent and ‘amoral’ bureaucracy. If managers and organizations are to survive and flourish in a world turned upside down, they need to alter their modes of conduct completely.

DuGay (2003:668) contends that the dynamic of fear, anxiety and discontent that frames Peters’ work sets up a “total but non-specific fear: what could be more threatening than unspecific ‘chaos’?”

Change as leadership
Managers within the change management literature are seen as key to the success of change initiatives. A strong theme running through the change management literature is the need for managers to act as leaders of change and to be proactive in the search for strategies that will make organizations more competitive. There is also an emphasis on working together as a team, on closing the divide between managers and workers in the promotion of a united front and a strong unified culture. However, this popular rhetoric masks the complex reality of living with change and often downplays resistance, political process and change failure (Dawson, 2003:37).

From the perspective of effective leadership, change is often represented in the literature as a means to ‘fix’ something that has gone wrong within the organization. The language associated with this approach reflects a model of repairs, tools and interventions that
managers might introduce to cure organizational failures. For example, DiFonzo and Bordia (1998:295) describe change as a “tonic for ailing organizations.”

The basic tension that underlies many discussions of organizational change is that it would not be necessary if people had done their jobs right in the first place (Weick & Quinn, 1999:362).

Change is often associated, in this context, as a response to the failure of employees to work efficiently or effectively towards organizational goals. “A typical storyline is, first there were losses, then there was a plan of change and then there was an implementation, which led to unexpected results” (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996:20).

Helms Mills (2003) points out that change can also be associated with ‘good’ management and leaders in this sense must enact change to demonstrate their vision. Today’s expectations of a good manager no longer focus on traditional roles of planning, controlling and directing. Managers and leaders today are expected to empower employees and facilitate commitment to culture change, organizational restructuring and changing work processes (Nonaka, 1994). In his study of middle managers involved with radical organizational change, Huy (2002: 31) suggests that successful change is facilitated by managers who are able to balance an emotional commitment to “personally championed change projects” with an ability to “attend to recipients’ emotions.” In addition to this need for emotional leadership within the organization, the concept of decentralized power is fundamental to many contemporary change initiatives. This focus on employee empowerment is central to the concept of the learning organization, communities of practice, and distributed leadership programs (Caldwell, 2005).
The language of change
A poststructuralist analysis of the language of change provides an opportunity to address issues of organizational power and identity. "Language is the central focus of all poststructuralism. In the broadest terms, language defines the possibilities of meaningful existence at the same time as it limits them" (Clegg, 1989:151). And within organizational management, change may be one of the most widely embraced terms in corporate America (Beer & Nohria, 2000).

Sturdy and Grey (2003) begin their discussion of the language of change with this thought provoking text:

We live in a world of unprecedented stability. Technology continues to shape how we communicate, travel, work and live. Most of the world remains poor and dependent on those who control capital and governments. For the relatively well-off, consumerism is established as a core activity, and a lifetime with a small number of employers can be expected. In organizations, key decisions continue to be concentrated among a small cadre, and other activities are still largely formalized. Those organizations where change is attempted usually fail in their efforts (66% according to one estimate) or achieve only marginal effects. Some disappear altogether as competition ensures that such failures prove costly in time and effort. It is therefore imperative that today's managers embrace stability and learn to manage continuity if they want to survive.' The Alternative Change Text (Sturdy & Grey, 2003:651).

The authors of the above text are quick to point out that the dominant discourse of change is so entrenched in our environment that the paragraph above would most likely be dismissed as absurd, humorous, or just wrong by most managers. "The extent to which this fictitious quotation seems amusing, paradoxical, ridiculous or simply wrong is a testament to the solidity of the power effects of discourses in change and change management in organization studies and related fields" (Sturdy & Grey, 2003:651).
Change and identity construction
Identity is represented in the literature as central to the analysis of organizational change (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Surprisingly given this level of interest, there are “relatively few empirical studies available on the construction of identity at the individual level (two notable exceptions are (Sennett, 1998) and (Watson, 1994))” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003:1164).

Among the conceptual studies which are available, there are two main perspectives on the nature of identity. Traditionally, the organizational literature has held that identity is a relatively fixed element (Albert & Whetten, 1985). In that vein, Gagliardi (1986) argues that the primary strategy of an organization is to maintain its identity and that organizations change in actual fact to preserve the essence of their identities.

In their study of sensemaking during strategic change, Gioia and Thomas (1996) challenge this perspective. They question the previously held assumption that identity has permanency in organizations and individuals, and embrace the possibility that the concept of identity “may be more fluid than the organizational literature has suggested” (Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

Sensemaking as a framework to investigate the ways in which individuals construct their identities provides an opportunity to investigate the process by which changes to identity become plausible, or are made meaningful. Weick (1995:23) describes identity construction as an ongoing process where “people learn about their identities by projecting them into an environment and observing the consequences.”
Gioia and Thomas (1996) suggest that managers can change the image of the organization that they send to outsiders. And if the outsiders respond by accepting that image, and reply with meaning that reinforces the new image, then organizational reflection may occur as a catalyst for identity change. As Weick et al. (2005: 416) points out, “Who we are lies importantly in the hands of others, which means our categories for sensemaking lie in their hands. If their images of us change, our identities may be destabilized and our receptiveness to new meanings increases.” Weick (2005: 416) goes on to explain the fluidity of individual identities in sensemaking terms when he says, “identity [may] turn out to be an issue of plausibility rather than accuracy, just as is the case for many issues that involve organizing and sensemaking.”

Identity construction is an essential component of sensemaking not just as it relates to individual and organizational identities, but because it, “influences how other aspects, or properties of the sensemaking process are understood” (Helms Mills 2003 55) At the same time, the process of identity construction itself is influenced by what others think. Helms Mills (2003) applies a critical perspective to this process by suggesting that power relationships may privilege the views of more powerful actors in this sensemaking process. By applying organizational rules (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991) to sensemaking processes the relationships that privilege certain identities above others may be identified. Helms Mills points out, however, that organizational rules alone can not explain how rules are interpreted and enacted (2003:196).
On an organizational level, identities are created and maintained in language, not action, and not results (Grant et al., 1998). Pointing to the impact of advertising and public relations strategies in the management of organizations, Oswick et al. (2005) contend that a company’s identity may be formed and maintained with rhetoric, not tangible results of management processes. However, neither critical sensemaking, nor the discursive approach described by Oswick et al. (2005), specifically address the implications of language in the process of identity construction for individuals and organizations. Although the critical sensemaking approach defines how individuals come to make sense of and enact change in a local context, it does not address the management of meaning through language as distinct from the management of identity or of change.

In their analysis of the discourse of strategy Knights and Morgan (1991:269) point out that “managers and staff are not just passive victims of the power of strategic discourse; through it they are constituted as subjects either in support of, or in resistance to, its plausibility.” In the same way, the relationship between individuals and change serves to define one’s success or failure within an organization.

**Change as power**

Although there is some diversity in the literature on what drives organizational change, language is characterized as central to this discussion. “Language, images, vocabulary, abstract terms of knowledge are integral to the practice of power, of getting things done” (Wilson, 1992:883). And the language, beliefs and practices associated with typical change initiatives are strikingly similar. Most change initiatives promise empowerment,
typically focusing on a delegation of power (reflected as a prerogative for decision-making) from managers to front-line employees. The strategies proposed to achieve this empowered workforce may differ, but what is clear in the literature is that although change is aimed at redistributing power this rarely happens (Butcher & Atkinson, 2001).

One of the most sought-after identities in the realm of organizational change today is that of the ‘empowered’ workforce, organization or employee. But although the concept of empowerment is very appealing to organizational leadership, there are few examples of the successful operationalization of this within organizations (Forrester, 2000; Foster-Fishman & Keys, 1995:371). As a result, the critique of empowerment initiatives has come from both mainstream organizational theorists, who feel that the initiatives introduced have been flawed, and critical theorists, who view empowerment strategies as methods of increased organizational control which employees may choose to resist (Cooke, 2001; Wilkinson, 1998).

Critical theorists argue that management theorists have failed to address the concepts of power and disempowerment in their discussion of employee empowerment, choosing to use language that promises power without addressing the practices that limit the devolution of power within organizations (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). As Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan (1998:472) point out, “rather than avoid power, it would appear that it is, perhaps, time for mainstream management research to address it more directly.”
Researchers have noted that this “promise-making language” (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; Rousseau & Parks, 1993) creates beliefs about fairness (Rousseau & Aquino, 1992). It also creates a psychological contract (Rousseau & Parks, 1993). These promises are rarely fulfilled, however, as organizational practice has failed to embrace the systemic changes that would be necessary to transform existing power relationships (Appelbaum, Hebert, & Leroux, 1999).

Cooke (2001:102) uses as social psychological perspective to caution that the very nature of group processes can restrict participation and access to decision-making. “Specifically, participation can cause decisions to be made that are more risky, with which no one really agrees, or that rationalize harm to others, and it can be used consciously or otherwise to manipulate group members’ ideological beliefs.”

Wendt (2001) further asserts that the mainstream view of power as a commodity or possession which can be used ‘rationally’ fails to address the apparent paradox of organizational empowerment. He suggests that,

> By appreciating the counterintuitive dimensions of organizational and group power dynamics and by continuously building a trusting environment, employees can begin to empower themselves and each other. However, just as organizational power relations are not always rational or linear, neither are they stagnant or ephemeral; empowerment, like communication itself, is thus an end never to be fully realized. This may be the hardest learned lesson of all, that communication and power and leadership are interrelated, unreachable endpoints enacted through struggles over meaning, and not means or modalities (Wendt, 2001:52).

This struggle to make sense of power, empowerment and change takes place within a broader context of social and organizational meanings. Sturdy and Grey (2003:660)
describe a “shifting, ambiguous and inherently political arena lying beneath and beyond the bland clichés, pious nostrums and simplistic recipes that are the stock in trade of organizational change management.” Traditional views of organizational change that take place in isolation of these political/power relationships fail to acknowledge that the meanings created through organizational language will be informed by these discourses and the power relations which sustain them. Analysis of organizational change must, therefore, include an analysis of power within the organization as well as outside of it. It must also investigate the conditions which allow those power relationships to exist.

From a poststructuralist perspective, power is not a ‘commodity’ that can be acquired, shared, or lost. In stark contrast to the managerial view to redistribute or control power within organizations through change, a Foucauldian understanding or power sees it in a mutually constituted relationship with knowledge.

The distribution of power among actors, the forms of power on which actors can draw, and the types of actor that may exercise power in a given situation are constituted by discourse and are, at a particular moment, fixed. Over time, however, discourses evolve as this system of power privileges certain actors, enabling them to construct and disseminate texts. Depending on the dynamics of transmission and consumption, these texts may influence the broader discourse and shape the discursive context (Hardy & Phillips, 2004:299).

The ubiquitous nature of power is described by Foucault (1988a) as dispersed and circulating within, or outside of the organization. He maintains that there is no ‘power’ but only power relationships which are being constantly created as both effects and conditions of other processes. In this sense, a discourse of change both produces and maintains power relationships reflected in the language, beliefs and practices adopted by the changing organization.
Foucault emphasizes that any analysis of power must also acknowledge resistance as part of the same process. In essence, resistance is the irreducible opposite of power (Foucault, 1980:96). There exists, therefore, a discourse of resistance to change. This focus on individual enactment of change (or resistance) in the context of a dominant change discourse may also provide useful insight into the constraints inherent in transformational change processes.

**Change as inevitable**

As previously discussed, organizational change in the mainstream literature is presented as a natural circumstance of the modern management environment. Although, as Fairclough and Thomas (2004:381) point out, “rarely does anyone provide compelling empirical evidence to support this assertion.” Further reading of the history of change indicates that organizational change in its current form may result from a given social reality influenced by specific discourses of capitalism, nationalism, management, (Mueller & Carter, 2005) and the production of knowledge within several sectors of the knowledge economy: human resource management, management consulting, and the academy.

To investigate the ‘inevitability’ of change this study will adopt a genealogical reading of the history of change. Foucault’s genealogical approach focuses on essentially one question, “What is our present?”(May, 1993:1)

To ask about our present, to ask what it is, is not so abstract a question as it may appear. For what Foucault is after in holding this question to be the organizing principle of his life’s work is neither an ontology nor a metaphysics. It is not a matter of delving into the Being of the present, but
rather of asking them one pedestrian and yet more urgent question: What are things like for us today? In what kinds of situations do we find ourselves, in what kinds of predicaments and with what kinds of troubles? What are the constraints that (immediately apparent to us or not) bind us, the oppressions that beset us? And how did we let all this happen? (May, 1993:1).

A genealogical approach to the evolution of the discourse of change will attempt to analyze the particular set of conditions that have made this discourse possible, but not necessarily the inevitable outcome of a linear historical evolution.

**The language of change as problematic**

The discursive effects of the language of change have significant implications for our understanding of organizational change. First, the totalizing assumptions represented in this language narrow possibilities of perspective on change (du Gay, 2003). Second, this discourse neglects the voices of individuals, particularly those engaged in resistance (Thomas & Davies, 2005b). And finally, it maintains a power/knowledge structure located within other discourses, for example nationalism, capitalism and globalization. This structure disenfranchises those with other perspectives (Sturdy & Grey, 2003).

Fairclough and Thomas (2004) argue that change has always been present in society and business. “Change and flow and movement are constants, and therefore contemporary events are no different from those observable throughout history” (:381). Why, then, has the need for ‘change’ become so important in the past 20-30 years? A critical analysis of how this current ‘knowledge’ of change emerged and became so widely accepted may begin with an assessment of the specific language used in connection with change.
The acceptance of this relationship between a constantly changing broader environment and the need for organizational change is so complete that it forms a key part of the fear/anxiety potential of the change discourse (Oswick et al., 2005). This rational for change is essentially taken for granted in the literature, and there is virtually no discussion about whether the societal level changes we are experiencing today actually do require transformational changes within organizations. Cheney et al. (2004) describe this process of linking one issue with another as a particular rhetorical strategy called “identification.” The undisputed connection between organizational change and social, political or environmental change appears in the language of management practice as well as academic studies. In this context, “the need for micro-change (i.e. organizational change) is depicted as indivisible from macro-change (i.e. wider socio-economic change)” (Oswick et al., 2005).

This acceptance of the need for change, driven by the corresponding fear for organizational survival, helps to maintain the discourse of change as a powerful “requirement” of good management. “The discursive coupling of rapid social change with the need for a concomitant organization response is, however, problematic insofar as this process of identification shuts off other possible courses of action” (Oswick et al., 2005:384).

According to Sturdy and Grey (2003:653) this assumption reflects the dominant perspective which “gives voice to managerial perspectives but neglects others.” These authors voice a concern “about the dominance of the view that organizational change is
inevitable, desirable and/or manageable and that this view seems to be taken for granted, receiving relatively little critical attention” (Sturdy & Grey, 2003:659).

Helms Mills (2003) contends that a blind acceptance of the premise that organizational change is a real and pressing issue limits managers’ ability to see alternatives to change, or variations in how change might be enacted. She points out that, “some organizations have survived by resisting the urge to change, or by arguing that change will unacceptably alter its fundamental character (e.g., the Catholic Church)” (Helms Mills 2003:123) Nevertheless, stories of organizations that resist change are not typically featured in the change literature.

The lack of ‘hard’ evidence of change identified in this study has typically meant that organizational change in the mainstream literature is evaluated through the sharing of stories of successful organizations and their change experiences. These stories provide an assessment of the change based on productivity outcomes after the change. They rarely address the voices of individuals involved in the process, and their anecdotal approach to evaluation is probably more representative of the management guru approach than academic research.

Here is an example of one of these stories:

So Long, Civil Service

Nearly four years ago, the state of Delaware dissolved its underperforming IT department and hired CIO Tom Jarrett to rebuild it. Jarrett (at Governor Ruth Ann Minner's behest and with the legislature's blessing) also eliminated the civil service system that guaranteed IT workers job security.
and regular, albeit marginal, raises. Every employee had to reapply for a job in the new Delaware Department of Technology and Information. Workers who were rehired got salaries competitive with the private sector in the area but had to meet performance goals to keep their jobs.

Jarrett cut 90 percent of the old department's senior and middle management positions, and replaced the remaining ones with new functions and titles. He and his team then met with each of the department's 200 employees to tell them whether they had a future with the new agency.

Although there was no IT employees union defending their jobs, those who weren't rehired were guaranteed a job elsewhere in state government. In the end, 79 percent of the staff survived.

Jarrett says that since the transformation, his staff has finished all of its major projects on time and on or under budget. But his personnel practices have created a rift between the department and other state agencies that are still on the civil service system. Lynn Hersey-Miller, the department's chief program officer, says that her team is perceived as pushy because they have performance goals to meet. IT workers are also resented for their higher salaries. "If one of my folks makes a mistake, I've heard people say, 'You shouldn't be making those kinds of mistakes with the money you make,'" she says. "It's just a difference in culture."

But it's made a difference in the State of Delaware. (Levinson, 2005:1)

This anecdote was included in an article honoring some of 2005's most successful change initiatives. In the title of the article the CEOs are recognized for "steer[ing] their staffs to new jobs, better performance and different approaches to building systems" (Levinson, 2005:1).

There is little recognition here for the anxiety-producing effects of this change that must have accompanied the job cuts and changes to the system of rewards and consequences that control employee behavior. Although the author does acknowledge a rift that has developed in the larger organization (government), the author makes short work of this phenomena by characterizing the resistance in the other departments as lack of
enlightenment on the part of those elements of the state still on the old system. Any tension between the two groups is explained away as “just a difference in culture,” the new one clearly positioned as “better.”

The final line in the story emphasizes the main point – that productivity has improved, and therefore (retrospectively) we know that change was successful. This exemplifies two important elements of the impact of change in the current literature. The first is that productivity or profitability are unquestioned as the most important measures of success. Very much in line with Weick’s (1995) framework for organizational sensemaking, this process of building stories is retrospective, ongoing, and part of a social fabric of change that has become a significant backdrop to management decision-making. In fact, after time had passed and the “success stories” of a previous decade were actually facing significant financial losses (i.e. Sears and General Motors), the story is re-framed so that the current circumstance may be attributed to a failure to fully commit to sustained change, or an individual leadership style is blamed.

The second element identified here is that the experience of individual employees rarely factors into the story. Those who ‘resisted change’ or in this case may have been in the 21 percent of employees who were without work at the end of this process are rarely acknowledged at all.

**Resistance to change**

Today, ‘resistance to change’ has been embedded in the mainstream literature as a marginalizing label, referring to practices that are irrational, un-American, and unacceptable in right-minded organizations. The positive messages associated with
change combine with the threat of survival to “marginalize alternative critical readings of globalization” (Oswick, 2001) while a form of coercive persuasion heightens anxiety among managers and reinforces adherence to the positive view (Fairclough & Thomas, 2004).

In the change literature, managers have frequently received attention in terms of their role in managing or enacting resistance to change. In her study of 40 managers experiencing change, Isabella (1990: 34) challenges the view that resistance is an obstacle to be overcome, and suggests it may be otherwise seen as “an inherent element of the cognition transition occurring during change.” She concludes that resistance to change may be a result of the construed reality that managers experience as they move through four stages of change; anticipation, confirmation, culmination and aftermath.

From a poststructuralist perspective, managers are often the subjects of study due to their unique power relationships. “Within an organizational context managers are placed in a position of weakness and power simultaneously. On the one hand, they are too fearful to resist changes that may or may not happen and cannot take the chance that events may overtake them if they do not respond” (Fairclough & Thomas, 2004:385). On the other hand, managers are also empowered in local settings as they have at their disposal a powerful discursive resource (Hardy et al., 2000). The discourse of change can serve to quiet resistance from employees, and gain commitment from them for change initiatives. It also contains a controlling threat of “downsizing” or redistribution of resources, the initiating events of many of the change programs in the 1980s and ‘90s.
Foucault points out that resistance is the irreducible opposite of power in any power relationship (Foucault, 1980:96). In this perspective, all aspects of organizational work are focused on disciplinary power that extracts productivity. Disciplinary power is built into the structure of the organization, the goals of the organization and the surrounding environment (Foucault, 1966).

One of the challenges in locating resistance to change is the narrow definition of resistance that has framed this activity in the literature. As discussed by Thomas and Davies (2005b), resistance in the early years of "change" was defined largely as concern of "the worker." From the traditional capitalist versus labour perspective, resistance was seen as enacted by "the prototype male blue-collar worker" (Gottfried, 1994:103) towards whatever was imposed upon him. More recently, the "subject of resistance -- the category of the 'oppressed worker'--has been widened to include other oppressed groups and new categories of workers previously overlooked. The contribution of 'new' knowledges coming into organization studies, from feminist theory, post colonial theory, queer theory, and poststructuralist and post modern philosophies, have made a significant contribution in recent years to the 'shaking up' of conceptualisations of resistance" (Thomas & Davies, 2005b:712).

Another dimension of this response to resistance is the tendency in the mainstream literature to blame resistant employees and managers for the failure of change (Tsoukas, 2005). While there have been attempts to understand the reasons for failure, these have
been seen as inconclusive, and a need for further empirical work has been identified. Within the growing literature on change leadership there are assertions that the root cause of many change problems is leadership behaviour (Higgs & Rowland, 2005:121). Managers and senior leadership are critiqued for not being fully committed to change initiatives, and employees who resist change essentially need to be ‘managed’ into compliance.

However, managers may still demonstrate resistance to the discourse, and the language of change.

Rupert Steiner, editor of the Prufrock diary, suggests that senior managers are showing their disdain for recent developments in management knowledge by playing ‘buzzword bingo’ (Sunday Times, 28 June 1998 cited in Collins, 2004:671).

Clark and Fincham (2002) go on to assert that cynicism with buzzwords is common among managers and academics. This cynicism may reflect a frustration with the widespread, quickly adopted, and universally accepted language of change. If ‘buzzword bingo’ exists as a form of resistance to the totalizing impact of the language of change, it is not the type of resistance that is referred to in the change management literature. Resistance in the mainstream literature typically refers to processes that delay the change process or increase its costs (Ansof, 1990). In this sense, resistance is often attributed to employees or leaders who do not embrace the components of change initiatives as they are implemented within the organization.

To more fully understand the nature of resistance to change within organizations, we must broaden the definition of who resists, as well as our understanding of what
resistance looks like (Thomas & Davies, 2005b). And, by observing the language and actions of individuals within organizations, we may gain further insight into the process by which individuals make sense of change and constitute resistance. As Thomas and Davies (2005b:715) suggest, from the Foucauldian feminist perspective, “resistance takes the form of micro-political resistance understood as: Resistance to the dominant at the level of the individual subject is the first stage in the production of alternative forms of knowledge or where such alternatives already exist, of winning individuals over to these discourses and gradually increasing their social power” (Weedon, 1999:111).

Change as emergent discourse
The emergence of “change” as a management initiative is closely connected to the development of Human Resource Management. Human Resource Management has struggled to establish an identity as a strategic element of good organizational management. Within this identity is the specific role of the HR manager/consultant as an agent of change (Caldwell, 2001; Guest, 1990).

the "changemaker" role among HR professionals is well documented, and linked with this increasing attention has been drawn by analysts to the pivotal position of the HRM function in reinterpreting symbols and changing meanings for employees (Francis, 2003:309).

Perhaps as a result of this need to establish itself as a concern of both managers and academics, change exists as much in the “management guru” domain as in the world of academic research. And, in some cases, the individuals writing in these two domains have become one and the same (Collins, 2004). As a result of this interconnectedness, the line between theoretical foundation for the discourse of change, and the prescriptions for changing can be blurred (Poole & Van de Ven, 2004).
This point is important when investigating the origins of change because the domains of both human resource management and management consulting have struggled to carve out for themselves roles as essential, strategic elements in management practice. This struggle for legitimacy is achieved through endorsement within the mainstream management literature which enables the consulting industry enacting these change strategies. As the discourse of change becomes more widely accepted, the acceptance of change as both desirable (or even utopian) (Fairclough & Thomas, 2004), combined with the implied threat of organizational demise (Oswick, 2001) leaves the need for change virtually unquestioned. This need is reinforced on a macro level by the academic community which must remain relevant, and on a micro level by managers and consultants who continue to enact change.

Perhaps spurred on by the rise of international business or by domestic economic crises, this demand for organizational change has become most prevalent in the American economy. The most celebrated management gurus on change (for example, Drucker, 1954; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Senge, 1994) write from the perspective of the United States, and identify the nature of the US business environment as especially conducive to change processes:

Organizational change in terms of corporate re-structuring or downsizing is easier and faster in the United States than in Japan or Germany. The US capital market, viewed as a market for control of ownership rather than stability of ownership, facilitates relatively easy and frequent mergers and acquisitions... The highly developed and adaptable external labor market in the United States and the employment-at-will doctrine, combined with a management philosophy of human capital as infinitely replaceable in the market, gives US firms the latitude to replace employees relatively more easily in comparison with German or Japanese firms (Lewin & Kim, 2004:344).
It is not surprising, then, that the language of change in recent years reflects some familiar elements of American culture. Concepts such as democracy, entrepreneurship, and autonomy have become entrenched in the change literature.

In the 1980s and 1990s, with the end of the cold-war and the emergence of a new threat to the US, globalization, the language of change alters again and becomes much more focused on survival and a response to the turbulent socio-political environment. The discourse of change in this sense is very closely related to the discourse of globalization, and consequently, of nationalism. In fact, metaphors of the American dream are never far from the surface in the current change discourse. Even in this year’s downturn in the US economy, advice is still couched in language like “US needs pioneer spirit to stay No. 1” (Morton, 2006).

This emphasis on American nationalism provides a response, to some extent, to Japanese competitiveness, one of the paramount economic events of the post-war world (Pascale & Athos, 1986: xiii). And perhaps as a result of the management crises in the 1980s, the language of business in the 1980s and ‘90s began to reflect an increased focus on profit, leadership and change. This focus was not limited to the United States, as other Western economies began to reflect “an enterprise culture [the necessary remedy for a series of economic ills including inflation, unemployment and international competitiveness]”(Collins, 1996:2). Keat’s (1991:58) study of the British economy at that time asserts that, “The rhetoric of enterprise has dominated British Culture at virtually every level during the 1980s."
The language of change as discourse
Within this context, discourse analysis as an approach to studying change has begun to grow in prominence in organizational studies (Grant et al., 1998; Sturdy & Grey, 2003). This approach offers an alternative to the traditional analysis of change, and is seen "as a way of providing a different voice in OCM" (Sturdy & Grey, 2003:657). Discourse analysis has emerged to redefine the organization as socially constructed, and language is central to this characterization of organization. Tietze (2005) describes organizations as "ongoing social processes" that are constructed and performed in language (Doolin, 2003). Language, in this sense, becomes much more than just a vehicle of communication. It is the process that generates and changes organizations by shaping individual understandings of identity and meaning (Hardy et al., 2000).

As Alvesson and Karreman (2000:1125) point out, “discourse is a popular term used in a variety of ways, easily leading to confusion.” The confusion arises, to some degree, because the term discourse has been used, almost interchangeably, with a number of other terms related to the communication of meanings within organizations. For example, organizational rhetoric, language, narratives, vocabularies, scripts, or conversations. There are also a variety of methods used in relation to this analytic approach. These methods may include textual analysis, interpretation of symbols and deconstruction of narratives, among others. As well, there exist two dominant, but quite distinct, approaches to understanding organizational discourse. These are:

the study of the social text (talk and written text in its social action contexts) and the study of social reality as discursively constructed and maintained (the shaping of social reality through language). The former approach highlights the ‘talked’ and ‘textual’ nature of everyday interaction in organization. The latter focuses on the determination of
social reality through historically situated discursive moves” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000:1126).

It is the second of these approaches, the study of social reality as discursively constructed and maintained, that is the focus of this paper. This connection between language, meaning and individual action provides a useful framework for examining the power effects of the language of change in relation to individuals and organizations. In this case, the term discourse draws upon the Foucauldian tradition which defines discourse essentially as “a set of ideas and practices which condition our ways of relating to, and acting upon, particular phenomena” (Knights & Morgan, 1991:253). However, Foucault himself applies the term in different ways, “…sometimes as the grand domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizeable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements” (Foucault, 1972:80). While this may contribute to the confusion about the term in organizational studies, Foucault’s approach to discourse is understood to encompass “speech, talk, documents, and other texts, [and] is fundamentally also about much more than these phenomena” (Prasad, 2005:250).

The study of talk also needs to consider the social context and the participants: to just hear the story -focus on the talk- is insufficient. There is the trap of linguistic reductionism and/or a rather narrow focus on details of language use that may lead discourse studies to a somewhat peripheral position seen as esoteric by organizational participants (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000:1145).

Discourse in this sense is more than a set of vocabulary that characterizes a particular perspective. Discourses function to impose social order (Foucault, 1966), or in this case, order upon organizations and individuals within organizations. Foucault’s analysis of discourse aims to discover how discourses come into being, and how they are translated
into effects, such as control (McHoul & Grace, 1997). From this perspective, a discourse is historically situated, and specific rules govern and structure any discourse (Prasad, 2005).

...in any given historical period we can write, speak or think about a given social object or practice (madness, for example) only in certain specific ways and not others. ‘A discourse’ would then be whatever constrains – but also enables – writing, speaking and thinking within such specific historical limits (McHoul & Grace, 1997:31).

A poststructuralist approach to the discourse of a language of change provides us with an in-depth analysis of power relationships within organizations. The focus of this analytic approach, as previously discussed, is to address the power/knowledge relationships which both produce and are produced by this discourse. Although there is some discussion of the power effects of the discourse on individuals experiencing organizational change (i.e. Woodman & Dewett, 2004) this treatment of consequence in the literature is very limited. The analytic framework of discourse analysis requires a broad societal perspective in its attempt to capture the full spectrum of power relationships which maintain that discourse. As a result, the distinct voices of individuals within this discourse may be lost. And, although post structuralism provides an essential analysis of the broader social discourse in which organizations operate, the phenomenon of “change” happens among individuals within organizations, and the effects of the discourse, as well as the products of it, must also be investigated on an individual level. A critical approach to Weick’s (1995) sensemaking offers an opportunity to investigate change on an individual level and gain insight into how individuals produce, reflect, control and are controlled by the discourse of change within organizations.
Although particularly evident with regards to resistance, there is a gap in the literature concerning the connection between discourse and action, or agency in general. Engestrom (1999:170) points out that organizations “exist in order to produce goods, services or less-clearly-defined outcomes for customers or users,” not simply as representations of language, conversations or texts. He sees this connection between discourse and action as key to understanding the relationship between language and organization. However, there has been little work done in this vein on how organizations should change or the role that individuals should have in the changing (Poole & Van de Ven, 2004). Without an analysis of this complex reality, including the power relationships that drive or restrict change, it will be difficult to clearly assess the value of change, and its impact on individuals.

**Agency in the change literature**

Despite the vast literature on organizational change in general, there exists relatively little work on change from the perspective of individual agency. To complicate matters further, the research which does exist represents a “growing fragmentation and diversity” (Caldwell, 2005:104) in terms of competing perspectives on agency. In his review of agency and organizational change, Caldwell (2005) describes four competing discourses of agency; rationalist, contextualist, dispersalist, and constructionist. In each of these discourses, agency is conceptualized through a different ontology. The most established and widely recognized view of agency in the literature is the rationalist approach. This view proposes the concepts of the “change agent” (Lewin, 1999) and “process consultant” (Schein, 1988) who offer expertise and direction during planned change initiatives. In recent years, there has been some debate among institution theorists
working from this approach about the traditional role of the individual as embedded within the organization and the concept of “institutional entrepreneurs” a term that may be applied to individuals in institutions who mobilize resources, utilize rhetoric, and affect institutional change (Battilana, 2006). Work by Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) for example, addresses the discursive struggle between members of two professions dealing with the emergence of a new organizational form within an established institutional field. These authors analyze the importance of institutional rhetoric in influencing the outcome of change initiatives.

The contextualist approach focuses on “processes of emergent change and the bounded nature of centred agency in organizations” (Caldwell, 2005:86). In this sense, agency is viewed in relation to processes of change. This research is concerned with creating “theoretically sounds and practically useful research on change that explores the contexts, content and processes of change together with their interconnectedness through time (Pettigrew, 1987:268). In contrast, the dispersalist discourse is concerned with self-organizing systems and decentralised decision making processes found in concepts like the learning organization (Senge, 1994). In this way, the dispersalist perspective focuses on processes of organizing and individual sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005) in those processes. The fourth discourse, constructionist, positions agency within discursive practices. The critique of this perspective is most often associated with the lack of rational or intentional control that individuals have over the effects of discourse from this point of view.
To date, the competing nature of these discourses has meant that there is no unified understanding of the role of agency in organizational change. As a result research on individual experiences in change initiatives tends to reflect this division, limiting contributions to one or another defined camp. The methodology utilized in this thesis offers a response to Caldwell’s (2005) call for new approaches to studying agency in organizational change which attempt to combine elements of two of these competing discourses. An approach of critical sensemaking informed by a poststructuralist perspective, may provide an opportunity to combine elements of the constructionist and dispersalist discourses of agency. Both these perspectives offer an opportunity to make language central to the analysis. And by maintaining the constructionist focus on power and discourse, while adopting a framework that illustrates how individuals make sense of and enact the discourse of the language of change, this study offers an innovative approach.

**An approach of critical sensemaking**

The analytical lens of sensemaking offers insight into the individual process of creating meaning. “Sensemaking is central because it is the primary site where meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity and action” (Helms Mills, 2003:35). Sensemaking offers a retrospective process through which individuals interpret and make sense of events in the change process. Identity construction is central to this process of sensemaking as it highlights the complex nature of social construction reflected in contemporary organizational change processes. As Helms Mills (2003:55) points out, identity construction “is at the root of sensemaking, and influences how other aspects, or properties of the sensemaking process are understood.” From that perspective, the
identities of those experiencing change influence the way in which they make sense of events and enact meanings. This facilitates a process of identity construction where, “who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity” (Weick et al. 2005: 416).

This approach to identity construction questions the previously held view that identities are held somewhat stable over time. The approach outlined above suggests an ongoing process of change. It also informs us as to some of the possibilities of discursive power in this relationship. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), for example, emphasize the role of ‘sensegiving’ in this process. From a poststructuralist perspective, this influence on sensemaking may be reflective of the discursive power of those actors and meanings positioned to influence organizational and individual identities.

The importance of this relationship between identity and sensemaking is significant in the enactment of meaning. As Weick et al. (2005: 416) reminds us, “when people face an unsettling difference, that difference often translates into questions such as who are we, what are we doing, what matters, and why does it matter? These are not trivial questions.”

At the same time, sensemaking offers a useful framework for analyzing language relationships. Language, as seen through this framework, is the substance of sensemaking. “Sense is generated by words that are combined into the sentences of
conversation to convey something about our ongoing experience” (Weick, 1995:106).

But the process is ongoing as individuals pull their understandings from a variety of vocabularies; occupational, professional, social, ideological. And, there is always some “slippage” between the meanings conveyed and understood (Weick, 1995:107).

Critical sensemaking provides context for the process individuals use to make sense of organizational events, language and practices. Even though these elements are informed by a broader social discourse of change, the production of change within organizations must occur at a level of individual action. Helms Mills (2005) argues that ‘formative contexts’ can be established to link actions with the discourse of change, and to explain how individuals reproduce the discourse as they enact it. Building on the work of Unger (1987) and Blackler (1992), Helms Mills (2005) contends that these contexts help to suggest the pre-existing set of rules that constrain how organizational language, events, and actions may be viewed.

Organizational rules (Helms Mills 2000a; Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991) provide insight into the system of formal and informal rules which inform organizational processes and controls. These rules combine within organizations to define the particular way things are done. The evolution of these rules may come through the effects of organizational discourse, and the subsequent experiences and behaviours of individuals within the organization. As in the construction of all knowledge/power relationships, these rules in local context are not static and may change based on the actions of individuals who resist them (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991).
The need for a new approach to analysing the language of change

The traditional managerial focus on organizational change and the language of change as tools that can be manipulated in the pursuit of organizational goals has left little space for a more in-depth analysis of the political landscape on which change happens. Specifically, the relationship between language and power in the process of identity construction in an environment of change has not been fully explored. As individuals and organizations endeavor to make sense of ongoing change, the broader context of this landscape must be taken into consideration from the perspective of discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis alone, however, cannot adequately address the process of change that is enacted by individuals within organizations. Individual enactment of acceptance of, or resistance to, change initiatives may be best explained through a framework that examines the retrospective process through which discursive language, events, and experiences are made meaningful in local contexts.

A critical approach to sensemaking extends Weick’s (1995) analysis to provide the framework of organizational rules in which individuals are operating (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000a). It also provides an important bridge to understanding the social and psychological processes which translate a discourse such as organizational change into the micro-level actions of individual employees as they choose to enact or resist the language, beliefs or practices of this discourse.

Although both the perspectives of discourse analysis (Oswick et al., 2005) and critical sensemaking (Helms Mills, 2003) discuss the importance of language as an element of
change, neither perspective alone provides an analysis of language as the context in which change happens. By incorporating the principles of critical sensemaking researchers may focus on the rules and conventions that create language and experiences as ‘meaningful’, as well as the process through which individuals enact these meanings. The discursive approach to this analysis provides a broader context that establishes the language and experiences of those making sense of change. A discourse analysis also serves to locate the language of change among related discourses of management. As I will demonstrate through this thesis, this focus on the macro environment of change, combined with the micro-level analysis of the enactment of change within organizations also provides a more complete picture of the discursive effects of the language of change.
Chapter Three

Conceptualizing the study

As discussed in previous chapters, this study conceptualizes the process of organizational change as a business practice and an element of organizational control enacted through a discourse of the language of change. The first section of this chapter will explore the poststructuralist underpinnings of the study. This discussion will include an investigation of the Foucauldian understanding of discourse in society and the struggle within this perspective to accommodate agency and the voice of the individual. The following sections present the theoretical components of the study which provide insight into how this broader social discourse may be enacted or resisted by individuals. This production of, reproduction of or resistance to change will be viewed within individual processes of sensemaking which create the discourse as meaningful at the local level. Critical sensemaking offers an appropriate framework within which to view this process as it focuses on the interconnectedness between individual sensemaking and the production of discourse.

In applying the critical sensemaking framework, this research will utilize techniques of critical discourse analysis in the poststructuralist tradition in order to privilege language and power as central to the investigation. Critical discourse analysis offers a methodology which has the capacity to address concepts “that we had not previously considered but that... were critical to our understanding of the complex inter-organizational relationships in our studies. Identity, in particular, was central – not a traditional view of identity as a stable, essential characteristic but, rather, a fragmented,
fluid and ambiguous identity that changed over time with interesting implications” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002:41).

Weick’s sensemaking (1995) offers an approach which complements critical discourse analysis in its ability to see the continuously constructed, self-reflexive, retrospective nature of identities; individual and organizational. Although sensemaking itself does not address the central concerns of critical discourse analysis – power and privilege – Helms Mills’ (2003) critical sensemaking considers the sensemaking process within the context of organizational power, thus making it a useful framework for investigating the discursive effects of a discourse of change at the individual level.

Essentially, critical discourse analysis is used in this research to position critical sensemaking to analyse the power and privilege which informs the language of change. In this way, the interconnectedness between individual action and the production of discourse may be investigated in the context of organizational change.

**Poststructuralism and the language of change**

Poststructuralism is a broad field typically defined by its “focus on language as it relates to institutions and power” (Prasad, 2005:238). Researchers within this tradition often use the analytic tools of discourse analysis and deconstruction, both designed to investigate the language / power relationship. Although these elements are common to Poststructuralism in general, there are differences in application. Probably the most well
know form of deconstruction in this genre is Jacques Derrida’s (1978) use of deconstruction as a mode of textual analysis. His focus is on the centrality and significance of “writing in the overall philosophic project” (Prasad, 2005:239). Derrida’s deconstruction is concerned with written texts and is intent on reinventing the writing or repositioning elements of the text in order to destabilize established representations of knowledge. In contrast to that approach, this thesis uses deconstruction in a Foucauldian manner, still intent on destabilizing established knowledge, but primarily interested in the power relationship exercised through language. Foucault’s approach, although consistent with Derrida in that he questions metanarratives and truth claims, focuses on discourse. His use of deconstruction is essentially to pull apart the structures which produce and maintain discourse by uncovering the specific conditions which make the discourse possible (Prasad, 2005).

Consistent with the Foucauldian perspective, this thesis is primarily concerned with the disciplinary effects of the discourse of the language of change and the relationship between power and knowledge in the production and maintenance of change. More specifically, I am interested in the questions which represent the building blocks of a Foucauldian analysis:

What individuals, what groups or classes have access to a particular kind of discourse? How is the relationship institutionalised between the discourse, speakers and its destined audience? How is the relationship of the discourse to its author indicated and defined? How is struggle for the control of discourses conducted (Foucault, 1978:15)?
This approach is most appropriate to a study of the language of change concerned with meaning and social interaction. It also allows for an investigation of the nature of struggle within the discourse and through the language of change.

In this thesis, I have endeavoured to make present-day organizational change more understandable as a discourse that has emerged out of a compilation of events, beliefs and practices. I have also attempted to "record the singularity of surface events" (Burrell, 1988:229) that have helped to construct the meaning of change as a discourse that imposes order on organizations. Therefore, from an ontological perspective, this research has taken a social constructivist position, viewing reality as being individually and socially constructed (Prasad, 2005).

Within this construction of organizational change, a poststructuralist reading assumes that "no discourse is intrinsically 'truer' or 'falser' than the others." (Rossi, 2004:6). However, some discourses emerge as dominant and carry discursive power while others remain marginalized in the process. This analysis has uncovered a number of narratives reflecting discourses of change in the two organizations studied here. In each case, a limited few have emerged as dominant. At the same time, competing discourses have been produced to resist or provide alternatives to the dominant voice. The power of these competing discourses to establish themselves within the organization, as discussed in future chapters, results in a determination of the "success" of change.

The question of how some discourses become privileged over others is central to a critical discourse analysis of the language of change, and it also introduces some
important connections with the framework of critical sensemaking. The possibility that members of the same organization may make sense of the same language in different ways has been acknowledged within the poststructuralist perspective. For example, Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism emphasises that discursive meaning is not created in isolation. It is an ongoing process that involves dialogue between individuals enacting language in response to previously established meaning and in anticipation of future meanings. As well, recent work on resistance to change (Thomas & Davies, 2005a) has suggested that individuals may draw on multiple discourses when constructing their own identities. This may result in multiple representations of the meaning of 'employee' for example, within the same organization.

However, there is little direction given in the literature as to the process through which these multiple voices may become visible within a dominant discourse or in what circumstances. Critical sensemaking may provide a process, in its accounting for the broader context of power, whereby individual process of sensemaking could lead to different outcomes. Through principles such as 'plausibility versus accuracy,' it is possible to connect the plurality of discourse advocated by Foucault with the process by which one discursive explanation of change or identity makes sense to the individual, while others may not. Likewise, the process of extracting cues from a complex environment often privileges one possible meaning over another and provides a link between how an actor, word or experience may reflect power in discourse and be made meaningful in organizations in the same process.
Although the critical approach tends to see power as controlling, Foucault’s conceptualization of power did not exclude the possibility that power may also be a positive force, and even productive for individuals (Newton, 1998; Townley, 1994). Similarly, Knights and Morgan (1991: 194) argue that the “corporate strategy discourse stimulates a positive sense of self-discipline by transforming individual employees into subjects who secure their sense of identity, meaning and reality through participating in strategic practices.” This perspective suggests that the power effects of discourse can be internalized by individuals into processes of sensemaking that are ultimately positive experiences.

While this broader conceptualization of power opens up some possibilities in terms of identity construction and resistance within discourse, it does not specifically offer insight into how individual actors might enact, influence or resist power. As Rossi (2004:6) points out, “because Foucault equates power and knowledge (cf. Foucault, 1977:27), he limits the extent to which actors can be seen actively to manipulate knowledge in power games which do not take place between equals.”

Consistent with Townley’s (1994:107) caution that, “it would be a mistake to assume that the individual is a passive participant in the constitution of identity,” this study was concerned with highlighting the role of agency in the process of change. To that end, this study required the application of a method of analysis which is informed by a Foucauldian perspective but at the same time provides the tools to focus on the language
of change as a discursive process enacted by individuals through their own sensemaking of organizational change.

**Critical Sensemaking**

Weick (1995) describes the sensemaking framework as a recipe that provides both a way to interpret the environment and a guide to action. A recipe can help to make retrospective sense out of observed behaviour, or in a more active sense, a recipe “tells how to handle people and situations so that satisfactory results are obtained and so that undesirable consequences are minimized” (Weick, 1979:46).

This framework offers important insight into why some meanings are acted upon in the process of organizational change while others are not. Miller (2004:212) explains that “sensemaking is both an individual psychological process (belief-driven by recipes) and an interactive social process (action-driven through communication cycles.)” This dual process of understanding and communicating is central to the micro-level enactment of, and therefore the production, maintenance and constraint of, macro level discourse.

By adopting an approach of critical sensemaking this study offers an opportunity to address the dynamic of organizational change in a more complete fashion as the analysis of language becomes focused on processes rather than on discrete categories of individual understanding reflected in language. The retrospective and ongoing nature of sensemaking, and the tendency of individuals to draw on a plurality of available discourses and identities as they make sense of things, makes it an ideal framework through which to view change as a process.
This application is perhaps most visibly achieved in the study of resistance to the language of change. Although the Foucauldian analysis of power theoretically links the existence of power and resistance, there has been relatively little direction provided in the literature on how to study individual resistance at the employee level (Newton, 1998). In that sense, the Foucauldian “neglect of resistance... reflects the limitation of Foucault’s analysis where, in the desire to avoid explanations at the level of the subject, human agency gets lost in the constitution of the subject solely through discourse” (Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995:625).

As a result of the limited focus on agency in the poststructuralist perspective, those working in a Foucauldian tradition have been challenged as they attempt to reflect individual processes of discourse production or reproduction in the context of resistance. By applying a framework of critical sensemaking, this thesis has attempted to create space for individuals to reflect upon their own resistance to change where this emerges as part of their individual sensemaking process.

The properties of sensemaking as retrospective, social, and ongoing are consistent with those corresponding elements in an approach of critical discourse analysis. As a result, this framework will serve to enhance that perspective in the analysis. However, the framework also offers some unique opportunities to focus the analysis in the following ways. First, identity construction is a central element in both the change initiatives addressed in this study, and as Weick (1995:20) states, “the establishment and
maintenance of identity is a core preoccupation in sensemaking." The discourse of change reflected in this study emphasised the construction of identity among individuals and organizations and provided an important theme of analysis. By privileging this property as a potential mechanism for understanding a participant's reaction to or experience with change, the study was able to explore how identity construction is enacted at the micro level.

At the health centre featured in this study, identity becomes central to the focus of the organizational change initiative. As employees were struggling to make sense of their new identities in a merged organization, the senior leadership team introduced an organization-wide change to be “family-centered.” This initiative came with a new set of values and beliefs around family-centeredness, and its own language. One employee who participated in this research described her frustration with this newly proposed identity as follows:

I do not want to “change” to be family-centered. I always was family-centered. Now because we have new guidelines does not mean that I need to change who I am. I am offended that I’m asked to change to someone who cares about families...

The relationship between the care providers in this organization and the patients is consistently referenced in the organization as a key component in job satisfaction, workplace identity and organizational values. In the case described above, the employee made sense of the new program as devaluing her previous identity as a health care provider. But on the same unit, her colleague was quite enthusiastic about the change and saw it as an identity-building opportunity. She described it as:
a new program that could really put us on the map as a leader in family centred care. You can get an accreditation, you know, and it is international. I would like to see us achieve that.

These two employees represent the range of interpretations available in the organization around what it means to be family-centred and what agreeing to change to that model means in terms of identity.

Another principle of the sensemaking process is that it is focused on and by extracted cues. This property provides an important reference point for analysis of interview text and archival material. Although critical discourse analysis can shed some light onto the power / knowledge relationships that may maintain organizational change as a process of control, it does not completely answer for us why some change programs are selected by organizations and others not, or why some programs become institutionalized, i.e. Total Quality Monitoring, and others do not. “Cues tie elements together cognitively” in a sensemaking process, and they are linked to a broader system of understanding about what is important. As individuals, or organizations, pick up on some cues, as opposed to others, they achieve relative importance in a sensemaking process (Helms Mills, 2003).

In the case of the College, a significant investment from the provincial government constituted an important cue by which the organization began to interpret its change program as “successful.” This conclusion was supported by interpretation of the cue by the CEO, validation of the importance of the investment by the media, and an organizational communication process which created its own corporate jargon to describe the event. Retrospectively, the previous five years of change were deemed successful.
Third, the sensemaking process is also enactive. As individuals enact their beliefs, they also make sense of them. And in effect, the use of language in the describing of an event enacts the construction of sensemaking about the event. Helms Mills (2003: 198) explains enactment as a property of sensemaking which "means that we create an activity that reflects our making sense of the experience within our environment." Critical sensemaking draws on organizational rules theory (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991) to offer an analysis of how these actions are determined. Organization rules focus on "activities of socialization, whereby employees enact organizational rules and maintain organizational culture" (Helms Mills, 2003:199). However, the rules also set limitations on individual sensemaking and actions. This connection between the social construction of beliefs and their creation of, or constraint of, actions is important to the analysis of the enactment of the discourse of change in this study. For example, at the Canadian Health Centre, a number of employees continue to construct their workplace identities as members of the former City Hospital or members of the former Faith Hospital (the two pre-merger organizations). As employees in these two camps made sense of the merger as something that should be resisted, they established and maintained language and practices that would support their traditional loyalties. As one manager put it:

I still have nurses who refer to this section of the health centre as the "Faith side" and they will not share resources with folks from the former "City" side. Also, they won't apply for internal positions that are connected to "City" side departments. But it's more wide spread than this... I mean, the language is so established I can't get a taxi to pick me up at the doors on this side of the building without asking specifically to be picked up at the Faith side of the hospital. That has to stop... but it is very ingrained.
In this description, the power of language to maintain meaning in the merged organization is evident. Some employees in the centre are continuing to use language to reinforce practices which have real effects on organizational processes. Although formal organizational rules encourage nurses to apply for jobs across the centre, the informal rule reflected in a practice of maintaining silos is apparent. This struggle for identity between the two former institutions will be discussed in detail in Chapters Six and Seven.

And finally, sensemaking offers a frame of analysis that looks at actions and beliefs as driven by plausibility not accuracy. As previously discussed, there is very little evidence to support the idea that change programs work. Nevertheless, the language of change is widely accepted and applied within organizations. Even when the experience of individuals within the organization is quite negative, the ‘need to change’ is virtually unquestioned.

Plausibility essentially refers to a sense that one particular meaning or explanation is more meaningful than others (Weick, 1995). It feels right within the range of possible explanations available to sensemakers in a given situation. There is no specific definition of what makes a particular explanation plausible, however, Weick (1995) suggests that options make most sense when there are no better alternatives, other individuals seem enthusiastic about this alternative, other individuals or organizations have taken this same perspective, and/or this explanation resonates most closely with existing identities and perceptions. As a method of critical discourse analysis, this study proposes that plausibility is also enhanced by those same factors that privilege some discourses above
others. The discursive power (Hardy, 2004) of the actor proposing a particular manner in which to make sense of change, the access individuals have to a plurality of discourse, and in fact the access individuals have to the proposed meaning, all influence plausibility.

For example, in the health centre experience, one organizational change initiative, program-based care, was introduced organization-wide following the merger. This initiative involved a complete restructuring of the organization. Although it is now fairly widely acknowledged in the organization that it did not achieve its objectives, it is still viewed as a plausible approach. As one employee says:

Well, the leading hospital using it at the time was Johns Hopkins. And everyone was implementing it, all over North America. It does make sense to have a team-based approach. It made sense for us at the time.

In terms of the accuracy of the approach, an external review of the organization done last year identified that the main contribution of program-based care was to create silos which further divided the organization, both in terms of resources and culture (Health Centre Document, 2005). The current CEO of the health organization has initiated a plan to move away from a distinct program model and collapse the existing programs into one organization-wide structure.

This study is concerned with the experiences of individuals involved in change, but the change itself is happening at an organizational level. Weick (1995) has identified some important differences between sensemaking at the individual level and the organizational level process. Although the principles may still apply, sensemaking is organizational when “it takes place and is part of interlocking routines that are tied together in relatively
formal nets of collective action" (Weick, 1995:3). Helms-Mills (2003) explains that because organizational life is conducted within a particular organizational language and organizational symbols, sensemaking may happen in a collective fashion. But this does not necessarily mean that individuals within organizations make sense of the same events in the same way. “In essence, individuals within organizations do not take things for granted in a way that they typically do in their everyday lives” (Weick, 1995:63).

Weick (1995) suggests that organizational routines become established and “encourage and stabilize certain forms of sensemaking” (Helms Mills, 2003). This perspective shows us the possibility that changes in an organization may be seen in different and contradictory ways by different members of that same work place. Yet, the work of the organization may continue. The relative instability of organizational life is balanced by a more stable or consistent process of sensemaking.

Weick (1995) proposes that, in essence, changes in organizational sensemaking must be triggered – separately from the day to day sensemaking that stabilizes organizational life. This trigger is often experienced as an organizational ‘shock.’ Helms-Mills (2003) describes these shocks as occasions of ambiguity or uncertainty that create breaks in organizational routines. As previously discussed, in the health centre, a merger between two distinctly different health facilities in 1996 lead to an organizational shock which remains unresolved today. A recent review of the organization identified three distinct organizational identities at work; a former City culture, a former Faith culture, and a more recent new culture of individuals who work with health services which have moved
to the health centre but were not formerly associated with one institution of the other. The shock of the merger resulted in what remains a significant barrier to organization-wide communication and shared meaning. At the college an organizational shock occurred in 1996 when the college formed its first independent board of directors. It had formerly been a component of the provincial department of education. That change in identity still underlies the challenge of identity construction within that organization.

Although the sensemaking properties provide a useful lens through which to analyze agency, Helms Mills (2003) reminds us that individuals do not determine their own sensemaking, separate from external forces, macro-level discourse and power. By introducing the dimension of formative contexts, the critical sensemaking framework creates space for a discussion of how the macro-level context in which individuals operate affects the cues they extract, the plausibility of various text and narratives, and the nature of enactment. Mills and Murgatroyd (1991) indicate that organizational rules may also contribute to the establishment of the context in which sensemaking happens. "Rules are phenomena whose basic characteristic is that of generally controlling, constraining, guiding and defining social action" (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991:3). From that perspective, rules provide a pre-existing sensemaking tool that contributes to the plausibility of an interpretation or the likelihood of a cue to be extracted as meaningful.

The incorporation of organizational rules into the critical sensemaking framework also introduces the concept of meta rules to sensemaking practices. These rules (including privatization, competition, and modes of production) are broad in scope and represent points of intersection between a number of formative contexts (Helms Mills, 2003).
In as much as rules inform our understanding of how organizations may retain unity and cohesiveness, they “simultaneously serve to contain differences of opinion, beliefs, and values while resulting in practices that give the appearance of unity of purpose” (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000a:58). This perspective within a framework of critical sensemaking provides insight into both the power of the actors enacting rules, and the constraints under which these rules are introduced to the organizations. Although powerful actors in the organization may set the direction for the rules which will provide a sense of cohesion within the organization, they are themselves constrained by meta-rules and formative contexts which limit the availability of alternatives they may select from within a broader discourse of organizational change.

Why Critical Discourse Analysis?

Before applying the elements of critical sensemaking to the analysis of the language of change which emerged in the two case study organizations, I felt that I needed another filter through which to identify the language that would be most useful to my investigation. Specifically, I needed to ensure that the language I analyzed was indeed reflective of power and privilege and, as such, central to my interest in the discursive effects of the language of change. Critical discourse analysis emerged as the appropriate analytic for this purpose for a number of reasons. Discourse analysis as a method focuses on the nature of meaning for participants in a socially constructed world (Gee, 1999). This focus allows for an effective investigation of the idea of organizational change and its meaning among individuals affected by change initiatives. It will also allow for an exploration of how the idea of ‘change’ came to be and how this idea has been
maintained or constrained within this socially constructed world. Critical discourse analysis is distinguished from other qualitative approaches “by its commitment to a strong social constructivist view and in the way it tries to explore the relationships between text, discourse, and context” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002:6). Also, within the tradition of discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis offers a particular focus on issues of power and privilege in the production and reproduction of discourse. As the question of power in the language of organizational change is central to this study, critical discourse analysis offers insight into the dynamics of power, knowledge and ideology that surround discursive processes (Phillips & Hardy, 2002:20). As such, critical discourse analysis “should describe and explain how power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimated by the talk and text of dominant groups and institutions” (van Dijk, 1996:84).

Further, critical discourse analysis is uniquely suited to this particular study as a methodology which allows for a “close examination of the relationship between discourse and power” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) and an investigation of the contextual aspects of the change process. When combined with a process of critical sensemaking, critical discourse analysis is useful in identifying the organizational rules that individuals apply to the change process and their use of the language of change. In this way, critical discourse analysis provides “a way to link macro political, legal, and organizational processes to the micro behaviours” (Putnam, 2005:26) reflected in organizational change.
At the same time, the analysis of discourse demands a focus on language that highlights the reflexivity of discursive processes (Putnam, 2005). The analytic categories which emerge through a discourse analysis of language and text reflect the subjective reality of those involved in the study. “Whereas other approaches tend to take analytic categories for granted and allocate data to them, discourse analysts are interested in the socially constructed nature of the research categories themselves” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002:10).

Thus the task of discourse analysis is not to apply categories to participants’ talk, but rather to identify the ways in which participants themselves actively construct and employ categories in their talks. Further, all categorization is provisional, analysis requires constant reflexive attention to the process of categorization of both the participant and the analysis (Wood & Kroger, 2000:29).

Critical discourse analysis provides context for the macro level issues of power and order in change, but on its own it is not able to provide a complete analysis of individual understandings of this power or insight into how individuals make sense of and enact change. As a result, the general approach had to be situated within a methodological framework that could enhance the focus on agency and make connections to local sites.

Because of the concern with the centrality of individual enactment of language as a process of change within local sites of discourse, critical sensemaking provided this framework. The framework did not impose categories on the narratives presented by study participants or through textual documents. Rather, it shifted the focus of study to individual processes of sensemaking informed by the principles of critical discourse analysis. As participants shared their change narratives, I endeavoured to gain insight into the sensemaking process by using this specific analytic framework. Ultimately, the
categories that emerged from the narratives—dominant discourses, language of
resistance, the plurality of identities, privilege in leadership, etc—came from the
narratives themselves.

Making sense of the language
Linda Putnam’s (2005: 28) guiding principles for conducting discourse analysis provided
a starting point for this analysis. She proposes four principles, 1) Let the text and context
talk to you, 2) Work back and forth between the text and the concepts, 3) Look for
inconsistencies, ironies, or unexpected occurrences and 4) Dispute your own
interpretation and explanation. Although these elements provide an appropriate
introduction to the analysis, they do not, as described above, reflect the central interest in
power and privilege required by a critical discourse analysis. Therefore, this research
incorporates the work of Van Dijk (1993) and Phillips and Hardy (2002) to build on
Putnam’s model, explicitly to add a critical focus. The revised principles reflect this as:

1) Let the text and context talk to you; identify language and power and how these
elements are privileged in the context of their production.

2) Work back and forth between the text and the concepts, reflecting the use of
power, privilege and access to discourse which inform broader knowledge/power
relationships

3) Look for inconsistencies, ironies, or unexpected occurrences, including language
that silences other perspectives and marginalizes groups or individuals.

4) Dispute your own interpretation and explanation with attention to reflexivity that
acknowledges the researcher’s own sensemaking and participation in the
production of discourse.
These revised principles served to establish signposts for the application of the analytic framework of critical sensemaking. The integration of this framework was necessary because although this approach to critical discourse analysis offered a lens through which to investigate language and power, it did not provide a specific mechanism through which to address agency. Although the context of the narrative is considered in this approach, the individual sensemaker is not privileged above the organizational experiences she is describing.

Critical sensemaking acknowledges that individuals make sense differently of the same text, experience, language or event. Although critical discourse analysis can accommodate this outcome, it is not equipped to draw out the explicit process by which individuals create elements of the narratives they share as meaningful.

The signposts described above facilitated the research process by ensuring that elements of the narratives that would be privileged through the application of the framework of critical sensemaking were identified in a manner that was consistent with a reflexive, dynamic and critical approach. As this study endeavoured to maintain a process-focused, agency-centered analysis, these principles also established the guidelines for how language which emerged from the narratives and documents would be privileged in the study and ultimately how individual sensemaking experiences would be privileged in a study of the process of change. A description of how these signposts were applied follows below:
Text and context

The first step in analysing the text from interviews and documents was to become immersed in the content of the text and identify elements of the discourse that might represent themes or patterns. Emergent themes reflected elements such as examples of language used in relation to change, lived experiences with change, rationalizations of change, and explanations of descriptions of change. I also attempted to highlight the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) provided by participants in the study and the documents which contributed to the establishment of context for this analysis.

Consistent with the poststructuralist focus of this study, the analysis paid specific attention to descriptions of “the social practices associated with the applications of disciplinary techniques, individuals’ reactions in terms of compliance or resistance, and implications for the constitution of identity” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002: 26).

In the application of the critical sensemaking framework to this analysis, the focus on text and context provided insight into the formative context and organizational rules which inform individual sensemaking. By integrating a discursive approach with the analysis of the sensemaking context, pluralities of discourse began to emerge alongside organizational (and individual) narratives of change.

Ultimately, this piece of the research method provided insight into what would emerge as dominant and/or competing narratives of change within the two organizations. The adoption of, or resistance to, these narratives on the part of individual employees also
began to indicate identity construction within the organization as well as within the social discourse.

*Work back and forth between the text and the concepts*

Working back and forth between the text and the concepts keeps inferences about discourse patterns close to the observations of the data (Putnam, 2005: 29).

At this point in the analysis, I was concerned with moving beyond an analysis of the language reflected at the local site of this discourse, the organization, and connecting the themes which had emerged to a broader discourse of change. This focus is important from a poststructuralist perspective as it serves to locate the language of change represented at the local level within the broader discourse of change operating at a socio-cultural level. As a result, societal level discourses of regulation and control are central to this understanding of how individuals enact change in organizations. This study also attempts to relate this macro-level discourse in terms of other discourses of managerial control i.e. efficiency, profitability, strategy, etc. By working between the macro and micro-level languages of change it is possible to offer insight into how this broader discourse is mediated by local events.

From a perspective of critical sensemaking, this assessment of the broader discursive environment served to highlight processes of identity construction both for organizations and for individuals. This was reflected in descriptions of identities adopted by individuals (as 'good' employees or as 'warriors' against change, for example) and in organizational identities (as a national calibre College, or a financially accountable health
organization). The relationships between micro and macro discourse was also apparent in the establishment of plausibility of a particular narrative of change. For example, the move to a specific management structure in the case of the health organization (program based care) was seen as plausible because health sector leaders were moving that way as well.

When analysed from the perspective of critical sensemaking, identity construction and plausibility play a significant role in the link between ‘concepts’ as macro-level discourse and individual sensemaking. However, respondents’ descriptions of change from this section of the analysis provided insight into virtually every property of sensemaking. In one example, this textual element emerged as a description of retrospective sensemaking, privileging both capital investment and the language of change.

I don’t really know where these new change ideas come from… TQM, learning organization, communities of practice. It feels that they come out of thin air...like, someone goes to a conference or meets a consultant and suddenly we are all embracing a new way of working. But we don’t question that we have to do it... and it must have worked because we got a significant government investment. We wouldn’t have received that if we didn’t look like we were effective – would we?

Since the rationale for change is neither local nor clear, yet the acceptance of a new change initiative is unquestioned, the text only makes sense within this analysis if there is a connection drawn to a broader, macro-level acceptance of the language of organizational change.

For example, in another interview with an employee at the college, I asked about the language and meanings associated with the organizational change. She replied:
We talk about a new way of thinking about teaching and learning. We say, “learner-centered” now as a guiding principle. And we talk about portfolio as a way of enhanced program delivery, modern, hi-tech and hi-touch, that sort of thing... Well, I mean they use the terms more now than they did before. I think you would hear that language more. But there isn’t the understanding that we would like. Some people think of portfolios as binders, not learning processes. We made this handout defining all the new terms that are used to define the organization. It’s two pages. We thought it might clarify some of the confusion around terms. But some members of the senior team thought it was too restrictive. The prefer to allow people to keep redefining... the way we do now.

In that response, the employee describes an irony where the language is being used more consistently, but meanings are not consistent. This point was reinforced in an interview with a new member of the college’s leadership team:

I did something when I first came here: you know, nobody knew who I was, right? So I could accost anybody at any campus and say, “Tell me what a learning college is.” “Tell me what a ‘Portfolio college’ is.” I got hundreds of different answers.

The fact that the language of change at this research site was neither clear to, nor consistently used among, organizational members required that I analyze the specific function of the vocabulary here within a broader discourse. (The vocabulary referred to above as a handout is attached as Appendix A.) The local application of words of change had meaning for this organization, but this organizational rhetoric alone could not be responsible for the momentum behind the change initiative. What individual employees did recognize was that these labels reflected a broader social discourse of change that they accepted as being essential, and therefore, valid. And, because it was endorsed by senior management, it had meaning. From a critical sensemaking perspective, this highlighted both identity construction among employees (i.e. as ‘good’
and the plausibility of the strategy. It also contributes to an understanding of how cues, extracted by privileged individuals in the organization (i.e. management), may work to strengthen a particular way of making sense of change.

The participant comments presented above contain some irony in their presentation of the importance of change. The next guiding principle encouraged me to look for this irony and use it as an important element in the analysis.

Look for inconsistencies, ironies, or unexpected occurrences

Putnam (2005: 29) describes inconsistencies as “contradictions that appear in the text and call for the researcher to question the data.” These presented opportunities for me to question my analysis and address puzzles presented in the data. For example, from the interview data in this study a theme emerged in which some subjects described organizational change as simultaneously essential and fatal to the survival of their organizations. For example, one participant said,

Organizational change has made this a toxic workplace... we have produced a culture that is paralyzed by a fear of change. But we have to change... have more, significant change, because without it we will not survive in this environment.

This contradiction in the characterization of change as both threat and salvation presents an ironic inconsistency in the data. The emergence of this theme was critical to my understanding of how individuals make sense of the plausibility of yet another change initiative when they have experienced only failure in change initiatives thus far.
In another example a respondent comments on the success of change at her organization, but at the same time comments on how this change has failed her:

We have been very successful here implementing change. I mean, change here has worked – measured on every indicator except the human level. Enrolment is up, revenue is up, we have investments and new structures, our image is changing... but I feel less valued, less respected, and less important here than I ever did before this change process began. I think a lot of employees feel that way... but I don’t think we can say that change hasn’t worked. We got a 123 million dollar investment from the government two years ago... and no other university in the province got anything like that. Some of their funding was even cut!

This inconsistency in the narrative of “successful” change highlights it in the analytic framework as indicating an opportunity where sensemaking is happening. Environmental cues are highlighted (i.e. the $123 million investment) and made sense of retrospectively (we got a 123 million dollar investment from the government two years ago... and no other university got anything like that...). Elements of identity construction also emerge in the statement, along with a reference to an ongoing process and the privileging of a discourse of capital over one of employee happiness or value. On the surface, the statement appeared contradictory and therefore was ‘flagged’ in the data. A further analysis of issues of power and privilege, and the subsequent application of the sensemaking framework provide insight into the production of this narrative and its location in the organizational language of change.

_Dispute your own interpretation and explanation_

In this final guiding principle Putnam (2005:29) points out that “discourse analysts need to make decisions based on coherence among analytic schemes, evidence drawn from the texts, and interpretations that resonate with the situation.” In the application of critical
sensemaking, I adopted an approach of questioning interpretations in an effort to eliminate explanations that were either too disconnected from the narratives of change presented, or did not resonate with insight drawn from other sources, the context of the research sites, or the theoretical framework of the study.

This principle also served to illustrate the reflexive nature of the analysis and challenged me to acknowledge my own role in the production of this study.

Summary

This chapter has presented the conceptual underpinnings of the thesis and described how these elements complement each other in establishing an analytic approach. Essentially, the framework of Critical Sensemaking had been utilized as a method to analyze discourse in an investigation of the discourse of the language of change. In the first level of this analysis, I have employed techniques of critical discourse analysis to privilege language gathered in this research that will be most relevant to my study. Specifically, I have identified language that focuses on power and privilege, highlights inconsistencies, ironies, and examples of marginalization.

In this way, I have positioned critical sensemaking (in the next level of analysis) to act as a method of deconstruction which will address the processes of sensemaking within a formative context, and at the same time ensure that language and discourse are central to the process. Although this process is informed by the use of language, it is most concerned with opening up existing structures of meaning to discover the discursive
effects that are produced by them, and simultaneously produce them. The combination of critical sensemaking and techniques of critical discourse analysis engages individuals in this process of deconstruction and offers a process through which connections between the broader discourse of change management and individual experiences of change in organizations may be viewed. The following chapter will discuss the specific details of organizational access, texts, and interviews.
Chapter Four

Local sites of critical sensemaking

Consistent with the traditional focus of qualitative research, this research is most interested in how people understand, construct, manage and interpret their worlds (Morrow, 2005). In that vein, this study attempts to create space for the voices of individuals experiencing organizational change, and investigate how they make sense of change as a discourse that imposes order upon their language, actions and understandings.

The critical sensemaking framework

The specific method of critical sensemaking used in this research focuses on the connections between the formative context, organizational rules, and properties of sensemaking that influence how individuals make sense of discourse (Helms Mills & Mills 2000a). Weick’s (1995) framework tells us that individuals make sense of organizational change through a process that is; 1) grounded in identity construction, 2) retrospective, 3) enactive of sensible environments, 4) social, 5) ongoing, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, and (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. These properties provide us with insight into how individuals connect with the discourse of change on a micro-level as they construct the day-to-day activities of organizations. However, within this framework Weick does not explicitly address the issue of power or power relationships (Helms Mills 2003). As a result, we are left with a gap in the literature between understandings of individual level reactions to and relationships with change, and connections to the broader social discourse of organizational change. Helms
Mills' (2003) development of the concept of critical sensemaking offers an opportunity to combine the ideas of sensemaking and organizational power in an analytic approach that will allow us to address this gap. To that end, the language of change gathered in this study was identified through techniques of critical discourse analysis as described in Chapter Three. This language was then analysed using the framework of critical sensemaking as developed by Helms Mills and Mills (2000a) to identify the ways in which the discourse of change was made meaningful for individuals. This element of the analysis was achieved by identifying connections between the various components of the critical sensemaking process.

As this is not a linear process, this analysis did not happen in a particular sequence. The formative context in which the organizations exist informed sensemaking at times, and was also informed by sensemaking as individuals enacted language to make sense of an event or construct organizational identities. As well, the seven properties of sensemaking outlined above are not all equally visible in the process of individual sensemaking. At times one or more of the properties played a more significant role in influencing sensemaking than others. In addition to this, the sensemaking properties may influence individual sensemaking simultaneously. For example, the property of enactment may become visible in a particular sensemaking process, but that same enactment of language may influence the plausibility of the language of change, and simultaneously the construction of individual identity.
Due to the complex nature of this process, I started with the language identified through critical discourse analysis and investigated it to find out what it could show me about the process of critical sensemaking. In this manner, I was not attempting to fit examples of language into a checklist of prescribed sensemaking categories. Conversely, I allowed the language to highlight the elements of the process that were most significant in influencing that particular representation. Essentially, I reviewed the language and asked, "what can I learn from this about how the process of critical sensemaking unfolds." I looked for language that was reflective of a formative context and indicated that an individual was drawing on language and experience from outside the organization. I was cognisant of the fact that some of the sensemaking properties, most notably identity construction, may draw on a plurality of discourse at the same time during the sensemaking process. For example, identity construction for some employees at the health centre reflected a language of financial efficiency yet at the same time drew on discourses of family and public service to legitimate the importance of their work.

I also looked for evidence of organizational rules reflected in the language used. These rules could be in the form of formal or informal organizational rules, and reflected processes that imposed order through organizational routines. At the college, for example, a number of formal organizational rules were enacted around how and when students and employees were required to develop portfolios. These rules factored significantly in how individuals made sense of the importance of the portfolio, as well as how the meaning of portfolio came evolve in the organization as an artefact of the culture.
I also analysed the language to discern which of the sensemaking properties appeared to be influencing meaning. In some of the interviews participants described a very complex process of sensemaking referring to a number of the properties to make sense of one event. The financial investment that the college received from the province in 2003, for example, was an event that seemed to trigger sensemaking from a number of perspectives. Most obviously, it was an important cue extracted from the external environment. At the same time, it contributed to identity construction by validating the college’s struggle to re-invent itself as modern. For some individuals, the social and ongoing recognition of external stakeholders as a result of the investment contributed to the plausibility of the organization’s vision for change... and so on.

The final piece of the process identified in this research was to attempt to make connections between the broader social discourse, and the social psychological properties of sensemaking described above. The techniques of critical discourse analysis employed in the privileging of language for the purpose of analysis provided a starting point by making power and privilege central to the analysis. To make a further connection to the broader social discourse of change, I also looked for discursive elements that were present or absent in the language. I was particularly interested in language that reflected broader discourses of management, capitalism and nationalism as well as the discourse of the language of change. In particular, I identified those elements of the discourse of change which were discussed in Chapter Two. These included, for example, change as essential, inevitable, or threatening.
In the following section of this chapter I will outline how I gathered the language of change for analysis from the two research sites. This description includes background on the selection of the research sites themselves, the process for involving participants in the study and the manner in which I have addressed “quality control” for this research process.

Access to the research sites

The two sites in this study, a tertiary care hospital and a community college, provide an important opportunity for analysis in that they are similar enough to provide context, yet demonstrate different experiences. Both the Health Centre and the College have pursued defined change programs over the past 8-10 years. Although the actual programs differ; i.e. organizational learning at the CHC and portfolio education at the College, the processes of enacting these initiatives have some similarities in language and objective. However, differences in leadership, occupational sector, and overall image in the community will allow each case to tell a different story. The nature of this investigation did not require that a case study represent a particular type of organization or occupational sector. I was primarily concerned with finding sites where change had happened and individuals were making sense of events. These two organizations fit those criteria and were quite willing to participate in the investigation of organizational change. Organizational leaders approved the research, and I was able to access organizational documents, as well as conduct interviews.
My intention is not to conduct a comparison of these two sites through the course of this investigation. A comparative approach would be better suited to an analysis which is concerned with identifying elements that “work” or not in a change initiative, as in “best practices” for change management. I am interested, rather, in uncovering the language of organizational change that exists at each site and identifying the processes that unfold as individuals make sense of that language. As opposed to a comparative analysis, this thesis provides an in-depth study of two distinct organizations, focusing on the enactment of meaning in each. The two sites will serve to offer increased dimension to the study as they will, at times, reinforce each other as similar findings arise. At the same time, however, the differences in their experiences making sense of change will provide opportunities to challenge my own sensemaking and add depth to the analysis.

Each site had recently experienced a crisis or significant event of organizational change and represented the effects of change in the discursive field. As well, in each of the research sites language plays a central role in describing a significant organizational event. The CHC was the site of a merger of two previously established hospitals which took place over a number of years. The newly formed health centre has taken several paths towards organizational change over the years. These include a version of Total Quality Monitoring, an adaptation of Organizational Learning that focused on teambuilding, and Family Centred Care. The College is also involved in a process of identity construction, repositioning itself within the marketplace. In 1998, the College moved from within the provincial Department of Education (as essentially a trade school) to its own entity with a board of directors and status as an independent post-secondary institution. To facilitate the
corresponding identity project, the College used a process called portfolio learning – and now is moving towards a model described as the learning institution. It has also adopted a balanced scorecard program and learner-centred practice during this timeframe.

As Phillips and Hardy (2002: 71) point out, appropriate research sites for critical discourse analysis must have “specific characteristics that make them most likely to produce interesting results in terms of discursive effects.” Both of the sites selected for this study represent sectors which have gone through significant change over the past 10 years. As organizations, they have also undergone large-scale job loss, site closures and organizational restructuring. They also offer some similarities that allow for consideration of common experiences. For example, they are both public sector institutions and they both offer an essential social service. This common experience is reflected in the concern for the ‘clients’ in these cases, students and patients, and the commitment expressed by employees to the importance of what they are doing for their client’s lives. This appreciation for the noble work of the organization came up in both sites as a key element in identity construction, individually and organizationally.

These similarities serve to provide context for the research, but they do not diminish the importance of the distinct findings in the individual sites. Although both the health centre and College operate within a common discourse of public service, they also operate in an environment with a plurality of discourses available. The meta narratives informed by capitalism, globalization and nationalism are dominant in public as well as the private sector, and these narratives contribute to the formative context of management.
in organizations in general. As well, the individual focus of the critical sensemaking framework allows for a diversity of perspectives among employees among and within the organizations.

**Gathering the language of change**

The language of organizational change analysed in this thesis was gathered in two ways; as textual material (organizational documents) and through in-depth interviews. The textual documents included memos, internal reports, annual reports, media articles, government reports and advertisements. This focus on specific organizational documents is consistent with what Phillips and Hardy (2002) term naturally occurring texts.

Generally, ‘naturally occurring’ texts – in the sense that they appear in the normal day-to-day activities of the research subjects – are considered a better source of data for discourse analysis because they are actual examples of language in use. By this we mean that the text forms part of the discourses that constitute the phenomenon under investigation (Phillips & Hardy, 2002:71).

In the case of the CHC an external review of the organizational culture conducted by an international consulting firm will also be included.

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As opposed to the ‘naturally occurring’ nature of the texts to be explored in this study, the narrative interviews occurred as ‘researcher-instigated discourse’ (Phillips & Hardy, 2002:72). Although Foucault’s genealogic approach preferred archival texts (Kearins & Hooper, 2002) in this study that preference appeared to be somewhat problematic. The primary concern in this case is that the research requires individual narratives of change produced through individual sensemaking processes. It appeared likely that some discursive practices within organizations might “militate against documenting contentious issues – minutes of meetings often focus on agreement and resolution, and provide little discussion on debate and dissent. Official sources, published histories, newspaper files and even interviews can provide missing context and clues” (Kearins & Hooper, 2002:742).

In order to accommodate the retrospective, social and ongoing nature of sensemaking, interviews were determined to be the most appropriate method of gaining insight into how individuals had made sense of change. This study contends that interviews with individuals experiencing change within these organizations is an essential source of information in that this method will expose individual sensemaking processes, uncover the language of change specific to individuals in these organizations, and create space for the voices of individual employees who have, to a great extent, been excluded from the study of language and change.

The semi-structured, narrative interviews were designed to give voice to individual experiences and provide insight into how individuals make sense of change. The 35
interviews for this study were carried out over a period of 11 months from July 2005 to May 2006. As sensemaking is a retrospective process in itself, I was not overly concerned with the sequencing of the interviews or the timing between interviews. My focus was more so on the process individual participants used to make sense of change drawing on their own experiences, interpretations, and understandings of change.

**Interviews**
The interviews themselves ranged from 45-70 minutes in length and most occurred in the work-place setting of the individual participant. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed. I interviewed three CEOs, nine senior managers, 12 middle managers and 11 front-line staff people. Two of the managers and two of the staff people were actually former employees who had left the organizations, in some cases voluntarily, and in others as a result of layoffs. These interviews were held at the participants’ new place of work or over the phone. Twenty of the interviews were conducted with college employees and 15 from the CHC. At the health centre, I ensured that the participants included representation from former Faith employees as well as City employees and employees who had joined after the merger. Likewise, as the college I included participants from both rural and urban campuses and spoke with individuals who had been with the college more than 10 years as well as new employees. Individual participants were selected for the study as they represented voices from a variety of locations within the organization and reflected differing degrees of organizational power. The number of interviews at each site was determined by the point at which I felt confident that I had gathered the dominant and any alternative language of change which had emerged as meaningful within the organization. To determine this point I relied on the principle of “theoretical
saturation" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). When the narratives of change which emerged during the interviews ceased to provide new interpretations of change and language and served to reinforce or repeat narratives that had already emerged, I determined that theoretical saturation had been achieved.

At the CHC, theoretical saturation occurred slightly more quickly than at the College site, mainly because the ways in which individuals made sense of the language of change in relation to different sites of power in the organization was very consistent. For example, employees of the former Faith hospital quickly identified ‘loss’ as an important component of how they interpreted change. Managers were equally consistent in how they described the importance of ‘efficiency’. Although the Health Centre site emerged as more complex in terms of the strength and number of narratives of change available, the consistency of the sensemaking around these narratives was noteworthy. At the College, I conducted several more interviews (20 in total) because that organization had more physical sites and a larger number of employees. As well, although the dominant narrative of change (to become a national calibre college) was present throughout the organization, there was a fairly diverse vocabulary associated with the change. At the same time, the language itself (portfolio learning, student centered, portfolio college, etc.) represented different meanings among individuals throughout the organization.

In order to ensure that I heard from individuals involved directly in the production or dissemination of the language of change at both sites, I included some participants specifically because of their job requirements. These individuals had been officially
designated with roles in the change initiative by their organizations. Designated change agents, i.e. the senior management team, public relations department, organizational development consultants, etc, are reflected in the participant sample as these individuals were all familiar with the language of change introduced by the organization. They may also have insight into the language used throughout the organization either in response or resistance to the change. In addition, key contacts in each organization also provided the names of individuals who had taken on informal roles regarding organizational change, including roles of resistance.

In order to manage the scope of this thesis, I decided to limit participation in the research to employees of these two organizations, as opposed to other stakeholder groups. As a result, the study did not include stakeholders such as students, patients, government officials, physicians, or members of external accreditation bodies. Although these stakeholder groups all represent significant influences on the power relations exercised within the organization, the logistics of managing research with this many groups would have compromised the in-depth nature the research process.

The interviews were all conducted in a relaxed manner with a conversational approach. They started with a general question, “could you describe your experience with organizational change at this organization?” The response to that question helped to direct the rest of the interview, and began to illustrate the participant’s change story. Although a schedule of questions was prepared prior to the interviews, the questions were loosely followed so as to allow participants to use their own language and direct their
own sensemaking around the change experience. An interview schedule is attached as Appendix B.

Access to participants

The CEOs of both organizations were briefed about this study prior to any interviews. They were both enthusiastic about participating and did agree to participate in interviews themselves as the study progressed. The CHC had its own rigorous ethics approval process and once that was completed the interviews began. The College had a much more informal process: the CEO took the description of the research to a senior management team meeting and access for the research was approved.

At the CHC, an individual in the Human Resources department agreed to facilitate contact with potential participants, as required by the organization’s ethics guidelines. He provided a letter of introduction explaining the nature of the study to potential participants. This letter was sent to individuals identified as potential participants within the organization.

At the College, I was able to contact potential participants directly and invite them to participate in the study. Again in this case, the key contact, a manager in the organization, provided a list of designated change agents, as well as the names of several individuals who have taken on informal change roles. This informal role at the College included, for example, faculty members who were offering voluntary workshops on portfolio education for their colleagues outside of the mandated corporate initiative. At both sites, the researcher reviewed the list of participants with key contact people to
ensure that the list included individuals who were both supportive of and resistant to the respective change initiatives.

**“Quality control”**

As Prassad (2005:287) points out, “questions of standards and quality control surface regularly in discussions of qualitative research, partly because the application of standards is by no means clear or conclusive.” Her advice to researchers in the postpositivist traditions is to maintain a clear focus on the theoretical traditions which inform the study. In this case, Foucault’s poststructuralist approach provides a strong focus for the research and the concern with how discourse becomes meaningful for individuals. Prassad asserts that the first step in assuring this connection between theory and research is that, “researchers need to make sure that research questions are conceptually aligned with theoretical assumptions and that the questions asked are meaningful to the tradition in which they are working” (Prasad, 2005:287). As discussed in previous chapters, the centrality of power, language and identity to this research is consistent with not only the poststructuralist approach, but the methods of critical discourse analysis and critical sensemaking which are employed here.

Discourse analysis has been criticized for lacking rigor (Putnam, 2005:27). As it is a relatively new methodology, it is not yet established as a tried and true approach to studying management issues (van Dijk, 1996). Nevertheless, a full understanding of the methodology of critical discourse analysis indicates that this is indeed a rigorous approach which has made an important contribution to the study of how meaning is constructed in organizations (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).
Although there is no “lock step” method of conducting critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1993), the approach in general tends to be time consuming and meticulous. Researchers must spend a great deal of time with the text in question in order to make connections between micro and macro level discourse. Morrow (2005) advocates the need for researchers to immerse themselves in the data in order to conduct quality research. She describes this process as beginning during data gathering and transcription of interviews. It continues with repeated readings of transcripts, listening to tapes, and review of field notes and other data. These repeated forays into the data ultimately lead the investigator to a deep understanding of all that comprises the data corpus (body of data) and how its parts interrelate (Morrow, 2005:256).

In keeping with this approach to rigorous study, the analysis in this research began at the point of each interview, during and immediately after the event. The initial interviews in the research process were also used to inform and evolve the analysis of future interviews. Likewise, the later interviews contributed to my own sensemaking about information obtained earlier in the process. As a more in-depth understanding of the context for change in each case was developed, the themes which emerged became more meaningful and I was able to provide stronger connections between the data and the theoretical framework of the study.

Consistent with this process, both critical discourse analysis and critical sensemaking are reflective, retrospective processes. They are also dynamic and based on ‘emergent’ conditions such as identity, language, and experience that may change before, after or during an interview or document is produced. Although this makes the methodological
approach well suited to study a dynamic, socially constructed discourse, the analytic process is challenging.

**The role of the researcher**

In contrast to other research approaches which demand “objectivity” from the researcher, critical discourse analysis actually requires the researcher to be an active part of the study.

Unlike other discourse analysts, critical discourse analysts (should) take an explicit socio-political stance: they spell out their point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large. Although not in each stage of theory formation and analysis, their work is admittedly and ultimately political. Their hope, if occasionally illusory, is change through critical understanding (van Dijk, 1993:252).

The methodology described in this chapter has been consistent with this objective and provides an appropriate framework through which to investigate the power effects of change on individuals. As pointed out by van Dijk (1993:252) “Critical discourse analysis should deal primarily with the discourse dimensions of power abuse and the injustice and inequality that result from it.”

As a former employee of each of the organizations involved in this study, my experience is both as a researcher and as a participant. As a result, I bring my own sensemaking experiences to this research, as well as my own frames of experience with the organizational rules, power structures, and discursive effects of change initiatives at these sites. This experience affords me an in-depth knowledge of the research sites, and also provides me with some understanding of how the discourse of change “feels” in each organization from the perspective of an employee.
Although I view my own connection with this research as an asset to the process, I also respect the poststructuralist tradition of owning and acknowledging that experience. To that end, I have endeavoured to flag points in the process where I have used my own experience to make a decision about data that did or did not resonate with me. I have also identified my personal statements or reflections on the change process within the text. And finally, I ensured all participants in the study were aware of my background with the organizations. I knew many of the participants personally. In cases where I did not know the individual, I provided some background of my experience at that site. As a result, in the relaxed setting of the research interview, I was able to frame prompts for participants in terms of “as I recall, there was a lot of resistance to that policy…” or “It seems to me that language was fairly prevalent throughout the organization…” and get reactions from participants in that manner. I have indicated in the analysis when participant responses resulted from that type of exchange to provide context for the narratives that follow.

Although my association with the organizations offered a unique opportunity, it also introduced a challenge. I wanted to ensure that I created space for multiple voices in this research, and not just my own experience with change. Critical discourse analysis was well suited to this challenge as it provided a method which required that I constantly question my own interpretations, and highlight sensemaking that did not resonate with my own in the analysis. In cases where participant responses did not reflect my own experience I used those opportunities to challenge my own narrative of change and to
point out in the analysis that individuals can make sense differently of the same event or language within an organization. This attention to differences in sensemaking among individuals served to add depth to my analysis and highlight the complexities of the interconnectedness between critical sensemaking and broader discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed my access to the sites of the study and the processes I employed in gathering narratives of change and organizational documents. It has also discussed the issues of reflexivity that are associated with this research, and the role of the researcher in both analysing the organizations featured here and contributing to change among individuals within these organizations.

Chapter Five will provide a more complete introduction to these two organizations and their respective change experiences. The background and change histories of these organizations will provide context for the language gathered through interviews and archival material which are analysed in Chapters Six and Seven of this study.
Chapter Five

Organizational Background and Formative Context

This chapter provides context for the two organizations featured in this study of change. In the first section of the chapter, I provide background on the development of the organizations and some historical experiences which have served to inform sensemaking processes. In the following section, I offer a discussion of the formative context in which these organizations exist. There are some interesting similarities to the experience of these two organizations, and also some useful differences. These elements of the context in which change has happened allowed me to see how individuals have made sense of cues differently, and how different elements in the organizational environment have contributed to the plausibility of the language of change, the construction of identity and the enactment of meaning.

The CHC and the College provide interesting and appropriate sites for this research for several reasons. Although both organizations have undergone transformational change, the past decade highlights some significant differences in their experiences. Most notably, the differences in leadership, financial context, and external image create an interesting backdrop for analysis. At the same time, there are some important similarities in the experience as well. Both organizations embarked upon employee empowerment initiatives in an attempt to foster team-based learning and decentralized decision-making. The organizational learning approach at the health centre was designed to facilitate team development across a unified organization. The portfolio learning approach at the college was intended to empower employees, but also students, as both groups took
responsibility for their own learning and participation within the organization. These organizational experiences present an excellent context for analysis of how individuals can make sense of the same experiences in different ways.

**Change at the Health Centre**

The CHC as the organization it is today has emerged from a series of what Weick (1995) would term shocks in its history. The history of the organization comes from essentially two sources, the formerly independent tertiary care City hospital and the Faith hospital which merged in 1996 to form one organization. The merger event was the defining event of the last 10 years for the organization and the way in which individuals, and the organization, have made sense of this event are central to the discussion of change at the CHC.

Although the merger is described as “peaceful” by one historical document at the affiliated university school of medicine (medical school document, 2006), the interpretation of this event by employees of the health centre is anything but. The merger was driven by fiscal pressures, and it was neither desired, nor accepted, by the majority of City or Faith Hospital employees. To this day, the merger is not complete in the minds of employees, or the community, and a recent external review of the CHC has described three distinct cultures. One reflective of the “old” City hospital, one of the former Faith hospital and a new hybrid culture which has emerged in the interim (Health Centre Document, 2005).
The cultural and historical differences which defined the Faith hospital and the City hospital individually are significant in the discussion of this tumultuous merger. The Faith hospital was founded in 1917 in the wake of a regional disaster. The hospital was built on land donated by an affiliated university. The hospital did not move from this site until 1992 when it was relocated across the street in its current location adjacent the City Hospital. Prior to 1917, Faith hospital existed as a Salvation Army facility several blocks away. This facility was opened in 1906 and operated as maternity home for single mothers. Private patients were also referred to the home by their physicians because of the reputation for excellent maternity care (MSVU Archive, 2005). The religious organization continued to be involved in the operation of the CHC until 2001 when the Army removed itself from the board of directors and terminated its association with the health centre.

The loss of the religious influence, remains one of the most significant factors of the merger for former Faith staff. As one former Faith Hospital employee says,

we were a Salvation Army facility that -- it’s hard to explain, but there’s almost a religious element to your work. You certainly – and it didn’t matter what denomination you were or whatever, I’m not suggesting that we were all reading the Bible all the time – but there was this spirituality around the cause and what we were there for and what our governance structure meant in terms of the Army and the giving of oneself to the betterment of mankind. And the Faith Hospital was all about, initially, you know, homes for unwed mothers, and there was a real feeling at the Faith Hospital, you know, no money was ever wasted. (former Faith Hospital employee)

This commitment to values of thriftiness and spirituality was an important part of the sensemaking that contributed to the culture in that hospital. In retrospect, the CHC
employees who came from the Faith side remain intensely proud of what they accomplished with limited resources.

"We weren't allowed to have yellow stickies; we weren't allowed to have wire notepads; you didn't spend a cent that you didn't have to spend; there was no wastage; everything was very much a family; and it was small enough that there was this real family atmosphere and a culture about supporting each other" (former Faith Hospital employee)

Spirituality had a very real presence at the Faith Hospital, and contributed to the family-type culture. Regular chapel services were held on Friday mornings for staff, led by the Salvation Army chaplain. These events were often well attended and certainly staff were aware of the services. The hospital chaplains were integral members of the organization’s patient care teams as well as other committees concerned with the development of the organization, social aspects of organizing and community outreach. Since the move away from the Salvation Army influence, the chapel on the Faith side of the hospital has been turned into office space, as has the former chaplain’s space. The Health Centre now maintains one chapel on the former City side of the hospital.

There was also a very different approach to organizational leadership within the Faith Hospital culture compared to that of the City. The CEO of the Faith Hospital at the time of the merger was not paid a salary by the organization. His role as CEO was part of his work as an officer within the Salvation Army organization and he was paid by that organization. The influence of the Salvation Army values also affected the way the senior team and the CEO represented themselves within the hospital. As one former Faith Hospital employee explained, “the decision-making by the CEO was driven by a whole different motivation. There was no room for personal gain.”
The Salvation Army philosophy also prohibited the hospital from going into debt. The strict fiscal responsibility demanded by the organization meant that at the time of the merger the Faith Hospital was operating in a very strong financial position while the City Hospital was not. The City Hospital at that time was carrying a debt and the newly merged organization, as a result, acquired that debt. “I remember feeling somewhat resentful of that fact,” stated one former Faith Hospital employee. “Because the need to deal with that debt affected us, and we hadn’t run it up.”

From the Faith Hospital perspective;

The City hospital were the rich folks across the street that were the best at everything, and had the best of everything, and we didn’t have – you know, when we moved across the street, my gosh! We were like just bumpkins in this big old, gorgeous, brand-new facility. I mean, we thought – we couldn’t get over it! But, you know, as we began to work together, it was very evident that the City folks just had a lot of money to spend and they spent it. It was just a different culture altogether! So as those two cultures came together – and there was more of a, you know, a trust thing within the City folks. They were people that were movers and shakers and had their own agenda and you never quite knew where you stood (former Faith employee, now a CHC employee).

Another Faith Hospital employee who was a manager during the merger says, I think that the Faith Hospital didn’t have the clinical respect of the City. Because they really were the tertiary paediatric centre, you know, for the whole [of the] region. And granted, the Faith was as well, but didn’t have the dramatic cases that the City would’ve had at the time or still continues to have for our region. So I think there was always a “We’re better than you are” type of attitude. They had long ago instituted a B.S.N. (Bachelor of Nursing) as entry-level into practice many years before we ever tried to do that at the Faith side. So I think that there was a sense of elitism there that probably rubbed the culture a bit.
Another element in the cultural difference between the two groups was the fact that the Faith hospital was unionized prior to the merger and the City was not. After the merger, unions gained access to the City side as well. As a result, some of the issues of workplace disparity were highlighted. Probably most contentious was the Bachelor of Science in Nursing qualification required by the City, and subsequently the CHC, and the Registered Nurse designation required at Faith Hospital. City Hospital had required the bachelor degree years before the merger while the Faith Hospital did not. As one former Faith manager describes it,

And then you have the whole B.S.N. (Bachelor degree) versus R.N. (diploma) issue, you know, which was causing more pressure because we didn’t have as many B.S.N.s as they did. And it would give fodder for the union by saying, “Prove to me that she doesn’t have the skills and abilities to do the job because she doesn’t have the B.N.” You know? And we went through that whole thing; then we had to write that bypass for some of the people in the clinic [so] that they weren’t to be considered unionized. So that caused a lot of issues.

And then the training of the other managers at the CHC side, because they knew nothing, you know. So I remember mentoring a lot of them because they never had a collective agreement, never even saw one before, never knew how to interpret it. Oh, we’d get constant calls: “She did this. What does this mean?” And then you’d have to go take them to Article 2.1: “Well this is what overtime means, this is what sick-time means, or the roster, putting your name on the roster because you want to transfer to another unit. “Well, you know, what the hell does that mean?” I think they were stressed. [The City managers] were feeling pretty stressed about, you know, now having to incorporate that into an already heavy workload and other issues. But I remember days on end meeting in that boardroom with the VP Human Resources and going through every article, trying to get them to have a better understanding of what it meant.

The politics around the unionizing of nurses at the CHC were also contentious. The City nurse managers had prided themselves on maintaining a non-union work environment, and some managers were surprised that the provincial nurses union was successful in gaining access to the CHC staff.
Once we merged, the union had the rights to organize and as you know, they had the vote and CHC voted to go union. Which I think surprised a lot of the City nursing leaders because for years, they had prided themselves on being a non-union job and [yet] giving their staff the same benefits. So I think that’s — you know, for those people, they were quite put out that their staff would’ve chosen to go to the union (CHC Nurse Manager).

The merger as a shock in organizational sensemaking is an important starting point for an analysis of how the CHC employees continue to make sense of change. The merger went right to the heart of identity construction within these two groups. Individuals were being asked to separate themselves from previously held identities as either members of a particular “family” or members of a very prestigious, medically advanced health facility. The fact that these two distinct identities endure today, a decade after the merger, speaks to their importance within the organization. In subsequent chapters the language and events that sustain these identities will be further analysed.

*The current CHC work environment*

The director of human resources at the CHC has identified a strategic goal for the organization as establishing itself as an employer of choice. This, she feels, is critical to turning around the “toxic work environment” that currently exists. The current environment at the CHC has also been described as “change averse,” a “culture of resistance” and “paralyzed by change.” Although opinions differ on the source of the failure of change, there is agreement that the workplace has suffered as a result of it.

Change, in this sense, is seen as needed to undo the damage created previously by change that was ‘wrong.’ For example, the organization is now ‘fixing’ program-based care. To that end, program-based care has gone from structurally organizing the Health Centre...
into five programs, then three and now it will have one director for all clinical programs. This has been interpreted by some as an abandonment of program based care and a return to a health-centre wide administration of care. The main problem illustrated in the program based care model was the entrenchment of ‘silos’ within the organization which emphasised the divide between the Faith and City hospitals. It also created a competitive culture where sharing across program boundaries did not occur. This problem had been experienced by other hospitals who had implemented program based care in the 1990s. In fact, as one manager describes the situation,

The leader in program-based care was abandoning that model and moving away from program based care in 1998, just at the time the CHC was embracing it. For the same reasons that we are changing it now. But, it was a more cost effective way to deliver patient care.

Leadership

The CEO of the health centre during the merger and up until 2003, came from the former City side. He lead the transition team during the merger, and many Faith Hospital employees read this as an omen to come as they feared the CHC would swallow up the Faith hospital and they would lose their distinctiveness.

After that CEO left the CHC, the organization had a turbulent leadership experience. There were four CEOs in three years. There has also been a high turnover rate on the Senior Management Team. Only the VP of finance and operations has remained the same throughout this entire process.
Leadership at the CHC must also include a discussion of the physician group. Doctors have an interesting relationship to the organization in that they are not employees of the health centre, but they represent a very powerful group in terms of organizational decision making. As one member of the current senior leadership team explains:

In health care, the physician group has enormous power, and sometimes leave everyone else powerless. So if you look at my role in quality and patient safety, I really can't move best practice forward if the physicians aren't engaged. They're enormous in terms of their influence. And when you look at how they influence the teams that they work on, you know, it's incredible. So I would say the most influential group health care and in our organization, specifically, it's the physician group.

In Chapter Six the importance of the power of this group will be discussed in relation to organizational change. At the CHC the physician group is also divided, to some extent, between former Faith and former City cultures. They also speak in a language of change that focuses specifically on patient care, and does not reflect the vocabulary of financial accountability that characterizes change for the senior leadership team. These differences have contributed to a power-struggle between physicians and managers to define change in the Health Centre.

The College Change Story

The College had its beginnings almost 200 years ago with the regional Mechanics’ Institutes in which evolved in the early 1800s. By 1910 there had been an expansion of apprenticeship and on-the-job training, and the idea of adult vocational training was growing in popularity. After World War II, the vocational high school system emerged in the region and the province also established technical institutes including a land survey school and a nautical institute. A government white paper on vocational education
produced in 1988 recommended the amalgamation of the vocational high schools, adult vocational training centers and technical institutes throughout the province. This amalgamation formed the College. In 1998, the College became an independent, board-governed College. It currently has an enrolment of approximately 8000 students in 128 full-time programs and over 15,000 students in continuing education, customized and part time programs. There are also over 1,000 students in apprenticeship training.

Change at the College

The College has historically taken a back seat to the region’s universities in terms of resources as well as respect. As a result, the College system in 1994 was the least funded of its kind across the country. As well, the college structure itself reflected its previous vocational high school model.

In 1993, the provincial Auditor General’s report concluded that the college would remain unable to fulfil its mandate without significant change to its management processes:

The College, according to its Mission Statement, has a key role to play in the economic recovery of the Province. At the present time, it is not well-prepared to meet that challenge. There are serious deficiencies in many areas of the College’s operations including performance measurement, programs and accountability. …… Until Government makes key decisions … or empowers the College to make those decisions, the system is unable to move from the status quo (cited in Drapeau, 2002:5).

This admission by government that the newly formed college was not working marked an important point in the college history. From that point on, the focus of the college became organizational change. And, in that report, the language of change was very clearly linked to the concept of survival.
The report clearly identified that the status quo was not a viable option. Without a concerted focus on the development of the College, the provincial government would have to face the eventual extinction of its only college level institution in the province (Drapeau, 2002: 6).

In 1994, a capacity study was conducted for the province that indicated significant gaps in the potential of what the College could be doing for Canadians (Dobbs, 1994). Essentially, the report indicated that the College should increase enrolment, re-focus its programs, and align itself more strategically with industry and government. These elements became the foundation for the change to come. In 1994 the College comprised 19 campuses. It has since downsized to 13 campuses. There have also been significant changes to program offerings. Over 60 per cent of current College programs have been introduced to the curriculum during the past 10 years.

Change at the College at that time was driven, by the most part, from two directions. First, there was an unfilled demand from industry in the province to provide skilled labour, and second, the community College system was virtually held together by a thread. It needed to be reconstructed, or dismantled. To say that the organizational change agenda was ambitious would be an understatement. Here is how the senior leadership team characterized change at the College in a position paper in 2001.

In 1998, the College decided it was time to change, change how we see ourselves, change how the wider community sees us, change how students enrol, change what we teach and how we teach, change the organizational infrastructure, change our institutional priorities, change how we relate to the economic and political realities of our society - in short, change from being a College that was primarily focused on the delivery of occupational training to an activist College that integrates experiential learning in its programming, and, at the same time, seeks to play a major role in the development of the regional economy (College Website).
Add to this transformation the previous years of transition from the Department of Education and the resulting closure of three campuses, job loss, and reduction of services. It is safe to say that employees of the College were in the midst of transformational change, and it was not always pleasant.

In 2000, the College instituted another structural change in the organization with the introduction of academic schools.

After extensive consultations and a comprehensive strategic planning process, the College undertook an ambitious plan to restructure its programs within four schools, each with a dean whose core responsibilities included the development of more effective communication and collaboration with industry and the wider community. The new team of senior managers has already demonstrated a firm commitment to making the College a more dynamic, responsive and accountable institution, a central player in the province’s economic development efforts (Kenny & Shaw, 2001).

Leadership

In contrast to the turbulent leadership experience of the CHC, change at the College is inextricably linked to the leadership of the CEO of the College from 1998-2005. This CEO brought in the organization’s first strategic plan and implemented that plan over its 5-year timeframe. He was the first president of the College hired by the board of governors, and he was committed to the idea of developing a national calibre college in the region. As a result of this belief in the need for a modern College, he focused the organization on re-packaging itself to successfully win the government funding it so desperately needed. The strategy which became known as “Getting to Yes” essentially focused on the
organization's presentation of a new, relevant, and in demand. Consequently, in March 2003 the provincial government invested $123 million in the College, and the significance of the announcement of this funding cannot be underestimated in the shaping of that organization's change experience.

As opposed to the power struggle that exists at the CHC between management and other interest groups, during this CEO's tenure, power at the College essentially became more centralized within the senior leadership group. Prior to 1998 power had rested with principals of the various, autonomous campuses. The campuses operated as separate entities and the principals came together to 'manage' the organization. After 1998, the College moved to a schools model. Essentially, the committee of principals was disbanded and academic decision-making happened within four schools: business, health services, applied arts and new media, and trades and technology. The schools were headed by Deans who were part of the senior team. Principals essentially took on local roles as 'managers' of the facilities and liaisons to their communities.

The Portfolio College

Throughout the structural changes that would create the modern college described above, the concept of portfolio learning has become the dominant conceptual representation of change. The former College CEO refers to Mezirow (2000:21) for his definition of portfolio learning as:

…the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. The focus is on how we learn to
negotiate and act on our own perspectives, values, feelings and meaning rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others – to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers.

According to the CEO, the portfolio learning process implies “not only significant internal transformation in regard to learning, but full participation in the learning coalition that is emerging in terms of economic and social development policy in Canada” (College Document, 2002).

Organizational narratives of portfolio began to emerge within the College shortly after the Portfolio College initiative was launched. These narratives were, almost exclusively, identified and introduced to the organization by the CEO himself. The narratives continue to circulate throughout the organization, and as they are passed on among employees, the telling almost always involves a reference to the first time the teller heard it as, “[the CEO] told me a wonderful story once about how portfolio is used…” or something to that effect. As one Senior Leadership Team member describes…

And then, before you know it, there’s something happening, and then a few people out there are doing something that – the story you get is great because it’s just a neat story. Like, someone did this: “Wow! Look at that!” And that story, because we’re not in silos anymore, begins to spread around the organization to become a bit of a mini-myth or a mini-legend. You know, a great one that’s – I don’t know if [CEO] mentioned it to you – about the Guysborough Seafarers that we use all the time. See, some of those myths rise up to the people who can really tell a story, and he was the perfect situation to do it because of who he was. But the Guysborough Seafarers were a group of people, a group from the County of Guysborough, who, because of the decline of the fishery, were displaced from their jobs. They’d spent their whole careers, lives, generations on boats and fishing vessels. With the augment of the off-shore coming into place, one of the local employers came in and said, “Look, what we’re going to be doing
in our business is actually to provide supply vessel work, all the staples and equipment that’s required on the rigs themselves. And we need people to captain and man the boats.” So they came in and they worked with us at the Nautical Institute; the Nautical Institute came in and they looked at all the people who’d done fishing for their career and they looked at the off-shore vessels and sort of mapped out where the top skills were. And 90% of us were saying, “You just need this 10% extra.” So we’ll have the Portfolios, you see, because you just looked at some of the past experiences: well, why would you put someone through 100% of the program when really they only need 10%? So all of a sudden, the off-shore vessel people said, “You’re right, that’s faster for us!” They got rid of almost 90% of the stuff, and did 10% for them to be able to have a full workforce. So in a sense, that was Portfolio Learning: well, he took that and talked about it forever, the Guysborough Seafarers, because that was one of the greatest examples of valuing experience.

In this example, and in others that can be found throughout the organization, several elements remain the same. First, the story came into the language of the organization through the CEO. Second, the story speaks to empowerment for students and flexibility with delivery that organization does not typically offer in its current program offerings. And, finally, the story reflects a desired state where students are in control of their own learning.

In the early days of the portfolio initiative, these actual, ‘real-life’ stories were not readily available in the organization. However, the format for delivering the stories was the same – they were just hypothetical. For example, one employee describes the first time the CEO explained what a portfolio College looked like at an organization-wide summit. “He said that he had a vision where program delivery was so flexible for students that they could customize their own diplomas. And the story was about a wood-lot owner in Cape Breton. He said, imagine a wood-lot owner from Cape Breton who wants to make
his own diploma with some business courses, and some landscaping courses and some
survey and forestry courses…” The College was not set up to offer that type of
customized program. However, the CEO offered hypothetical scenarios to set the context
for future change. In terms of sensemaking, he contributed to the plausibility of future
initiatives. He also used these stories to enhance the construction of an organizational
identity as a national-calibre college.

The Portfolio as Artifact

Every student who graduates from the College is required to complete a portfolio.
Faculty and staff are now required to develop portfolios as well, and a portion of the
CCEDP (Community College Education Diploma Program) curriculum is dedicated to
this project. CCEDP is a mandatory training program for all faculty and staff in their first
two years of employment. It involves a residential course at a rural campus held over
two summers. This program is designed to develop teachers in the College system. It is
also an organizational vehicle for sharing language and concepts. Through CCEDP,
faculty are taught how to produce portfolios (i.e. binders of work samples) and how to
share this learning with their students.

Although the portfolio experience described by college leadership is something that
should be flexible and reflective of individual student needs, the curriculum requirements
for portfolio completion now require, formally or informally, a resume, goals paper,
learning narrative, and work samples. Essentially, faculty check off the completion of
these items and students are required to submit a binder or other format (some students
use CD ROM) for assessment of completion. The students receive a pass or fail mark and students are not eligible to graduate until they have passed the portfolio component.

This gap between language and experience was not lost on the CEO, as he described:

Because the new language is so abstract by definition, and it also doesn’t have the solidity of the years that you’ve had the old experience and lived reality, right? And I just thought of – I remember my favourite bumper sticker of all time, when I lived in the Boston area, Harvard had had a strike of its professional and technical staff, and their bumper sticker was “You can’t eat prestige.” And it appealed to me from a variety of perspectives, but I think one of the things around the change dynamic is: “You can’t eat the new language.” Right? It doesn’t have the substance yet, the nutritional value to eat it. You can continue eat the old language. So the old language has an attraction, and when you’re hungry – I mean, to extend and torture this metaphor – when you’re hungry, then it’s human to say, “You know? I want to go back and take a bite of that old language because I can get some nutritional value from it. The new stuff? Still not sure whether it’s going to have that or not.” So I think all of those elements are there.

That struggle between his vision of the modern College and the experience of organizational members will be discussed further in Chapter Six in relation to the importance of language in creating the vision of the Portfolio College.

*The language of ‘portfolio’*

Change at the College is often identified through the language of portfolio development. For example, several employees identified the “move to be a portfolio College” as the most significant organizational change they had experienced in the past five years. Others, however, did not identify portfolio as a change per se, but certainly acknowledged that the language of portfolio was significant in the change process at the College.
Members of the senior leadership team did describe the origins of the portfolio language as having come from a consultative process.

Well, it came from – when we did the Strategic Plan in 1998-9, we had a Steering Committee that was drawn from people across the College and from different occupational categories who rolled together all the information from those consultations and the research that was going on, and they said, “We need a different educational model. We need to move from training for skills to something else.” And as that committee sort of batted around the ideas at a retreat for two days, different people began to throw out concepts for different reasons. Some people had a lot of work with the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Community, where Portfolio is integral to that. Other people had experiences from – I can’t remember where, but they were different ones – they were saying that there should be demonstrable evidence of the skills people were showing, to market yourself, like an augmented resume type of thing. And then more people were saying was what we should try to do is get people to take responsibility for their own learning so they’re not just, you know, sitting there being passive recipients… So, people said, “Well let’s just shift the power to the students and make the student responsible for what they learn: they’ll take what they need for themselves.” I mean, they’ll bring their own experiences to it, and we’ll ask them to reflect and not just passively take in and learn how to bang a nail over and over and over again. So that’s where it came from – there was a debate about our educational model (member of the senior leadership team).

This evolution of the term that would come to define change at the College in this description does not appear to be strategic. It is also not described as being related to any pre-existing change strategy or adoption of change programs from other location. In fact, the employee above speculated that other language may have served as well as the term portfolio, but the concrete nature of the word, and the ability to put action or tangible outcomes around the concept made it attractive to the strategic planning group.

We used portfolio because it is a concrete word. It began purely as a shift from training to applied education, but applied education is not really a word. And so people ended up landing on this [other] word, because it is a Portfolio. It was useful word that created the ability for people to sort of
think about it, because Portfolio rested with the students, #1. So immediately, it’s about that individual student. “Okay, what’s that mean, Portfolio?” And you could see people opening up their hands to show what a Portfolio is, which is where some people say, “Okay, I get it. It’s a binder.” But really what you’re doing is opening up your hands and saying, “Okay, this is what I can do.” And then they’ll say, “Well, what’s in that opening up of hands?” “Well, first thing is an ability to look back at what you can do and see your progress and reflect upon it so you can learn what you can do next.

With Portfolio is the ability to say, “I don’t want that elective.” I’ll use the example of Trenton Works – maybe you want to go work in public relations at Trenton Works, which is pretty much about welding. So maybe you want to take part of your experience to say, “I don’t want to do this part of my public relations …I’d actually like to go and learn more about welding.” So that person’s Portfolio – they can insert whatever they want, and can we organize one enrichment class so they won’t have to do that? And we left it, right there. That was it, within those five years, to get it going. But the Portfolio, you can get more discussion going about that than you can [about] “We’re going to move from training for skills to applied education. Let’s talk about applied education.”

So that’s the language.

The importance of the sensemaking process of ‘enactment’ features prominently in this description of the selection of language to describe change. In fact, as the employee above explains the choice of the word ‘portfolio’ as a conceptual description of learning and program delivery, he emphasises its usefulness by referencing how individuals actually ‘act out’ with their hands the motion of a portfolio binder. The importance of enactment will again be discussed in further chapters as the College leadership describe the importance of enacting Canada’s Portfolio College as a brand initiative a couple of years into the change program.

At the same time, the employee tasked with rolling-out the portfolio change initiative points to the concrete nature of the artifact as problematic. “By tying
everyone into these binder requirements, we can only see portfolio as a binder…
many people here are missing the point of portfolio as a conceptual way of
teaching and learning, delivering our programs…”

As well, although senior managers have described the language of portfolio as having
arrived from a consultative process, the origin of that language is not described as
indigenous at other levels of the organization. Frontline staff describe the initiative as
coming from, “what’s being used in the U.S. primarily,” or “what other Colleges in
Ontario are using.” “You know, they (management) go out to conferences or things and
come back with some new idea and we try it on.” In that sense, what is described by
senior leadership as one of the most important dimensions of the language, its indigenous
nature and evolution through consultation, is virtually unrecognized (or not accepted) by
front line faculty and staff throughout the organization.

Likewise, the meaning conveyed by the word Portfolio is equally unclear within the
organization. The senior leadership team, however, is not overly concerned with this
situation – in fact, members of this group are encouraged that the multitude of meanings
reflects a dynamic debate on the language and the model.

You use concepts and language; you give guidance; you let people make
some meaning of it. And, as you said, people do come to different
meanings, but what we then put in place was making sure we had the
places where people could gather and work and have conversations:
forums. So those conversations, they’re making them meaningful.
[That’s] the first half of – I’ll use Portfolio Learning as an example: all of
sudden there’s this concept that comes out and is used, and other faculty
kind of sit there and say, “Oh, that’s the flavour of the day: it goes away,”
and then of course it doesn’t go away because people are still talking
about it. And some said, “Well, okay.” And then all of sudden, a couple of people got an interest in this and said, “Well, it’s actually kind of neat when you think about it” (member Senior Leadership Team).

The need to create places where organizational members can discuss their various understandings of portfolio was identified by almost every member of the strategic planning group. The importance of a course on portfolio development within the College’s CCEDP program is described here:

So everyone’s got different meanings, and you’ve got people who are storytellers, I mean, structural sort of storytelling of shared stories at the organization. And then all those stories come together in one spot and people continue to struggle through the big ones and discuss: “Well what does this mean for us?”

According to members of the senior team, and the portfolio development office, “clarifying meanings and making them consistent throughout the organization is our next step.”

**Formative context**

Critical sensemaking informs us that individuals do not limit their interpretation of meaning solely to the language and experiences provided by the organization. The process is much more complex than that, as individuals draw on broader contexts in order to extract cues that support their own sensemaking. This connection between the local site of sensemaking and a broader social context is an important link in the analysis of individual enactment of discourse. Weick et al. (2005:419) point out that the micro-level actions created through sensemaking processes “are small actions with large consequences.” As local sensemaking happens within a broader context, the linkage
between local action and discursive effects on the level of grand discourse cannot be overlooked. From Foucault’s poststructuralist perspective, “all knowledge is a selective process that essentially ignores vast areas of the world around it, in order to achieve closure of meaning and come up with a representation of the world that is both purposeful and manageable” (Chan, 2000:1068). The process through which individuals make sense of knowledge by privileging some and ignoring other contributes to this management of meaning. Through the everyday enactment of meaning, individuals within organizations essentially reproduce, create and maintain the broader level societal discourse of change.

Formative contexts are the institutional and imaginative practices which shape a society’s routines (Blackler, 1992). They are structures that limit what can be imagined and done within that society. Helms Mills and Mills(2000a) describe the formative context as a link between dominant social values and action. While Unger indicates that no one formative context is necessary or fixed. He acknowledges that some are more ‘visible’ than others and therefore more easily destabilized (Unger, 2004). In terms of critical sensemaking, the formative context represents a restrictive influence on organizational rules and individual enactment of meaning through the privileging of these dominant assumptions. Formative contexts, and the related organizational rules, are both productive of, and produced through discourse. In turn, “discourses are related to, and produced by, bodies of knowledge that govern, constrain, and energize people within particular fields” (Treleaven & Sykes, 2005: 357).
The two organizations featured in this thesis are both located within a discursive field of public sector management. However, the formative contexts in which they exist draw upon multiple and competing discourses specific to health care and education respectively. Although the influence of government in advocating for fiscal reform and increased capacity at both organizations cannot be underestimated, the related values, assumptions, and identities within each context result in very different sensemaking environments.

The change strategy at the college was essentially to move out of the discourse of government and move towards a more defined discourse of a national calibre college and an economic engine for the province. Both these identities introduce much more competitive language and focus on performance and economic progress in a way that was not previously evident.

At the CHC, the discursive field in which the health center operated was more complex. The previous discourse of faith and service was supplanted by a discourse of technology and medical care. This occurred in a broader discourse of health care reform – using a language of financial accountability and efficiency. Those who describe themselves as marginalized within the organization today are individuals who continue to identify with the faith-based culture of the former Faith Hospital.

In the CHC case the management narrative of financial accountability emerged in the context of significant change within the health sector in general. This re-organization of
public health care in the 1990s was closely aligned with a view to becoming efficient at the business of health services provision. The driving force in health care in the region over the past decade has been a need to cut costs. In fact, health care is probably one of the most targeted sectors in this region of Canada when it comes to ongoing change. Financial pressure driven by increased demands on the system and inadequate federal and provincial budgets have led to significant job losses, restructuring, a series of mergers, and the reduction of care programs across the province.

As the current CEO of the CHC explains, this need to respond to financial pressures from government is at the very center of decision making at the Health Centre.

Expenditures in health care are growing at approximately 90 per cent per year. And at that rate, you know, we’ll be spending the whole provincial budget within five years, and this constant “Grow, grow, give me more, give me that stuff,” that’s got to be addressed. We’ve got to figure this out; we’ve got to figure out how to work smarter, how to be more efficient and effective, which people don’t like to hear about.

Although the organization may not want to hear the rationale for change described in terms of financial necessity, this argument was undoubtedly a driving force behind much of the change over the past decade.

I can remember not so long ago – it was in the last year – there were, like, eight major things going on. It was unbelievable, and leaders, no matter where they are in the organization that were working on all these various initiatives, were just overwhelmed. And it appeared that, for many of those things, we didn’t have a choice. They were being imposed upon us by government or imposed upon us by regulatory agencies... So it wasn’t even that we could be in control and manage it. And it really does get overwhelming. And for the general staff, they don’t know what’s pulling it or pushing it – they just know that they have to do “stuff” again. You know? And so, we as senior people, you know, you don’t send the communication and say, “And you can blame this one on...” You know, that’s not how you do it! So you kind of

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have to wear it, too: like, “Oh you know, you guys never stop it.” But there’s a lot that we’re pulled into that’s totally out of our control. And we have shared this frustration with government. I don’t think they really care (member, senior leadership team).

As this employee explains, the pressure of financial efficiency, combined with the need to comply with other government regulations, has lead to a feeling that change is getting out of control.

This pressure to navigate the financial environment of health reform was very strongly felt just prior to the merger. At that time, health centers were being amalgamated into regional health boards, and the CHC was struggling to “survive” as a relatively small fish in the geographic proximity of the largest regional health board in the province. The positioning of one of the sensemaking shocks in the CHC experience, the merger, was couched in the language of survival through increased efficiency.

The District Health Authorities were starting to form. And the big fear then was that we were all going to get gobbled up by one! ... So in the beginning, the forces were working together because neither one of them wanted to get eaten up by the district. So there was a lot of collaboration, a lot of going downtown, a lot of going back and forth between the Boards and the senior management [so] that we could pull this off and keep our specialities separate from the Health Authority. So I think in some respects, there was a little bit of a victory there because they were able to accomplish that initially. And felt good about it, I think, that these two organizations “beat the giant” type of thing. But then, the honeymoon phase was very short-lived because, as the year or two went on, the political pressures were starting again, that the two facilities needed to merge finances, etc., etc. And then the Faith hospital folks started think they were going to get swallowed up by City. Which they were. (former senior manager during the merger).

In this description of the environment in which the merger happened, this former senior manager has bracketed his sensemaking within specific events. Prior to the
amalgamation of the health authorities, the relationship between City and Faith was strong. They were unified in the struggle to “keep our specialities separate from the health authority.” After the threat of that amalgamation was avoided, the two organizations went back to operate as separate institutions. Shortly after that, however, the province required that they merge into one organization. Again the language of fiscal restraint emerged to legitimize change. The merger of Faith and City was presented in terms of efficiency, even though the argument to avoid the health authority amalgamation was positioned in terms of unique specialities and distinct roles for each hospital.

The concept of change as essential to organizational survival is one that was outlined in Chapter Two and reflects a broader discourse of management that demands organizational efficiency. As a result, the threatening language of being “gobbled up” by a larger entity made sense to both sides of the merger. In addition, the experience of anxiety-inducing, wide-spread reform of the health sector supported that language.

When that threat was neutralized, individuals in the two hospitals were less willing to accept the narrative of survival. In fact, as the organizations began to merge services, the Faith Hospital side of the merger began to make sense of its own survival in a very different way. At that point, within a different context, focusing on different cues, the Faith Hospital began to make sense of the merger as a threat to its own survival. In the sensemaking processes of individuals who reflected on their experiences of change, this
language of equating organizational change with survival was prominent and unquestioned.

Although some diversity in terms of identities and narratives existed in this context, the broader discourse of managerial efficiency appears as a significant element of individual sensemaking. This management discourse appears to have emerged through the contribution of language developed by what Foucault terms, “those who are charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault & Gordon, 1980:131). In terms of the language of change, those experts are found in three categories: academics, management gurus and consultants, and the media. These influences were reflected in both organizations as employees reflected on their experiences with change.

I wish I totally understood that myself... how these things suddenly become the flavour of the week, kind of thing. I think everybody, if you’ve worked in any kind of large organization, small organization and experienced that flavour of the week mentality then all of a sudden it’s just the thing to do. I think that’s somewhat external to a certain degree is that management schools and schools of thought and that kind of thing start to stir these in books, and then one person goes off maybe to a week in New York or something and comes back totally born again, a new concept, and I think it’s almost seeded that way and also watching what other people are doing and you might see a trend in whatever happened in a bigger city and it starts to trickle down (CHC employee).

Fairclough (1995) uses the term “interdiscursivity” in relation to the manner in which organizational texts draw upon other texts to produce shared meanings and influence organizational language. It is a process of “the constitution of a text from diverse discourses and genres’ (Fairclough, 1995:133). This same process reflects the sensemaking practice of drawing upon other narratives in defining what is ‘plausible’ in a particular organizational context. From the perspective of critical sensemaking, the
formative context in which sensemaking occurs offers individuals diverse discourses and genres. The extent to which an interpretation draws on other discourses for legitimacy and meaning (Fairclough, 1992) will impact the plausibility of the story and thus its potential to accommodate the sensemaking practice of its audience.

In the case of both the health centre and the College, we may also extend the scope of interdiscursivity to include the very defined institutional fields in which these two organizations operate. By looking at what these external voices say about the organization, we see how identity construction is influenced by narratives from outside the organization’s walls. Those who have the most access to these voices are privileged by access to knowledge. At the College, the CEO’s vision for the College was essentially the national-caliber college concept. At his farewell tribute in 2005, an evening of speeches and presentations essentially told the story of the College journey from vocational high school to a serious post secondary alternative for students in this region. When the CEO describes his vision he puts great emphasis on the impact of existing Colleges in Canada on his design.

I showed the senior team here at the College a presentation about Colleges in Ontario and Alberta. They were amazed. Those college systems were so far ahead of us. [Canadians in this region] needed to be educated about what a college could be.

Members of the senior leadership team were sent on site visits and exchanges were arranged between those working on change at the College and their counterparts in other Canadian Colleges. For his part, the CEO made a concerted effort to provide descriptions of national-caliber Colleges in his presentations and conversations at the College, and this
played a central part in the proposal for increased government funding for the College made in 2003. At the CHC, the industry leader in program-based care provided the blueprint for the CHC program-based care initiative. The influence of other organizations in the institutional fields in both cases contributed to the plausibility of management's change initiative, without doubt, at the level of senior management and in terms of the organizational boards.

Nevertheless, just because a particular language of change is present within the scope of the formative context, it does not follow that it must be universally accepted within the organization. Sensemaking informs us that what resonates with one audience may not make sense to others in the same organization. "What is plausible for one group, such as managers, often proves implausible for another group, such as employees." (Weick et al. 2005:415) Plausibility of a particular story is enhanced when it "taps into an ongoing sense of current climate, is consistent with other data, facilitates ongoing projects, reduces equivocally, provides an aura of accuracy, and offers a potentially exciting future" (Helms Mills, 2003:169-173).

This disconnect between the perspective of management (or the group proposing the dominant narrative of change) and those who subscribe to alternative interpretations of change is evident in both organizations. At the College there is widespread agreement that the CEO has shown great leadership. As one employee says, "I mean, at the summit we held, when he went to the stage to speak the employees gave him a standing ovation of applause. For several minutes. And he hadn't even said anything yet. He is well
respected." However, there is less consistency about whether or not change has been achieved. "In terms of my work, I do things as I always have done them," said one faculty member. A faculty member from a rural campus said, "we try to keep up with what they want in Central Office. But basically we’re out here doing our thing. Most of the change happens somewhere else, not to us." And finally, "change here means that ‘central’ has made some decision that makes more work for me, and does nothing to help my students. They don’t ask for my input, and for the most part I’m not interested in hearing from them."

Employees in these examples have made sense of the organizational change initiatives as belonging to only one part of the College, “Central.” They have characterized the language of change in this organization as coming from Central and hence have marginalized its relevance to their own work. Conversely, those on the senior team (housed in Central) who participated in this study were enthusiastic about the transformation change they had witnessed at the College. They described the language of change, particularly portfolio, as key in changing the way people worked in the organization.

Overall, faculty were the group least likely to be enthusiastic about change, and comments about the disconnectedness between administration and students came up with this group. At the CHC, front-line staff were consistent in their expression of fatigue with ongoing, relentless change. The new CEO acknowledged there was some frustration around change, but she maintained that, “there’s been a lot of changing… changing of
people... but I’m not sure that we’ve really engaged in fundamental change in the organization in terms of how we operate and how we do business, how we care for women and children, families, etc.” Another member of the CHC management team described the organization’s change experience in this way; “We’ve made change, but we made some mistakes. We didn’t do things as well as we should have. Now we have to backtrack” This reflects another dimension of the language of change presented by “experts” contributing to the discourse of change management.

This apparent inconsistency in sensemaking between two members of a relatively small senior leadership team at the CHC reflects two of the themes visible in the discourse of the language of change. The first, that we haven’t actually been doing “real” change, the second that we have done change but done it incorrectly. In both these scenarios, the broader need for change and change management remains unquestioned.

Across formative contexts, interpretations of the language of change may vary as well. Although change management in the public and private sectors have some similarities, there are differences in their respective applications. As one employee at the CHC explains, her experience in making sense of change at the health centre was been quite different than a previous experience with change at a private sector corporation.

The phone company went through a merger as well when I was still working there. The phone company started to actually live with it better than what I’ve seen here (at the CHC) which is really shocking. I mean we took four regional telephone companies that had heritage and pride and just incredible history and put them together and some people had issues with that. But I find reaction around the merger at CHC was much stronger, more lasting, and more negative. Maybe because of the business sense at the phone company. We were very profit centered and customer focused. We got on with business.
This reflection, comparing change across two different sectors, suggests that the focus of the discourse may impact the available positions within a discursive field. The business of making a profit appears to have influenced the sensemaking of individuals involved in the phone company merger privilege ‘getting on with business’ over other elements of culture or identity.

Within the context of the CHC, the management narrative of change did emphasize the need to be ‘business-like’ about the change. At the same time, other individuals in the organization privileged narratives of culture (i.e. the former Faith hospital), faith (from the religious affiliation) and medical care (represented in the physician group). This diversity emphasizes the possibility of multiple voices in a single discursive field.

Within the formative context of the College – it appears that there is less diversity of opinion about change. This may be reflective of a situation where every other jurisdiction in the country had, by this point, re-positioned colleges as competitive with universities. This was the only college that had not had that type of investment. Other jurisdictions had also separated the college systems from the department of education; this was the last college in the country to leave the department of education. From that perspective, it may have appeared more plausible to change, as demonstrated by others in the field, than to retain the vocational high school identity.
The discourse of the language of change involves complex language that, as demonstrated in these case studies, can represent a variety of narratives of change. These narratives reflect individual sensemaking, and are, at the same time, productive of the broader discourse. The individual experiences which may be reflected through the sensemaking process, offer another opportunity to introduce language other than that of the dominant discourse. The potential to question, destabilize, and re-frame dominant and privileged voices is reflected in this broader interpretation of critical sensemaking and a discourse of the language of change.

As one CHC employee describes it, “When they say “employees are valued” here, they don’t mean it. They mean, ‘you’re valued until we need to save money and then you’re a cost of doing business.’ So I don’t listen to that language about values. I do my job well, as I always have. What is important to me is that I am good at providing health care, not being part of their strategic plan.”

This reflection uncovers the tension between the work of management to influence sensemaking of employees as member of a common team, and the strength of individual employees in defining their identities by their role in health care provision. Resistance is described here as “I don’t listen to that language.” This employee is drawing on previous shocks in her sensemaking (layoffs, etc.) to inform her sensemaking of the current development of language. Likewise, the rules that the health centre has implemented formally through a strategic planning process emphasising the ‘workplace of choice’ have failed to convince this individual that she is valued by management. As a
result, she is making sense of her contribution to the organization by drawing on an alternative discourse, one of professional competence. This is an important discourse in the formation of the discursive field of health care. And as such, it remains central to the cultural separation of the CHC and the former Faith hospital. As another employee explained, “at the time of the merger the Faith folks did not have the clinical respect of the City people. That tension is still felt. That’s on the medical side, nursing, everywhere.”

Conclusion
The elements that make the CHC and the College so interesting in a study of the language of organizational change emphasise both the similarities and differences between these organizations. Most notably, leadership at the CHC has been inconsistent over the past six years whereas at the College one leader has defined the organizational change experience.

At the same time, the identity of the CHC out in the broader community has always been very positive. Externally the community tends to view the CHC as a prestigious place to work. On the other hand, the reality for many employees is a workplace they describe as “toxic” and a very stressful work environment. At the College, the last five years have been focused on changing the external view of the organization. The change efforts at the College continue to encourage the community to view it as a national calibre post secondary alternative instead of a vocational high school. And, as one faculty member stated, “Now I feel proud to work at the College, previously I did not feel so proud to work here. I used to say I worked at Campus A (the former name for what became one of
the College campuses) to disassociate myself with the broader College. I don’t do that anymore.”

In terms of similarities, power at both organizations has shifted considerably from where it once rested, with principals at the College and with the Salvation Army at the former Faith hospital, to new models of organizational structure. And language in each case has provided a context within which individuals have attempted to make sense of change in their organizations.

The following chapter investigates the discourse of the language of change in both organizations and applies an approach of critical sensemaking. The similarities and differences in the change experiences of the CHC and the College outlined above have provided the backdrop for this analysis.
Chapter Six

*Making Sense of the Language of Change: applying a critical sensemaking framework to the CHC and College*

The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the individuals in the two case study organizations and provide insight into how these individuals make sense of a language of change informed by broader discourse and formative context. This sensemaking process includes the application of sensemaking properties, most notably, identity construction, extracted cues, plausibility, and enacted meaning. At the same time, the sensemaking processes of individuals in this study are further influenced by organizational rules, formal and informal, that help to determine individual actions in the workplace.

In Chapter Five I looked at the formative contexts in which the two organizations exist and identified elements of organizational history which have contributed to their current identities. In this chapter, I provide an analysis of the language of change which has emerged in each organization. In the first section of this chapter I have used techniques of critical discourse analysis to discover the language of change which is privileged within the organization. Although previous work on the narratives of change in organizations has highlighted the importance of language in the construction of organizational reality (Chreim, 2005) these studies have not investigated the process through which individuals make sense of these narratives within a context of change management. Through critical discourse analysis, I will privilege elements of the language which reflect inconsistencies and contradictions, silence some voices in the interests of others, or indicate the discursive influence of a broader discourse of
management. In doing so, I have identified the language which will set the scene of a critical analysis of sensemaking processes in the second section of the chapter. The application of a framework of critical sensemaking to the language of change will allow me to identify how this dominant language came to be meaningful for individuals, and ultimately enacted within the organization. In the following chapter, Chapter Seven, I will look at two specific examples of organizational events which influenced language at the local sites, and apply a framework of critical sensemaking to these examples so that we may examine the process in depth.

**Critical discourse analysis and the privileged language of change**

Critical discourse analysis highlights the struggle between the dominant change stories at the College and the CHC and other interpretations of this change which may come from less powerful groups and individuals in these organizations. Consistent with the critical discourse analysis perspective, the organizational management view of change has become dominant, at least in part, through privileged access to organizational communication at both sites. In both the organizations discussed here, resources have been deployed to emphasise the management change story, and minimize alternative views. At the CHC, for example, the public relations department has been tasked with “effectively communicating change” throughout the organization. To that end, the department maintains an internal newsletter, intranet sites and produces other documents to describe changes as required. At the College, an internal communication position was created several years ago to facilitate the ability of management to get “their story across.” As the current internal communication manager describes that part of her role,

I spend a lot of my time talking to the members of the Senior Leadership Team, which is about 54 people across the College. And making sure that
they understand what it means to be a good communicator because the messages need to come from them to their people. They need to describe and explain the change. It should, ideally, come from the person the audience reports to.

Organizational leaders have interpreted events in a manner consistent with their stories and "other" or alternative change stories have been labelled as resistant, negative or inappropriate. The language presented in this chapter emphasises how these stories have been privileged in their production throughout the organizations. Likewise, individuals who do not accept the management narrative of change are often referred to by organizational leaders as "people who just can't embrace change," "negative people," or "glass-half-empty kinds of people." These phrases all imply a personality flaw in the individuals who do not accept the language of management's narrative. At the CHC in particular, this group was identified specifically as those who had refused to let go of the names of the two former hospitals. Language has played a significant role in both the interpretation of and resistance to change – with both perspectives employing their own language of change to create very different experiences of meaning. Language which attempts to silence other perspectives or marginalize voices is important in this research as it highlights the tension between dominant and alternative narratives of change, and indicates sites of local sensemaking.

In the case of the College, the language of this dominant story has come exclusively from the senior leadership group. Specifically, it comes from the CEO during the organization's transformation from vocational school to modern College. At the CHC, things are not so clear-cut. Two competing stories of change have emerged, both lead by
powerful groups. Although the senior management view of change is certainly the
dominant story organization-wide, the language of change used by physician groups in
different areas of the organization has succeeded in overshadowing the management view
in some areas of the centre. In these cases, the physician leaders of units like
anaesthesiology and the intensive care units have succeeded in maintaining a language of
change, and a structure of operation that are in conflict with the senior management view.

The language of change has been used within the organizations featured in this study by
both the dominant groups (organizational management; senior leadership; physicians)
and less powerful groups (employees, students, patients, etc). Those resisting the
dominant change story have also used (or re-claimed) the language of change and
interpreted it in a manner unintended by the dominant group. Consistent with the premise
of critical discourse analysis, the perspective of the disciplinary nature of change is
expressed most clearly from those individuals who do not perceive themselves as
powerful within the organization. In this case, they are typically front-line staff or
individuals in supporting services such as student services, administrative services, or
support staff.

The final interpretation of whether change has “worked” - been successful in the
organization – or not appears to be determined in the two case-study organizations by the
level of acceptance of, or resistance to, the dominant change story. If the management
view of change is maintained as the dominant story – change is deemed “successful”. If
it is not – if the language of change begins to mean something different or if dominant
views emerge as those of competing groups or the typically less powerful groups in the organization, change has not worked.

The dominant narrative of change at the college

As the College evolves into the national calibre College Atlantic Canadians deserve we’re providing a fresh, new example of what post secondary education can be. (College Annual Report 2003-04).

The dominant narrative of change presented at the College basically describes a shift in organizational identity from a “vocational high school” to a “national calibre College.” This story of change comes directly from the former College CEO. Throughout the College, in fact, the change process is so closely tied to his leadership that it is difficult to separate his personal vision for the College from the organizational change experience. From a perspective of critical discourse analysis, the discursive legitimacy of this actor resulted from several factors. Formally, his position (the first of its kind in the history of this organization) was introduced as one of organizational power. Through the subsequent organizational restructuring, groups that had previously held power, i.e. principals and campus administration, were marginalized as power was centralized at “central office.” The physical growth of central office which accompanied this change gave the CEO significant access to individuals who would be making decisions for, and communicating outwardly to, the rural campuses.

In terms of his own process of identity construction, the CEO clearly describes his role as leader as one of leading change to “right a wrong.”

I had the good fortune of being hired -- by the Board -- as the first President that the Board hired as we came out of government. And, you
know, there was implicitly and explicitly a mandate for change, although I don’t think any of us really fully understood what that meant. Part of the reason I took the job was I felt that there was, if you like, a fundamental wrong that had to be righted. Because of the anomalously slow development of college education in this province, it was accurate to say that simply by virtue of having the misfortune of being born in this province, you had access to fewer post-secondary applied education opportunities than if you had been born in any other province in Canada. And I just thought that was fundamentally wrong,

His passionate belief in this role as a champion of change at the college was contagious throughout the organization, and motivated many of the stories he used to advance the language of change. He describes the language introduced under his leadership as visionary, compelling and relevant to the organization. As he says, “look, at one level this change stuff needs to be rooted in our humanity, right? In our lived reality. So if someone believes, and often it is the president or somebody else leading those things, that there is a compelling case to be made as to why we need to change, then get up and make it!”

This belief that the college had been underserved, and deserved better from the government and the community was supported by a formative context informed by the experience of change in post-secondary education and work in an economically impoverished region of the country. He describes this experience as significant in establishing his commitment to accessible, relevant education for all.

Although the language of change around portfolio remains abstract, the central theme of the CEO’s story of change highlights the emergence of the “one College concept.” The language related to this element of the change is quite concrete. This language describes
the converging of what had formerly been 19 independent campus-level organizations involved in vocational post-secondary education into one organization with 13 campuses. This concept of a single College organization was part of the CEO’s vision of building a national calibre college.

The “Other” College

There’s a huge gap between people who are making the change initiatives and the people that are implementing the change initiatives. So when you’re on the implementing end, all the dirty detail questions come to people like us and … if you don’t understand the rationale and where we’re going with this, it’s hard to make up the answers even though you’re the person on the front line… It feels awkward and humiliating. (College support staff)

In the process of applying a critical discourse analysis to the language of change at the college, ironies and inconsistencies in the ways in which individuals explain their experiences of change highlighted an “other” narrative of change at the college. This alternative change story tends to revolve around the contention that those imposing the change “the higher-ups” do not listen to employees with less organizational power. They also do not take into consideration the reality of those who must implement, or live with, the change. It is interesting to note, however, that the alternative change story does not question the CEO’s leadership or commitment to change. The perceived gap between his description of the organization and the lived reality of employees is explained as either a) resulting from an isolation of the CEO from the rest of the organization;

the central office people really keep bad news away from him. I mean he is very protected there. He doesn’t hear what we are saying... except in a very watered-down way. (College faculty)
or b) an appropriate result of his role as the external face of the College and its visionary champion.

that’s his job, vision. He’s outward-facing and presenting us as a changing organization. He sets the direction. My problem is with how the bureaucracy between him and us actually implements that (College support staff).

The support for the CEO’s vision of change organization-wide was very consistent.

What was questioned, however, was the on-the-ground outcome of the change, the relevance of the change, and the effectiveness of the implementation of the change. One perspective that came especially from faculty was that very little “actual” change was happening at all.

I’ve been here for 25 years, if I start from the beginning, I think that the change is huge, absolutely huge. But there’s been a lot of change everywhere in that time period, so how much of it is just societal change, so to speak? But if I start with looking at -- starting, say, 1990, when the College sort of officially comes into play to now, over the past 12 years: very little has changed at the classroom level (faculty member)

I have always been ‘student-centered.’ We just never used that word before. And I’ve been using portfolios for years. What I am teaching and doing in the classroom has not really changed. In some areas it may have changed. But not for me (faculty member).

The organization described in the alternative change story is an expanding bureaucracy, a centralization of power away from the previous campus-based power structure, and a lack of personal influence outside of one’s work team or department.

So change-wise, I think, the size of the organization: well, that’s certainly a change. I mean, I can look and see this enormous bureaucracy and not know who does what or how many people there are or who you’d have to contact: that’s certainly a significant factor...We look more like a post-secondary institution now in terms of: I can enter my grades at home on
the weekend, and the students and I can access all the information on the Net. Those systems and processes are really good. Now, on the downside of it, all of that access, all of that bureaucracy has meant an emotional detachment. It’s almost, now, as if – it’s more like being on a consulting contract with the organization than being ingrained in the organization. You know, there’s less faculty contact, less student contact. Student contact, in fact, has actually gone down significantly (faculty member).

The supportive relationship with students is an important element of the identity of college faculty. They describe this relationship as differentiating them in a positive way from their counterparts in universities. It is also a great source of pride among the faculty and support staff. A loss of this accessibility to students is perceived as quite negative.

Consistent with the view of the organization as becoming increasingly centralized, the location of power is interpreted fairly consistently throughout the organization as residing with the senior management team. For all the talk of a matrix, or flattened organization, the perception within the organization is very much one of a hierarchy. Change is very much seen as a top down phenomenon that is “put on” the organization, as articulated here:

I mean, Portfolio Learning; I just woke up one day… it was like, “We’re a Portfolio College!” I had no idea. I mean where did this come from? I think it’s the higher-ups.

Front line staff describes the location of organizational power as residing, physically, in “central office.” Essentially, this is where the ‘higher-ups’ have their offices. Central office resides in one wing of an existing campus. Yet, even within that campus, ‘Central’ is seen as a different geographical location. And for some front line staff, the emergence of ‘central’ resulted in an increase in centralization and a significant expansion in the administration of the organization. Central is often described as a place of privilege in the College.
They tried to really centralize a lot of things, and created a vast number of positions in a very short time in what is called Central Office, which is all of the administration (College staff person).

A great deal has changed structurally, the organization: the structure of the organization. Communication-wise; reporting-wise. Reporting: I’d say the bureaucracy has increased. And, I’ve experienced a personal detachment, emotionally, from the organization; that’s the biggest change in a sense. Now, why that detachment? I think it’s because the organization has become so big and bureaucratic that I could only name a very few people in the organization. Hardly any in Central Office” (20-year College employee).

The dominant change story at the CHC
The dominant story of change from the management team at the CHC essentially describes a unified tertiary care health centre which is committed to the health of women, children and families. Language associated with change at the CHC includes terms such as family-centred care, program-based care, organizational learning and development, workplace of choice and more recently, communities of practice.

I think we have been very successful in making changes; but from the perspective of measuring the results of our work, we’ve got much more to do. Are we on the right road with respect to the reasons for the change? Absolutely. Do we have to continue to make investments with respect to paying attention to the needs of the staff? For sure. So if you think about the context of our changes, you clearly have got to pay attention to the needs of the people who work in the organization because they’re delivering the service (Manager, CHC)

I was recruited to the CHC to align an array of Health Centre services due to the program-based care model. And as a senior leader new to the organization, a key responsibility was to lead change with respect to the new corporate model, recognizing this new perspective of services, the role of services that support the individuals who are providing care. And my most significant accomplishment in that was ensuring that all of our processes were clearly aligned with the new people that we were serving and the people who were serving our community (Member of the senior team, CHC).
Although members of the management team agree that there is work to be done, especially in the area of employee relations, many members of the senior team are positive about the change that has taken place. Their language tends to celebrate financial accountability, efficiency and the cost-effective delivery of care.

However, financial pressure is not the only source of the language of change at the CHC. The other powerful group in this organization is the medical staff. This physician group speaks in the language of the quality of patient care. This has lead to two dominant narratives within the health centre, each exerting pressure on the organization in different ways. As the current CEO of the Health Centre explains,

With the physician group, they certainly would say, “This is so much change here that I see. Why can’t we just be stable and let us get on with the work that we do? We know what we’re doing.” And that’s true; to some extent there has to be acknowledgement that the care is wonderful, and I have no reason to think that it isn’t. Although, you know, I’m sure you can always improve it...So when I talk to physicians, I try to talk about maintaining the high level of care that’s provided by them by some reassurance that this is not about making their lives more miserable. But it is about asking some tough questions about how we currently operate. And I talk to them a lot about sustainability and whether we can sustain what we’re currently doing, especially in terms of if you consider that on the Children’s side, the population is declining...So that sounds very threatening to physicians.

The CEO’s approach above is consistent with the senior management language of change at the CHC. It focuses almost exclusively on the importance of efficiencies, the need to save money as a justification for change. This example provides a glimpse of the ongoing negotiation between medical care and organizational efficiency in organizational values.
“Other” CHC change stories

The “other” change story here is rooted in the experience of loss associated with a merger which happened a decade ago. Because the former Faith Hospital identity is just as real today to some staff as it was 10 years ago, there remains a continuing sense of loss as elements of that culture are challenged, or as one employee said, “chipped away at.” For example, the CHC Social Committee was disbanded in April, 2006. In an announcement titled, “Change in Practice regarding Transfer of EI Rebate Monies,” the employee newsletter (put out by the Public Relations department) informed employees the next day that the Social Committee was disbanded and all events they had previously funded would be discontinued. The Social Committee had been a Faith Hospital entity that came over to the merged health centre. Funding for the committee came, in most part, through the rebate of employer contribution overpayments from employment insurance. When the overpayments were returned to the CHC, they were used to fund the committee and events like the Christmas Feast, a social gathering called Munchie Mondays, and education scholarships for children of employees. The announcement explains that HRDC (Human Resources Development Canada) has changed its guidelines for dealing with EI (Employment Insurance) Rebate monies and now requires the organization to rebate individual employees a percentage of the amount.

Employees were upset by this move, and some former Faith Hospital employees saw this as another loss of their former culture. As one former Faith Hospital employee says, “one more nail in the coffin of what was Faith Hospital.” Another CHC employee suggested that, “it may just be an unfortunate coincidence that this is happening at the
same time as the move toward a Workplace of Choice. I mean, maybe HRDC did change its guidelines. But the social committee did a lot of work and was important to the culture here. They obviously just met a pretty abrupt end.”

The language in the announcement of the demise of the social committee is fairly “business-like.” Even the message title “Change in Practice regarding transfer of EI Rebate Monies” relegates this issue to a financial discussion, without recognizing the social, cultural implications that may be associated with it. And, the establishment of a “Healthy Workplace Council,” is very much on the agenda of the human resources department as a strategic direction towards creating an identity for the CHC as an ‘employer of choice.’

An email sent to respond to complaints about the move stated that, “the Health Centre had no choice. Compliance with the HRDC guidelines required this move.” Although this rationale fits well with the fiscal accountability narrative favoured by the CHC management team, the past experiences of the former Faith contingent lead them to interpret the language in their own language – one of loss.

Has change really happened?

As with the College, there is a sense at the CHC that the core service of the organization, patient care, has not significantly changed. In that sense, individuals perceive that the standard of patient care was equally high before and after the merger (in their specific area, that is). In contrast, the newest CEO of the CHC suggests that there has actually not been much in the way of transformational change at the health centre. As she puts it,
"There’s been a lot of changing… changing of people… but I’m not sure that we've really engaged in fundamental change in the organization in terms of how we operate and how we do business, how we care for women and children, families, etc.” What she proposes to do next is to introduce some “significant, organization-wide changes in how the organization works.”

Critical Sensemaking, individuals and meaningful language
Critical sensemaking offers insight into our understanding of the relationship between power and the language of change by illustrating how individuals make sense of change through a process informed by organizational rules, formative context, and the properties of sensemaking. The critical sensemaking framework provides structure for the analysis of the change narratives which follow in this section of the chapter. By making sense of the language of change presented in this study within a broader context of power and privilege, the issue of power effects becomes not just important to the analysis but its primary concern. At the same time, the “explicit socio-political stance” (van Dijk, 1993:249) provided by critical discourse analysis introduces an activism to critical sensemaking, and an impetus for change. In essence, the paramount concerns of critical discourse analysis – power and privilege- become the context in which individuals make sense of their experiences with organizational change. Through a specific language of change, dominant groups within the organizations studied here enact, reproduce or legitimate power. Organizational sensemaking is significantly affected by interpretations of cues and meanings by discursive actors, and by the identity construction process happening both internally and externally. Initiatives such as re-branding and re-positioning of these two organizations out in the community affect the identities of
organizational members, internally and externally. In some instances, the discipline effects of the language of change serve to reduce resistance and encourage buy-in. The privileged voices in the organization define the language and disciplinary impact of change to some extent.

To further explore the ways in which individuals make sense of this language as meaningful, I will next analyze the language of change highlighted through critical discourse analysis in the first part of this chapter using properties of critical sensemaking. This analysis will conclude with a discussion of organizational rules in each site and the way in which power is exercised through these to influence the sensemaking process.

**Identity Construction**

Sensemaking is grounded in identity construction (Weick, 1995) and identity is a significant piece of both organizational change histories in this study. The CHC continues to struggle to reconcile its identity after a merger. More recently, the schism which has developed between the external view of the health centre and the experience of those within the organization has become problematic. On the College side, the vision of the CEO to change the image of the organization from a vocational high school to a national calibre post secondary institution underpins the last eight years of change for this organization.

Within these broad constructions of identity, individual employees have struggled to construct themselves as organizational members. Some members of the CHC staff, for example, have held firm to their previous identities as part of the old Faith or City
Hospital. Through their language, the Faith Hospital employees have maintained the existence of an entity that was officially dissolved over 10 years ago.

Its language, the very interesting factor with that is that people will still call their part of the hospital what it used to be called, the Faith or the City. So there’s the language of where they are and they don’t want to give that up. There’s resistance to participate and share resources and ideas across the board (Manager, CHC).

And although the external views of both organizations, and the new merged health centre, have always been positive, the culture inside the organization is not.

We do have a morale problem and that is one of the most interesting factors because a lot of people, most people from the outside world would think that the CHC is a great place to work. Always collegial with each other and positive. And its – the shocking reality is that it’s not like that for a lot of people. They don’t want to come to work when they have a difficult relationship with a manager or they don’t like their colleagues and you know – we have to deal with that problem before we can do much else with some of those groups (Manager, CHC).

Identity change for the College was also problematic. Essentially because it was attempted a decade previously through a change in language and organizational name that was not supported by any changes in practice. As the former CEO describes it:

I mean, essentially, you had regional vocational high schools, technical institutes, adult vocational training centres – government threw an umbrella over them all in the first Green or White Paper, and said, “You’re now the College.” And then immediately went around, lifted up the signs that said “Regional Vocational High School” or whatever, put down a sign that said “College,” and then didn’t change anything else! There was elderly woman down in the Valley who was sitting around in the early consultations and people were coming up with the standard line, right?: “You haven’t marketed yourself”; “People don’t understand what a College is”; all the rest of that. And this went on for twenty or thirty minutes, and then this elderly woman just, I remember, she was wagging her finger at me – and she was dead right -- and she said, “You’re all wrong,” she said, “You’re absolutely wrong.” And she characterized what happened in 1988. She said, “What you effectively told us is that the sign you took up and the sign you took down are interchangeable, so you told
us that a College is the same as a vocational high school. So why are you now surprised that we still see it as the same?”

As individuals both inside and outside the organization had continued to make sense of the college as a vocational school between 1988 and 1998, it would be challenging to change this identity with yet another attempt at new language. In this recent change initiative, the college actually chose to retain the same name, but attempted to change the meaning behind the word ‘college’ instead. This move to re-position the organization as something new and different relied on enacted meanings, the discursive power of the CEO to move the vision forward, and a focus on extracted cues from a complicated environment of economic reform.

**Focused on and by Extracted Cues**
The discussion of identity above provides some background to the complex environment in which these two organizations exist. Sensemaking informs us that individuals make this complexity understandable by selecting certain, specific cues upon which they may base their sensemaking. As pointed out by Helms Mills, “it is obvious that in the process of decision-making people extract certain cues from the environment to help them to make sense of events” (2003:153).

Weick (1995:54) identifies cues as being linked to a series of ideas and actions. These links can help to “tie elements together cognitively.” As a result, if the cues which individuals extract from the environment are consistent with the decision-making process of the organization, sensemaking may serve to support the change process. Alternatively, if there is inconsistency in the cues, or some important cues for the dominant change
story are missed in the environment, the change process may not be supported (Helms Mills, 2003).

The most significant, or most frequently referenced, cues in this study illustrate some interesting contrasts between the two research sites. In the case of the College, cues were most often interpreted for the organization through the CEO. His vision of change was interpreted, through a specific language, to the college community. Internally, he identified cues such as portfolio education, learner-centered college, and national calibre college in order to tie together elements of his vision. And as one staff member of the college explained, “it made it easier to believe in the direction of the change, because you could believe in the person. It didn’t matter so much if we didn’t know or understand what the change meant or what we were supposed to do. We could just see that he believed in it.” From a perspective of critical sensemaking, this trust in the discursive power of the actor increased the plausibility of his narrative.

However, most frustrating for the front line staff, was the fact that the cues interpreted by him did not always reflect their own experiences.

They implement all these policies and procedures...but they don’t think ... “They” as in – well, basically the higher-ups. You know, whether it be the President, Dean’s Council, the College Registrar. The people that make the decisions are people in the higher-ups; the problems is – and I’ve actually voiced this – is they don’t take the time to ask the everyday people (College administrative employee).

Perhaps the most striking difference in the extraction of cues at both organizations is the discrepancy between how those with power in the organization make sense of cues versus
those who have less power. The disciplinary nature of the discourse of change includes a language which sets up dualities of ‘with’ or ‘against.’ Because the cues have been interpreted so widely throughout the organization, it is politically very difficult for those with less power to question the cues, or attempt to privilege other cues which have been deemed inappropriate by dominant groups or individuals.

For example, one employee describes her introduction to an organization-wide change in the implementation of new information management software:

I mean, People Soft: I never knew People Soft was – did you know it was even happening to – it was kind of like, “Guess what?!” I don’t remember hearing that we were going to get a new desktop. No. It was just there. But what could I do? I mean everyone at Central thought it was great. I couldn’t be the only one not using it. When I complained I was told this would make us more student-centered. Now I have to manually provide information for my students in secret! Because this doesn’t give them what they need to know. And I ask the students to go complain. But I tell them not to mention that I gave them their records because I don’t want to get caught!

At the CHC, the lack of consistent leadership in the organization meant that cues had to be interpreted by other sources. In this case, the pre-existing cultures of the City and Faith Hospitals tended to provide the lens through which this interpretation occurred. As well, the structural reform in the organization – the move to program based care – meant that leadership in the organization was shared by co-leaders in the five programs. These leaders were a physician / manager team. This structure also served to represent the competition between these two powerful groups for the dominant language of change.
And as one manager said, “Unless the manager— who was usually from a nursing background, and female— was very strong... it was hard to maintain a balance between the two leaders.” As the programs became more entrenched in the organization, cues extracted from leadership took on more influence. Within that, the cultural affiliation of the co-leaders, i.e. former Faith or former City, also came into play. As a result, silos developed within the organization where programs would not share resources or information with each other. “The organization essentially locked into 3 programs from the former City hospital and 2 from the former Faith side.” Shared services, like the labs and food services, describe themselves as “caught in the middle.” This emphasizes the structures which privileged some actors over others in terms of their ability to interpret cues within the organization.

**Driven by Plausibility rather than Accuracy**

*Sensemaking is not about truth and getting it right. Instead, it is about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism (Weick, 1995:415).*

At the College, the plausibility of an initiative appears to be judged on its relationship to the vision for the national calibre College described by the CEO. In effect, will this change bring the organization closer to what he is describing?

So a lot of change is kind of following what has been successful, I believe primarily, in the US. ... I think we’ve tried to develop what have been deemed as progressive moves in other institutions. I’m not so sure we’re piloting any particularly new initiatives here. So I think there’s a group of people that scan what progressive educational institutions are doing, choose what looks like it might fit here and give it a whirl (College manager).
In the case of the CHC the move to program-based care has been particularly challenging for the organization. And, in fact, the current change initiative is working to deconstruct these programs and look at other ways to deliver services without entrenching such defined silos of practice and resources. The impetus behind the program was financial pressure to cut costs, particularly in the shared services. And, to some extent the model has been successful in maintaining costs. However, the cultural impact on the organization has been quite negative. The program based care model was certainly plausible at the time it was adopted. It was being used in other leading health centers in North America. However, it may not have been the accurate or “right” choice for the CHC. The downfall of the program is that it creates significant divides within the organization, and does not lend itself to institutional integration. Given the nature of the cultural amalgamation that would be needed to facilitate the merger, this was a risky move.

In an external review of the health centre conducted by an international consulting firm (Health Centre Document, 2005) the rigidly held separate cultures of the Faith and City hospitals is flagged as the major challenge to improving organizational performance. As a result of the tension between these groups, the review cautions that a “risk averse” culture has emerged. It suggests that this culture is ‘virtually paralyzed by a fear of change.’

**Enactive of Sensible Environments**

“If the other six properties are about influences on sensemaking, enactment is about imposing that sense on action” (Helms Mills, 2003:174)
At the College, the move to become a portfolio College was significant in marking organizational change. The enactment of this change was, initially anyway, completely done with language. This enactive language took the form of both formal and informal communication inside, and outside the organization. For example, the CEO used conversational opportunities throughout the college to bring up and reinforce the language of portfolio. He also constructed a memo that was circulated throughout the organization and asked each employee to talk about portfolio with students and co-workers in an effort to define for themselves what their individual contribution to the Portfolio College might be. A tag line, “Canada’s first portfolio College” was added to the College website. That language and the term portfolio learning began to emerge in virtually all corporate documents. In fact, portfolio education became the number one strategic direction in the College 2000-2005 strategic plan.

The need to clarify the role of the Portfolio College lead to more concrete methods of imposing sense on that action. In fact, the portfolio College concept itself has been relegated through much of the organization to an understanding of portfolio as a “binder of work.” The enactment of the portfolio as an artifact of the new college identity has tended to influence that meaning.

The first action that the College took was to set a timeframe so that by this time, every one of our students will be completing a portfolio, knowing full well that the easiest way to understand a portfolio, at a real surface level, is portfolio as artifact. Because that was the level that we had to get people to — kind of the first wave of understanding. And so, that was simply a: we’re doing it; every student will do it. There was a Director of Portfolio Learning hired who spent a fair amount of that early time creating guides for students on “How to create your portfolio”; engaging in dialogue with department heads or chairs, with faculty -- just generally,
getting the organization ready for at least understanding about that superficial kind of level of: its an artifact. It’s a way you collect things and display them to potential employers (college communication team member).

At the CHC, enactment around, for example, the change to become a learning organization was embodied in initiatives like the Tuition Reimbursement Program. Following the merger, in 1995/96 the organization embarked upon Organizational Learning (Senge, 1994) to foster team-building and the evolution of “high performing teams” through an initiative of employee empowerment. Organizational Learning was a term that was not clearly defined or understood throughout the health center.

Nevertheless, leadership often pointed to initiatives such as the tuition reimbursement program as a concrete action that proved learning was supported. However, this initiative came with its share of issues.

The criteria were fairly open, in the sense that the learning eligible for reimbursement could be related to any certificate, diploma or degree program. The courses submitted did not have to relate directly to one’s job. The idea was to show that innovative learning was supported and would translate into an all-round more creative work place. Not everyone agreed with that strategy. “Some of the nurses thought that since we were being pressured to get degrees, the tuition should be completely paid for. They shouldn’t have to go in the “pot” with everyone else and end up with a percentage of the fund.” Also, at a time when saving money was a driving force of changes in the Health Centre, some saw this initiative as a luxury.
In 2000 the fund was discontinued, along with all other learning initiatives with the dismantling of the Department of Learning and Organizational Development. At the same time, all organization-wide education programs were cancelled. Essentially, resources which were previously allocated to this department were divided up among the newly forming programs and placed with program leaders and managers. What evolved was a process of, “underground reimbursement – really the only criteria is who you are. It happens completely under cover and there is no transparency to that process. It is a well kept secret. Managers decide who they will fund and who they won’t.”

“It was part of that power struggle in 2000 around program-based care. When something centre wide was devolved the programs just chopped up the resources, took it on and basically did what they wanted with it…There is definitely a lot of inequality in the process… but it is hard to know exactly, because the people who don’t get funding don’t know about it. And the people who did get the funding don’t talk about it because they know others wanted it…”

Recently the HR department presented an initiative designed to support targeted health professionals with tuition support. During the discussion at the senior management team about the need for tuition support, the issue of “underground reimbursement” was uncovered. “So in the next year or so I predict we will go back to something more similar to what we had before” (CHC nursing staff employee).
Organizational rules
Power is exercised in organizations in relationships with rules and discourse (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000a). The power effects of the discourse of the language of change become visible in organizations through the formal and informal rules that serve to order the organizational routines and practices (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991).

One of the formal rules at the College is mandatory attendance of all staff at department and campus meetings. However, resistance to this rule can be demonstrated formally, by a lack of attendance, and informally, by not accepting the language of the dominant change narrative. As one employee describes, “resistance to change here comes through people, faculty, just laughing at it. They just don’t go to the meetings, or they make fun of the language when someone says it.” As individuals resist the language of change, they attempt to influence the sensemaking of others by diminishing both the value and the plausibility of the language.

By devaluing the language of change by labeling it the “flavor of the week”, individuals legitimate their resistance to the language through a sensemaking process which designates the language implausible, and unconnected to organizational identity. Characterized as coming from elsewhere, not relevant to this organization, and not sustainable as an organizational identity, this language is marginalized.

As one college employee explained, “I feel like I am always managing the change so the students don’t suffer. I do these ‘work arounds’ so that they don’t have to know that the college has made another change that doesn’t consider them. For example, I sometimes
have to give them their grades in person even though the system is only available online now. I mean that’s a good idea, online, but…” This ability to do the ‘work arounds’ demonstrates her enactment of power in relation to the rules. But this resistance stops short of discounting the language all together. Her sensemaking of the interaction between the formal and informal rules she must navigate is reflected in a language which ultimately endorses the change, but questions the manner in which the change is implemented.

In some situations, employees described examples of informal rules becoming formalized, and creating new practices that enforced language. For example,

The [CEO] actually said to us at that meeting, I want to walk through any campus and when I meet any student I will stop them and ask them, “what does portfolio mean to you?” and I want to hear an answer.” So now we have to report to our department head that we’ve talked about this in class and every student knows the answer… I don’t even know the answer (college manager).

This rule, invoking a specific practice and language, demands that the language of portfolio be integrated into course work. Informally, the language becomes privileged because the CEO wants to hear it. It becomes privileged as well since faculty are now “teaching” it in class as curriculum. Students are asked to “learn” the language.

Despite this enactment of meaning, tension still exists in the organization about what it means to be a portfolio college. The meaning of portfolio as a philosophical approach to learning versus the meaning of portfolio as an artifact contributing to organizational
identity remains unresolved. In this instance, an employee describes her frustration in making sense of the rules of portfolio learning.

And of course, now they’re saying, “It’s not about the product, although you do need the product in order to graduate. It’s not about the product.” …it’s about the concept of Portfolio Learning, but yet, you won’t graduate if we don’t check off some boxes for your portfolio. I hear myself saying, “Oh, is there a resume in there? Great. Are there Learning Narratives? Fabulous. Did you do a Skills Assessment? Wonderful!” Now portfolio only exists as this required binder of work. Does that make us the portfolio college?

This resistance to the language of change emphasises the alternative meanings of portfolio that exist in the college. There is also a distinction emphasised in the meaning between what the instructor asks the students to do, and what we have to do “to satisfy central office.” This construction of different and distinct identities within the college also contributes to the complexity of identity construction represented in the current language of change. The intent of the formal rule around graduation requirements was aimed at influencing sensemaking through the enactment of organizational identity as the Portfolio College. The example above demonstrates how in this case the organizational identity of the college is further separated from language put forward by one segment of the college “central office.”

**Power and Resistance**

As discussed in Chapter Three, power and privilege within the language of change may tend to appear in the form of inconsistencies between the language used to present or encourage change and the lived experience described by those implementing or enacting the change. The idea that there may be inconsistencies between what organizational leaders say and what they actually do is not a new one. Sensemaking explains that what
is plausible for one group, such as managers, often proves implausible for another, such as employees (Weick et al. 2005). As different groups, or individuals, draw upon the experiences, cues, and language that inform their sensemaking environments, they may make sense of events differently. However, the language of change is unique in that what it promises most often; equality, empowerment, democracy, and an acceptance of risk, is often what is most lacking in the organization, from the perspective of those with an alternative experience of change.

At both the College and the CHC an interesting phenomenon has occurred where those resisting the dominant management of meaning have used the language of the change itself to create new meaning. In this sense, the employees have reclaimed language and re-interpreted meanings to fit their own sensemaking practices. For example, at the CHC the term “family-centred” which is presented by the management group as a way of delivering patient care, has been adopted by employees and their unions as an argument for a kinder workplace. Throughout the health center, definitions of family-centered care vary. This ambiguity has allowed the term to be used for both discipline and resistance.

If you ask “What is Family-centred care?” you get five, or more, different answers. So - you know, why are we doing this? – we don’t even know – there’s not even a clear definition as to what that is. So I mean – in our written material, we’d be constantly talking about “Family-centred care, Family-centred care, Family-centred care,” but what it really came down to was: we don’t know what Family-centered care is (CHC staff member).

The dominant language of Family-Centred ‘ness’ has been adopted by those with an alternative view of change and differently purposed as a form of resistance. For example, employees have used the promise of a family-centered organization to protest cuts to food services.
When we made cuts to the cafeteria a couple of months ago, that whole concept that we were not family focused came up again. And it’s true that if you were in an ideal world you would offer the cafeteria 24/7 with full service. But people were hardly using it on the weekends. So it didn’t make sense, so we made some changes and a lot of people got really mad especially staff... Some of them actually said things like – if you really cared about families you would care about me as well because I’m part of the CHC family and that kind of thing. So that’s the interesting thing of it, they want to be treated like family too (CHC manager).

In another example, the employee unions have presented grievances on several occasions against employer behaviour which they deem to be “not family centred.” A member of the CHC HR team makes sense of these grievances as misrepresentations of true family centered policies:

Family-centred care is being misinterpreted by a number of our bargaining unit employees who, for whatever reason, want to interpret the collective agreement to saying, ‘But I’m entitled to take, you know, three weeks to go and care for my ailing family member. We are a family-centred care organization.

Perhaps one example of the strength of this re-claiming of the term family-centered by employees is the administration’s response. The strategy recently has not been to clarify a particular definition of family-centered care, but to change the language itself.

So we’re looking at a reinvention, if you will, of the family-centred care model coming back into the workplace and actually being a little bit more appropriately defined. (CHC manager)

This re-definition came in the form of new language, patient-centered care. For example, the newly appointed full-time Family Centered Care Coordinator at the health center has recently had a title change, to Patient Family Centered Care Coordinator in what some see as a move to re-focus the language of change on patients and away from employees.

As a member of the CHC’s HR team explained:

In the strategic planning process we’ve conducted a number of focus groups where employees say that the language of change they hear; supportive
environment, family centred, interested in human element, only applies to patients. Employees are feeling undervalued and cheated out of the values which the organization has promised.

In response, our leaders have begun to adjust their language to emphasise patient-centered care.

**Power effects of discourse - Disciplining through language**

"I’ve been told I’m not family-centered, even though I’m doing my job… even though nobody can tell me what family-centered is" (CHC frontline staff)

"and then my manager might talk to me like I somehow don’t care about the families, patients… saying I’m not family-centered" (CHC support staff).

“But if I complain that a new way of doing something actually is not going to work for my job, or the people I serve, I’m told I’m not student-centered enough” (College staff distance learning)

“I am the connection between my students and the organization – I am their support. How can I not be student-centered? I always was” (College faculty)

In some cases, the language of change has emerged at both the CHC and the College as a disciplinary mechanism to encourage compliance with organizational policies. As discussed in Chapter Three, critical discourse analysis attempts to highlight how “power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimated by the talk and text of dominant groups and institutions.” Van dijk 1996:84. In the case of the CHC, both powerful groups, the physicians and the senior leadership team, have used discourse to enact power in the organization. The physicians’ language of “competence in patient care” carries with it an element of discipline which effects not just the senior management, but the CHC employees who work in patient care.

The physicians are a very powerful group in this organization. Because the medical model of care that we use, although it may have softened somewhat from years ago, essentially says that every patient in this facility belongs to a doctor. Physicians, at the end of the day, are responsible; accountable for the medical outcome for that patient (CHC staff member).
As a member of the senior team at the health centre said;
They have probably the most powerful influence in the organization. So in health care, the delicate dance is trying to figure out how to factor physicians into that whole change process, unlike any other kind of organization where people are all employees and you do have more – you can impose change. Not that I think that’s the way to do it, but working with a group of people who are not there to impose anything on, other than certain processes like credentials and all that jazz: that’s a real dimension. So the extra trick in health care is that because everything is driven by physicians, generally speaking, and you have no real control over that group of people, it’s a huge issue. And it’s the hardest piece of change in our organization. I would say one of the hardest pieces.

The cultural and societal weight behind this group also adds legitimacy to their language.

And in the struggle between physicians and health center leadership for control of the dominant language of change, identity is key. One senior organizational leader describes the typical reaction she gets when she proposes change to the physician group. “They say, “how would you know, you’re not a doctor.” And she responds to that by saying: “Yeah, I know I’m not a doctor, but I’m really good at looking at the statistics, and your statistics look like this. Now, if those statistics were your operative record, you’d be wanting to do something about that.” And the other thing is, “If we do X and it saves us some money… – the dreaded ‘saves money’ – it will free up some to do some other things that you want to do. You know, that we currently can’t do.”

In this interaction, the physician group has clearly articulated that identity (as in doctor or not a doctor) is a key element in establishing legitimacy with regards to change. And in her response, the senior manager does not rely on her identity as a representative of organizational management – something that would most likely be effective with other groups in the organization. She very deliberately invokes her language of change, organizational efficiency.
Compliance with organizational goals for those on the administrative track within the
CHC is disciplined by the threat of being labelled someone who “resists change.” You
don’t want to be seen as someone who is not “on board” with change. Not surprisingly,
this appears to be most important to employees in the management or administrative
streams of the organization who are hoping to move ahead in their careers.

I’d say that it’s mostly the middle managers who use language like family-
centered, and fiscal accountability. I find that a lot of our middle
managers start out in health care, they work their way up the ranks, but
once they decide to do an MBA or a Bachelor of Commerce to improve
their career, they get out of clinical care, they get into management, and all
of a sudden they become these crazy – they speak this jargon. So yeah, I
think those people, often they use jargon because: they think it’s
acceptable; they think it’s a move to show their quality or their expertise.
They may even think it’s a cultural expectation that “Once I become a
middle manager or a manager of some sort, I’m expected to use this
language now, because this is how they speak. But in the big picture, I
can’t understand that. Like, it’s a “pop culture” dialect that is irritating
(CHC support staff)

At the same time, some managers expressed frustration that there was not enough
discipline of organizational members with regard to resistance to change.

Part of the problem is, resistance is not really punished, it’s probably not
really rewarded except among the resisters, I think they maybe consider
themselves kind of like warriors, you know. They are never going to
change, their darn proud of it. I think probably part of the problem is that
there is no level of expectation necessarily that people are going to step up
to the plate and change (CHC Manager).

Summary
This chapter has identified some of the language through which individuals at the CHC
and the College make sense of their change experiences. In both organizations, this
language exists in the narratives of change presented by dominant groups as well as the
narratives of resistance presented by those with less organizational power. This process
of re-claiming the language of change through terms like family-centered care and student-centered learning, demonstrate very different interpretations of the workplace environment.

The central question in this thesis asks how the language of change becomes meaningful for individuals. Chapter Six has offered some insight into this question by uncovering the privileged language of change at each site, and addressing the ways in which individuals make sense of this language though a framework of critical sensemaking. The language of change that most strongly resonated with individual identities became privileged, even when this was not the dominant management narrative of change. In the case of the CHC we also saw that alternative meanings of change may be interpreted from a language of change that conflicts with a strongly held identity. At both sites, the importance of cues extracted from the environment to enhance the plausibility of the language of change played an important role. At the College, the discursive power of the CEO of that organization and his ability to extract cues and influence sensemaking through narratives that reinforce these cues was a significant piece of the sensemaking process. As well enactment of the language of change was an important step at each organization as individuals began to make sense of their own roles in the change process. The enactment of the “Portfolio College” for example, solidified a language that had been used in an abstract manner in the organization up until that point. Upon its enactment as a brand identity, organizational rules (formal and informal) were enacted to re-enforce meaning.
In the next chapter I will focus on two specific events, one at each of the research sites. Each of these events has played a significant role in the sensemaking of individuals in these organizations. At the College, I will investigate an external investment in the organization which served not only as a cue from the environment but as a legitimating force in the development of a new organizational identity. At the Health Centre, the merger between the Faith and City hospitals remains today the most significant shock in the sensemaking of employees, so I will further investigate that event and its impact on meaning.
Chapter Seven

Critical Sensemaking and the discursive effects of the language of change

The question of how some narratives become privileged over others in the construction of organizational discourse has been addressed by a number of studies from the perspective of discourse analysis (Hardy, 2004). This interest in what attributes and conditions are required to give “some texts staying power” (Cooren, 2004), or “become sufficiently fixated” (Ricoeur, 1981), “leave traces” (Taylor & Van Every, 2000) or indicate that a narrative has been “taken up” sufficiently widely throughout an organization (Cooren & Taylor, 1997) provides context for my investigation of the dominant and alternative narratives of change in this study.

The Foucauldian approach “urges us to think in terms of a plurality of discourses, in relation to which actors are differently positioned by virtue of their status and identity” (Rossi, 2004:6). Privilege in the process of critical sensemaking comes largely through the ability of a particular actor to extract cues, convey plausible explanations, and resonate with the identities of those involved in the process. In both the organizations featured in this study, a number of competing narratives of change were available to those involved in the change initiative, yet only a few were privileged as dominant within the organization. Critical discourse analysis informs us that certain texts are more likely to resonate with the sensemaking process of individuals in organizations. Certainly how cues are extracted to support these narratives is an important part of that process. But the content of the narrative itself must reflect a plausibility that is required by sensemaking. It must also reflect an identity that is consistent with the current identity construction. If
a narrative offers these elements to those making sense of change, it may become ‘embedded’ in organizational discourse. Embedding refers to the extent to which texts are adopted and incorporated by other organizations to become part of standardized, categorized, generalized meanings.” (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004:643) And as these authors conclude, “only certain texts will ever become embedded in discourse.”

In the previous chapter, techniques of critical discourse analysis were utilized to identify the language of change, including the dominant narratives of change, at the two case study organizations. As well, properties of critical sensemaking were applied to this language to offer insight into how language may be privileged through the influence of a formative context, organizational rules, and broader social discourse. The interconnectedness between enactment of discourse at the local site and the broader societal level discourse of change is the focus of this chapter. To investigate that relationship, I will focus on two significant organizational events and outline the ways in which the language associated with these events has become meaningful for individuals in these organizations.

**$123 million dollar investment at the College**

In the College experience, one significant shock in the sensemaking process of many individuals was the financial investment the organization received from the provincial government in response to the demand for a more modern, national calibre college.

The $123 million changed everything – the way we saw ourselves, the way the province saw us, the way the universities looked at us (member, senior leadership team).
The College’s CEO at the time had made the strategy to secure increased funding a cornerstone of his change agenda. From the College perspective, there is no question that the $123 million dollar investment by the provincial government translated into an interpretation of change as “successful” at that organization.

When the investment announcement was made, the face of the community College was forever changed. By investing $123 Million in the College to renovate facilities and expand programs, the Province acknowledged the need to strengthen the learning experience for College students, and support their role in building this region’s economy and quality of life (College Document).

From the announcement of the investment forward, the College designated its change initiative as successful. As well, the organizational language around that event reflected its centrality to the College change story. “Getting to Yes” became short hand for the change process. The senior leadership team frequently referred to this initiative in its shortened form, as in; “after YES we’ll have to address this issue...” or “We are all focusing on YES right now...” And as one employee says,

The CEO set a vision and we were all concerned about the vision and about getting the funding for it – I mean, $123 million is really very little for what we needed to become a national College... and everybody’s energy and effort was poured into it, and look at what happened: It was successful.

This statement provides us with insight into several factors which have influenced the sensemaking process. The fact that the CEO set a vision, and the organization supported that vision, speaks to the impact of this individual on the language and direction of change at the College. Hardy and Philips (1998) refer to this as the “discursive legitimacy of the actor.” This reflects the ability of the actor producing the discourse to be seen as legitimate by her/his audience.
Not everyone can produce and disseminate texts and, in any discourse, certain subject positions are advantaged over others in the ability to produce and transmit texts (Deetz, 1992; Fairclough, 1992; Phillips et al., 2004). Thus, certain characteristics of actors within the context of a particular discourse—in Bourdieu’s (1990) terms, their habitus—will accord them agency. In many respects, the bases of such agency are familiar: for example, formal power, access to resources, links to other actors, which confer the ability to mobilize economic, social, and cultural capital, and discursive legitimacy all help the process of textual production and transmission (Hardy, 2004: 420).

Although discursive legitimacy is not limited to those with formal power within organizations, that status can certainly be part of the equation. In this case, the College has adopted the vision of the CEO quite enthusiastically. Although some employees demonstrate resistance to his narrative of change, or have suggested alternative narratives, the national-caliber College concept and portfolio learning as the change agenda, dominate the College sensemaking processes. In fact, at the College it has become inappropriate to question the CEO’s vision of change. As a result, individuals expressing discontent with a particular change within the organization frequently preceded the negative comments with a phrase like, “well his vision is great but the timing’s not right,” or “the managers between the CEO and us have messed things up.” His vision is central to the development of a language of change, so much so that resistance to the language of change becomes difficult to separate from a critique of the person himself. As one new College employee explained, “when I go around visiting the campuses people are saying to me, “we miss [the CEO], we miss [the CEO].” And they might have only met him once, or never even met him at all. But the idea of him is so big.”
This discursive power comes not just from formal power as the organization’s leader, but also the CEO’s ability to influence sensemaking by extracting cues which privilege the dominant narrative of change, and enhancing the plausibility of the change agenda by offering an organizational identity that resembled that of other successful colleges.

Identity Construction
Although the validation of the change initiative signified in the investment was important from an organizational perspective, it also contributed to the process of identity construction for individuals. As one employee said;

We used the phrase $123 million and the date (March 28th) because the world changed for us. We had validation that our change process had worked. And I think that, if I leave the College or whatever I do in the future, I will be glad I had this job. Because of that. (college manager.)

In this statement, she makes sense of the investment as legitimating the change process, but also as an element in the construction of her own identity as a part of that process. The external validation of the importance of the work being done at the College will remain an important part of her own experience as someone involved with change management. This interconnectedness between external validation and internal identity construction factors significantly in employee sensemaking. The external view of the College as a vocational high school, as opposed to a serious post-secondary institution, had been a concern for employees for some time.

As momentum built behind the change initiative, especially after the investment, the external view of the College began to change.
I would say when I first started that there really was a feeling that this was a vocational school, vocational setting. It was like your second class, post secondary experience if you couldn’t get into College or if you weren’t cut out to go to university and not get into College or university, if you weren’t sort of cut out, you might go into vocational school. I don’t think that’s the image anymore, I think it’s seen as very – from a students perspective I think they see it now as a viable post secondary educational option and I think there is a recognition in the community that it is a valuable, it’s the place to be, I hear it all the time from the colleagues I meet outside of the College that it must be an exciting place to work, very dynamic, changeable, changing, high profile. So I would say that the image of the institution both internally and externally has changed (College staff member).

Although progress certainly has been made in transforming the external identity (image) (Weick et al. 2005) of the College, the identities of individuals within the organization may not be so clearly defined. The following quote demonstrates the ongoing nature of critical sensemaking, where although new language around identity may be entering the organization, other elements (plausibility, the social nature of the process, etc.) are still significant factors.

We built new television spots to continue the evolutionary track we’ve been on in the holding of the position at the college that we are broadcasting and every single claim and statement in the commercials is validated by market research but it expresses more confidently and more dynamically then many employees can relate to what this College is and it was played to some faculty a couple of weeks ago and faculty had difficulty seeing and believing that was who they were, that there was such a demonstration of expertise and confidence and value through the television that – part of the challenge there is the layering of all the years of second class citizen and so part of our identity challenge inside is helping people feel worth and value and respect – feel respected because the province didn’t respect this institution for so long (College Marketing and Communication team member).

The move from “vocational high school teacher” to “college faculty” is an ongoing process, and one that is not yet complete. As a member of the college communications team points out, not only were faculty still feeling ‘second class’ but they were unable to
believe that the funding—which was key to the identity construction process—was actually “real”. Sensemaking is represented here as a process, but it is not linear. The ongoing nature of how individuals make sense of things required that events, experiences and external reflections of identity reinforce each other over time. Making sense of the change from vocational high school to national calibre college required external validation, internal identity construction, and the event which produced a shift in sensemaking. It was also reliant on the extraction of cues provided by leadership, and the privileging of voices advocating that identity. There were also perceived benefits on the part of the employees, most notably the increased pride in their workplace.

**Discursive effects of change**

We have been very successful here implementing change. I mean, change here has worked—measured on every indicator except the human level. Enrolment is up, revenue is up, we have investments and new structures, our image is changing... but I feel less valued, less respected, and less important here than I ever did before this change process began. I don’t feel listened to by the people making the change. I think a lot of employees feel that way... but I don’t think we can say that change hasn’t worked. We got a 123 million dollar investment from the government two years ago... and no other university in the province got anything like that. Some of their funding was even cut (College employee).

In this instance, the dominant discourse of change at the College, one of profitability and growth, simultaneously empowers and disempowers the employee. She is proud of the organizational accomplishment, yet at the same time acknowledges that her own experience has not been positive as a result. This statement provides us with insight into the power of the discourse of capitalism in legitimating change. The indicators of success, “revenue, investments, new structures” are all reflective of capital growth. In the example above, these elements of success are also privileged over their costs—the
human element. Even though the individual feels less valued, less respected, the fact that the financial investment came to the college and not universities, seems to justify that condition.

Financial pressures were also used in the language of change that legitimated the change agenda in the first place. The consequences of not “getting to yes” were clear, the survival of the organization was at stake. This threat to job security was not new to college employees. At the time when the College became a unified organization, six campuses were completely closed in that process. These were all rural campuses and the jobs that were lost in those areas would not be easily replaced. As a result of that experience, employees in the rural areas in particular also equated change with the threat of job loss. Not surprisingly, resistance to the language of change is much more vocal in the metro areas, where jobs appear to be more available.

The former CEO of the College emphasised that, “no campuses will be closed” in the move to become a portfolio college. Even with that assurance, and a provincial government commitment to protect rural campuses and jobs, employees were sceptical about job security. The previous campus closures had been positioned as essential to the overall growth and survival of the organization at the time of the amalgamation. Nevertheless, the impact on the sensemaking process of the employees who remained was significant. As one manager says, “it contributed to the low self-esteem that characterized the identity of the organization.”
That previous experience informed the sensemaking of a number of individuals, particularly at rural campuses. Even after the investment was announced by government, there were several campuses that were sceptical about whether or not the money would actually appear.

They kept waiting for the money to be taken away and part of our whole agenda was to spend the money as fast as you can because you know it always could be taken away, that’s the reality of any government funding. It wasn’t until construction started on campuses that people started thinking ok, well maybe it is going to happen. We had a case in [one rural campus] because of the way the cash flow was going with the government there were some aspects of the renovations that didn’t necessarily makes sense from a schedule perspective, they were driven by when the money was available. So in that case we ended up with a slow down in the middle of the process just because that year’s allocation of money was spent. We had to go to great pains to convey to people on those campuses that the money hasn’t been lost. This is a planned hiatus and the project is going to be finished.

Even after construction was underway people were still disbelieving. So that gives you a sense of the depth of the angst and the impact of years of lack of respect and years of being treated by the provinces and it’s going to take us years still – we still have a long way to go in terms of the institution being seen differently and accepted differently (member, senior leadership team).

**Summary**
The influence of the $123 million investment reached across the organization, and outside of it. The most immediate effect was the legitimating of the change initiative that the college had embarked upon five years before. With that, came an important contribution to the construction of identities both for the organization, and for individuals within the organization. In particular, the external validation of the College, particularly in comparison to its competitors, had significant influence on how individuals made sense of the effects of change.
In this example, the language of change became meaningful for individuals through several interconnected elements. The investment provided an important cue which influenced sensemaking processes. The image of the organization changed externally, and the internal identity of the organization began to follow suit. This cue was also important in enhancing the plausibility of the change agenda in the organization. External validation of the work being done at the college made the re-positioning strategy of the organization more plausible, and the social and ongoing nature of sensemaking re-enforced the possibility that the new identity was real. The investment strategy was also championed by an individual within the organization who demonstrated discursive power in presenting the narrative of change, extracting cues, and influencing identity construction.

The consistency between the broader discourse of financial growth and the College change agenda also contributed to the plausibility of the initiative. The original motivation for growth within the college came from a government capacity study that called for increased productivity at the institution. The $123 million investment was a stepping stone to achieving that productivity.

The discursive effects of the language of change in this case also influenced individual sensemaking. Previous experience with change driven by financial reform had introduced fear of job losses and campus closures. This element of discipline encouraged compliance with the change agenda, especially in the most vulnerable areas of the organization. At the same time, the broader discourse of change, reflected in the
formative context of public sector management in which the organization functioned, privileged financial accomplishments over other considerations in the change agenda. This is reflected in the contradictions described by employees who emphasise the success of the change program, and at the same time indicate their marginalization as individuals in the process.

The CHC merger
The most significant shock described by participants from the CHC is still, a decade later, the merger of the Faith and City hospitals. Although the organization has experienced many change initiatives since this event, individuals still tended to bracket their experiences into ‘before and after’ the organization merged.

The organizational values which were a part of the Salvation Army run Faith Hospital, the family-type approach to the organization, community focus, and commitment to “live within our means” were cultural attributes which Faith employees describe as being “lost” in the process of the merger.

I’ve reflected a lot on this over the years and certainly had a lot of conversations with other people about this about the role of the Salvation Army, when your CEO (in the Salvation Army model) doesn’t get a salary, their decision-making is driven by other things than personal gain. Perhaps when you look at other provinces where you’ve got hospital CEOs making close to $700,000 a year, when you put a Faith Hospital CEO up against that – where basically he gets living expenses – like, they get no money. It’s a whole different motivation and it is this notion of a religious calling. And so the Salvation Army – what I think we lost with that merger was we lost those values (former Faith hospital manager).

I think, in hindsight, maybe the administration did not pay as much attention as it needed to at the grieving of the old Faith Hospital... I think there was a huge loss with the Salvation Army; I think there were many, multiple losses. I think the grieving of the old Faith
was the beginning. And then put on top of that the dismissal of the LPNs: it just added to the further burying, I think, of the grief ... and then the layer of the shared services and then the layer of the merger. You know, so I think from the Faith perspective, it’s just been a compounding of issues (CHC nursing staff, former Faith Hospital employee).

The connection to the former organizations is maintained not only by Health Care staff, but by the physician teams as well. As discussed in the previous chapter, differing perceptions of the competence of medical care delivered in the former Faith and City have been retained, and resulted in both cultural and structural difference within the merged centre.

There are issues here that are real tough. For instance: we have two departments of Anaesthesia, you know. And that physically results in a barrier to trust each other enough to work together. So at some point, we’ve got to look at that: we’ve got two peri-operative things going on in one organization (CHC manager).

Identity Construction
As Weick et al remind us, “our identities lie importantly in the hands of others” (2005).

From the external perspective the community view of the CHC has been, and continues to be, very positive. The struggle for that group is to reconcile the internal reality of the workplace with the external perception.

This discrepancy factors significantly in individual sensemaking about organizational identity. Perhaps most problematic is the disconnect between the external identity of the organization as a top-notch tertiary care hospital and the internal experience of employees who were feeling undervalued, overworked, and unhappy in their (hostile) work environment. The HR director has introduced a new approach where employees are asked, in focus groups or individually, to reflect on the original reasons why they came to
the health centre. She hopes to capture some of the positive attributes of the health centre from the external perspective, and remind employees of what the organization could be. “Let’s focus on what we could be doing well and celebrate that,” she says. “It’s critical because you don’t want people really wanting to work at the CHC and then getting here and saying, “Oh my God! It’s extremely toxic; it’s stressful. I didn’t sign up for this; this is not what I expected.” And then getting out.”

Employees make sense of this inconsistency between external and internal views of the organization by drawing on several important cues. The first is the government validation of the CHC as separate from the regional health authority, with a distinct role in the community. This remains a source of pride across the organization. Likewise, the external perception of quality patient care provided by the organization is important to employee descriptions of themselves as health care providers. As employees grapple with the tension between competing discourses of management, medicine and culture, they tend to describe these differences in approach as internal issues, separate from the external view of the institution.

At the same time, the identities that individuals may draw upon in constructing themselves in the workplace need not be limited only to discourses of the employee. In explaining the conflict health care employees may feel about their roles, and their ultimate decision to continue working in a hostile workplace environment, one manager said: “in some respect they stay because they see themselves as future consumers in the system. They look ahead and say, ‘I am going to need this service, who will provide it
for me and my family?" In choosing to stay, some employees may be privileging a competing identity within a social discourse, one of health consumer or family member, over their identity as a health centre employee.

Another challenge to organizational identity construction is that the community around the CHC continues to recognize the two distinct organizations. Armed with this external validation of their previous identity, there was little perceived benefit on the part of the Faith hospital employees to adopt a new identity once the threat of the regional health board was averted. Employees at the Faith hospital already had respect from the community, and the dominant culture (City Hospital) at the CHC did not appear to respect the clinical competence of the Faith employees.

A decade later, identity construction has proven to be a particularly complex endeavor at the CHC. A number of program groups, or discipline groups have developed collective identities, i.e. former Faith Hospital employees, physicians, management, etc. As well, employees began to struggle with their own individual identities within the new language of program-based care and family-centered care. As a result, it has been difficult for management to gain a widespread commitment to the organization’s mission, vision and program-based care structure. One current member of the senior team has served as the acting CEO of the health centre on three occasions in the decade since the merger. He describes his approach to change in this way:

My experience in successfully navigating change here is you go back to the processes of planning for a change; putting in place measures so that you can report on the change; evaluating the change; and then doing some fine-tuning: “Okay, so we’ve done this change. How is working? What
do we have to do next?” Recognizing that you’ve got that internal piece, but you’re also looking at how the organization is doing relative to alignment with the changes in the system... It all has to play out in terms of; how do you develop the strategy, the strategic framework, for the next advance?... For the folks who lead an organization, you’ve got to say, “Okay, stay the course so as to show progress and move forward.” And that’s what folks in an organization expect vis-à-vis leadership. And remember, the dynamics of an organization, the people in an organization, are transitional... You want to make sure that you’re adding value with respect to the ongoing journey of an organization.

Although this approach is consistent with the mainstream approach to change management, it does not recognize the identity struggles of individuals within the organization.

Strategic change, when viewed as micro-strategic processes rather than successive organizational states, is highly susceptible to processes of disjunction and disruptions. Whilst an ideal may be that people can make sense of strategic change through a coherent narrative that is credible for all parties, in messy, socially constructed reality, there is a high chance of actors making sense of the situation differently and impacting on each others sensemaking processes (Beech & Johnson, 2005:44).

The alternative narratives of change at the CHC, stories of loss, lack of respect, workplace hostility and frustration, indicate that change has not been just an organizational undertaking. It has been an individual journey as well and, as Beech & Johnson (2005) point out, actors have made sense of the situation differently. A member of the human resources team at the health center explained some of the individual affects of the change agenda as follows:

We have very, very definite silos here. We are three, almost three organizations: City, Faith, and then Other Health Services, which was an amalgamation of a variety of services. And so our greatest challenge of trying to merge these is impacting everybody who works here and [that’s] recognizing that we’ve gone through a number of CEOs; they’ve seen what is happening in the government; they see that funding is not forthcoming. We’re burning people out. There is a lot of stress and
overwork. In some parts of the organization, a toxic workplace. We have a number of indicators to tell us, you know, that we're in trouble.

**Enactment**

This concern with workplace morale and employee stress is evident throughout the health centre, and central to any discussion of change. One of the most visible effects of this organizational environment is fear. As one employee says, “when people hear the word change, or any of that language... program based care, etc, it unnerves them. I think we have a culture of resistance here, maybe because of low morale, but because people are afraid.”

As Knights and McCabe point out, “Given the contractual nature of employment, the vagaries of capitalism and the structural inequalities of power, fear is invariably a perennial feature of organizational life” (2002:243). In relation to the discourse of the language of change, fear is an important element. This is not just in the production of the discourse, but in the experiences of those making sense of the organizational change as well.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the language of change is represented in a discursive form which equates change with survival. Essentially, the fear of what will happen if change is not attempted is motivation to adopt it, even when past experience with change has been negative. At the CHC, employees “equate change with a loss of service, loss of jobs and less money in terms of resources.” This is a result of the organizational change experience since the merger.

The first time we had a change was around the time of the merger and I think it was 46 people that went out the door and you know those were
competent people, they weren't folks that were deadwood that the organization could just say ok, let's off a few people, they were significant contributors to the organization, they were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. So now individuals start to get the mindset that change means consequences to significant numbers of people and budgets, and has nothing to do with individuals.

The enactment of layoffs in the name of financial efficiency was an important element of the change agenda at the CHC. It happened within a context of public sector health reform which was consistent with the language of financial efficiency. As a result, the discourse which equated change and organizational survival created layoffs as meaningful events in a strategy designed to preserve the work of the broader organization, at the expense of individual employees.

The discourse of health reform is presented below by a member of the senior management team as she provides legitimacy for the enactment of layoffs. “There is a lot of fear, but I mean, what can we do? The money just is not there. The provincial health care budget is already the largest, and we can’t afford it. We need to change so that we can be more efficient.”

This statement provides us with insight into the power of the language of change reflected in financial efficiency. When this employee emphasises what we can “afford” financially this language legitimizes a work environment characterized by fear. Although the statement acknowledges a negative effect on individual employees (fear) the meaning conveyed clearly privileges the power of provincial budgets over the environment, or individual concerns.
As one member of the public relations team describes;

One of the large agents of change or creators of change or catalysts of change in this building, as in the whole industry of health care, is funding. It really is a massive one. You know, they do get a chance — the managers and stuff — they do get a chance to go across the country and look at best practices and look at the way other people do things, and try to bring that back -- but not as much as they would look at their PIRs (performance indicator reports) and their quarterly budgets. I mean, that's really the big one.

This statement emphasizes the power of the discourse of financial accountability, and at the same time indicates a contradiction in the narrative where broader initiatives such as ‘family-centeredness’ are promoted as reflecting the values of the organization, but financial efficiency is actually privileged as the motivation behind organizational change.

The tension between the language employees hear, “workplace of choice,” “team-based,” “family-centered”, and the cues that factor into their sensemaking processes is further exacerbated by the fact that some individual in the organization do not accept the meanings conveyed through the dominant narratives. Consistent with the narrative of change reflecting financial accountability, success stories about the merger often focused on finances, rationale for change was often couched in economic terms, and this language did not seem to resonate with the organization as a whole. From a sensemaking perspective, the dominant narrative of financial responsibility appears to connect with the senior leadership team and management — but it does not resonate with health care providers. In fact, it is a point of resistance for that group.
The formal privileging of language associated with the dominant narrative of change from the CHC management team is embodied in the form of the organizational strategic plan. This plan is frequently referenced in terms of its values, mission and objectives, however, as one employee explains, the specific language of the document is not particularly accessible. “In that strategic plan, there are four key directions, 21 goals and 83 objectives which are supposed to guide our plan. What we’re doing, our business. To have 83 objectives that are submerged in a strategic plan that nobody looks at; and if you did look at them, it would be hard to decipher what is meant. That’s not a useful document in any organization.”

The power in the formal documentation of the strategic plan appears more so in its role of legitimizing management’s narrative of change. As one long-term member of the senior team explains;

So while it’s true that we’ve had a lot of change in the office of the CEO since the merger, the senior leadership commitment to be true to mission, vision and the strategic goals that were set in the last Strategic Plan really did not waver. We are meeting, have met, objectives…. And remember, the dynamics of an organization, the people in an organization, are transitional.

Although he acknowledges there were bumps in the road, he defends the organizational change experience as strategic and focused on objectives.

Yet even though formal organizational rules may attempt to guide the organization towards a more integrated approach, informal rules maintain a structure of distinct identities. As one CHC manager points out,
The two cultures are still very separate. Employees do not apply for jobs posted “on the other side,” and there can be a reluctance to share resources between the old Faith programs and the old City side and vice versa.

Summary
The language of change has become meaningful for employees in this case through a process of sensemaking that is closely connected to the cultural identities of the two former hospitals. These identities have essentially remained intact despite a change initiative aimed at a unified organization. The merger itself was the result of financially motivated health care reform in the province. Although some of the organization’s employees, and particularly management, accept and privilege financial responsibility over other organizational issues, others do not.

This tension between the language of finances and the language associated with a faith-based approach to health care is reflected in conflicting sensemaking process, organizational rules, and identities within the organization. Although the language of financial responsibility is questioned within the organization, it is certainly dominant within the formative context of provincial health care management. It is also dominant in the broader social discourse of organizational change. The discursive effects of this discourse upon the organization are most often described by CHC employees as low workplace morale, a toxic workplace, and a fear of change.

The resulting effect within the organization is one where employees from different parts of the organization make sense differently of the same cues and experiences. As discussed in Chapter Six, the cafeteria closure was an example of a cue which was
interpreted by organizational leadership as a good business move, where former Faith employees saw it as another example of loss in a litany of loss since the merger.

**Potential for altering the discourse of the language of change**
The interconnectedness between the language of change, the sensemaking framework of individuals, the organizational enactment of meaning through rules and the formative contexts which inform and influence meanings is, to say the least, multi-layered. This relationship is further influenced by broader social discourses which impact the formative context of the organization, influencing the available subject positions in a sensemaking process. These discourses inform individual and organizational identities, and help to determine the plausibility and possibilities of language.

This thesis began with a critical discussion of the destructive power effects of the language of change on individuals. It further explored the totalizing nature of the discourse, and the limitations such language placed on individual access to alternative meanings. I am encouraged through the subsequent analysis to have learned that, complex as the process of critical sensemaking is, the very nature of the interconnectedness between elements of the process also offers avenues for the introduction of alternative and multiple voices. We have seen examples in these two organizations of instances where individuals in the same organization have chosen to draw from different, and perhaps opposing, discourses within the same formative context. And although the CHC and the College are very distinct organizations, they both emerged from a discourse of public sector management which significantly influenced.
the formative contexts in which they now operate. Nevertheless, individuals in these organizations report very different workplace experiences.

In this case, individual enactment of meaning through language was the central point of the analysis. As a result, the analysis illustrated how individuals draw upon discourse to negotiate meaning in a complex sensemaking environment. However, the fact that individuals make sense of discourse differently does not necessarily mean that the discourse of the language of change may be easily destabilized. In fact, although many participants questioned the specific change agenda they were involved with, organizational change on a broader level was accepted by most individuals as a necessary part of organizational life.

Although individuals may make sense of the identities offered in the dominant narratives of change differently – there are still a limited number of potential identities available. These options are constrained by rules (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991), by broader discourse, and by the limiting, totalizing nature of the language of change (du Gay, 2003). Within these constraints, however, there may be room for resistance to the discursive effects of the discourse of change.

Critical sensemaking emphasizes that individuals within the same organization, experiencing the same change event (or shock) can make sense of that experience in different ways. The identity construction process of individual employees in each of the case study organizations had an important effect on whether or not the employee saw the
dominant narrative of change as plausible, or not. Resistance to the dominant narrative often came in the form of identity construction that supported an alternative narrative, or contradicted the dominant discourse. For example, former Faith Hospital employees constructed themselves as “warriors” protecting their beloved culture and organizational affiliation.

“We have lost a lot. Our place, our name, many of the people. We have to fight to hold on to the wonderful things that made us the Faith Hospital.” (former Faith Hospital employee)

“They see themselves as warriors... protecting the old Faith culture.” (senior manager)

“The Faith people have a lot of power. They don’t move across the organization and they (well some of them) don’t use inclusive language. It’s hard to communicate through that.” (public relations officer).

The strength of that identity meant that they could resist organizational change initiatives, even though the broader discourse of change demanded that employees should embrace change. The discursive legitimacy of the physicians extracting cues in support of the identity of the former Faith employees, combined with the preferred tendency during sensemaking to maintain established ways of making sense of identity, support this maintenance of the former organization.

In the analysis presented here, the formative context of the CHC – including the discourses of healthcare, management, faith, financial accountability, medicine, family, and others – emerged as much more complex than the corresponding environment of the college. For example, identity construction appeared much more difficult, in that more subject positions were available, and as such, more identities became plausible. As a
result, at least in part to this complexity, alternative and competing discourses of change in this context were possible.

At the college, the alternatives were much more limited. Because of the institutionalizing effect of the identities presented by other colleges in the country, and the perception of an enhanced external image resulting from the new organizational identity, the available subject positions were more restricted. Identity at the college was also more consistently reinforced on an organizational level, as the CEO used language, organizational rules, and the process of extracting cues for co-workers to build a plausible and cohesive story of change. Through this effort, the language of change within the college was reflective of his personal vision for the organization.

Although there were differences between the sites, the formative contexts of both organizations reflected a broader social discourse of the language of change. The discursive identification of the need for change equating survival was a visible motivator for both organizations. The presence of a language of fear in emphasizing the inevitability of change and the totalizing nature of the discourse as imminent is another similarity. As well, the language of corporate management couched in financial accountability and organizational efficiency is present in both.

The process of change presented in this analysis is complex. It is in the interconnections between the production and enactment of discourse that language, power, and identity converge to both produce and reflect the discourse of the language of change. This
process is not linear; the discursive or truth effects of the language can be privileged in multiple ways, or not at all, depending on the often competing effects of discourses, rules, contexts, and meaning in organizations. However, as Mills and Helms Mills indicate, "to untangle the 'way things are done' in a given place it is important to unravel the various interconnections; too many 'quick-fix' models falsely suggest that it is possible to overcome deep-rooted attitudes and behaviors in a short space of time" (Helms Mills & Mills2000a:70).
Chapter Eight

Making Sense of the Study

This thesis began by setting out my intention to contribute to our understanding of the discourse of the language of change. Through an approach of critical sensemaking, informed by a poststructuralist perspective, I have investigated the sensemaking experiences of individuals in two organizations as they have enacted, produced, and resisted the discursive effects of this language. I believe that the insight generated by this research is useful in several ways. It has provided an analysis of how discourse becomes meaningful for individuals. In doing so, it provides an empirical study of the discursive effects of the language of change, it has also demonstrated an application of critical sensemaking that makes language central to the process, and it has asked questions that challenge dominant truths about organizational change. In addition, by engaging individuals in a process of active sensemaking as they participated in this research, I believe I have contributed to the creation of space for multiple voices in this analysis. These voices have provided insight into how language is created as meaningful and enacted as discourse in organizations experiencing change.

In approaching this discourse from a genealogical perspective, this thesis addresses the specific conditions in which the language of change exists, is maintained, and is constrained. This is an important step in the contextualization of a discourse that has emerged out of a compilation of events, beliefs and practices. As well, through its focus on the process of change, this study may generate insight into the power effects of this discourse, as they relate to individual managers, employees and organizations. With
power as a central focus, I have attempted to confront some of the mainstream assumptions represented in the language of change. Accordingly, I have questioned the rules, context, language, and processes which are produced through this discourse. In doing so, I hope to contribute to the destabilization of existing power/knowledge relationships.

Finally, by studying the two organizations discussed here, the CHC and the College, this analysis offers a glimpse into the relationship between the discourse of change operating at the socio-cultural level as well as at the local (organizational/individual) level. The objects in this case, the health centre and college, serve to demonstrate sites where discourse is made sense of, enacted, produced and maintained.

**Contribution to the literature**

What these sites have shown us is that organizational change is a complex, ongoing, and retrospective process of sensemaking among employees, managers, and members of the broader community. As Sturdy and Grey (2003:653) point out, the mainstream literature reflects the assumption that change is an element of organizational development that must be managed to achieve desired outcomes. This study suggests that change is actually a discursive process, not about ‘changing’ but about the mutual constitution of language and identity in a process of making sense of a discourse the language of change.

In that sense, this study contributes to the related literature reviewed in Chapter Two by providing an empirical investigation of the discursive objects produced by, and producing, the language of organizational change. This contribution extends the current
literature by furthering our understanding of the relationship between the societal-level discourse of change, the local site of sensemaking and, ultimately, enactment.

By focussing on the relationship between language, power and identity, I feel that I have contributed to the existing literature on individual and organizational identities in changing work environments. Although proponents of sensemaking have emphasized that sensemaking processes are grounded in identity construction (Helms Mills, 2003; Weick, 1995), this study provides further discussion about the pivotal connection between language and identity and the mutually constitutive nature of this relationship within change environments.

For example, when the CEO of the health centre says, “we’ve done an awful lot of changing, and people are exhausted, but we haven’t actually begun to introduce real change,” she is describing a process in which identities established prior to the change initiative are still very much intact. And as a result, these identities continue to influence the sensemaking processes of those who are now experiencing organizational change. The sensemaking process in this situation appears to have been significantly influenced by identity construction in relation to the merger, as well as the relative effectiveness of competing narratives of change within the organization. The success or failure of particular groups within the organization to maintain identities, therefore, is related to the dominant narrative of change in that place in the health centre: physician versus manager, Faith versus City hospital, employee versus management, etc.
This study also contributes to the current literature by offering an analysis of the complexity within organizational environments. By approaching change as a process which has emerged from a specific set of beliefs and events, this research investigates the nature of power relationships within organizations and outside their boundaries in broader society. As a result, the complexity of the change environment in terms of competing narratives of change provides a key element in our understanding of where the language of change comes from, and how sensemaking processes may result in the adoption of or resistance to that language. For example, the environment in which the health centre attempted its change agenda was much more complex than the one surrounding the college experience.

However, complexity in this study refers to the plurality of narratives available within competing discourses (both local and global) and the volume of available language within this framework. Power, in this context, was diffused throughout the organization and beyond by identities available in discourses of efficiency, public accountability, service, faith, management, health care, etc. What organizational members describe as competition between identities of those associated with the doctors versus managers, for example, reflects this plurality of interpretations in the meaning of the language of ‘family centered care’, or of the language of ‘organizational change for efficient delivery of health care’.

In the college experience, although there were many players involved, there were fewer identities available in terms of defining individual association with the organization. It
seems that, as a result of this circumstance, the privileged voices at the College were much 'louder' and experienced much less competition in terms of support for the dominant narrative than their health centre counterparts. Although the college actually employed more individuals and maintained more geographic sites than the health centre, the meanings associated with change throughout the organization, and the diversity in terms of shared meaning with relation to organizational identity, were much more consistent.

Complexity, then, appears to be determined by the plurality of meanings associated with the language of change, not structural factors such as organizational size and proximity. As previously discussed, key determinants of success for narratives were power, privilege and access. Hence, the more effective privileged voices were in extracting cues and championing a particular change narrative in either organization, the more likely it was that the corresponding sensemaking was to happen within the language of that narrative.

This study offers a further contribution to the current literature by providing insight into which narratives will become privileged within organizations. Building on the existing work about the privileging of organizational language, (Cooren, 2004; Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Hardy, 2004; Ricoeur, 1981; Taylor & Van Every, 2000) this research demonstrates how language becomes meaningful in a sensemaking process; in essence, the available language associated with the change must resonate with the identities, experiences, and shared meanings of individual within the organization. In that same
context, change and identity are enacted through language. As a result, resistance to the language of change becomes virtually equivalent to resistance to change.

Theoretical contributions
This study makes contributions at the level of theory in three important ways. The first is the analysis of the relationship between discourse and agency in an attempt to connect the individual actions associated with change at the local level with the broader social discourse of change. The second is a problematization of change from a poststructuralist perspective. By deconstructing the totalizing nature of the discourse of change, this study contributes to the genealogical understanding of change as resulting from specific conditions of possibility. And the third contribution is the conceptualization of a new approach to studying change. This approach focuses on the discursive, as opposed to the substantive, effects of change and highlights the importance of language and power in this process.

The relationship between Discourse and agency
The integration of a poststructuralist analysis of language with critical sensemaking offers a theoretical bridge between the conceptualization of Discourse as an all-encompassing power/knowledge relationship and the enactment of discourse by individuals at the local level. The nature of how the language of change becomes privileged within organizations also informs our understanding of the relationship between discourse and agency. In Chapter Six, I discussed the narratives of change that had emerged in each organization, and how these narratives contributed to the definition of the organizations and individuals within them. In Chapter Seven, the power effects of these narratives were analyzed using a framework of critical sensemaking in order to
investigate the relationship between this privileged language and the enactment of meaning.

We saw in this analysis that the discursive space between the dominant narrative at the local level and the broader social discourse it reflects can result in a plurality of outcomes in terms of sensemaking and enactment. This space appears to be most visible in the area of identity construction. In the case of the organizations studied here, the contribution of individual actions to organizational sensemaking becomes apparent. The impact of these enactments of meaning is highlighted in the way in which the discourse of change is translated into local practices. Most notable in this context is the role of the president of the College in interpreting and extracting cues, and enacting the dominant narrative of change through stories which were shared throughout the organization.

The fact that organizational members are now virtually unable to separate the change from the individual leadership of the president speaks to the importance of that contribution on their sensemaking. The CEO's focus was very much on “showing” employees what they should look like by presenting examples of other Colleges that looked like he thought they should, and by sharing stories that described appropriate identities. Consistent with previously identified structures of organizational privilege, he also created channels of controlled access through which to communicate his narrative. He was constant in his efforts to reinforce the language chosen to reflect this vision. Furthermore, he put actions around the language at key times in the sensemaking process.
These actions include initiatives such as the enactment of the Portfolio College and the requirement of student portfolios for graduation.

Conversely, at the CHC, the lack of consistent leadership in extracting and interpreting cues meant that a number of competing visions were introduced or sustained throughout the centre. As a result, the process of sensemaking was much more complex for individuals who not only had to sort through their individual experiences, but choose between competing discourses inside and outside of the organization.

These findings helped to focus analysis of the question of whose narrative becomes privileged in the discourse of the language of change, and whose voice is marginalized; and why. In the two organizations studied here, privilege appeared to be very much tied to consistency with a dominant narrative of change. Although this privilege was mutually constituted, as those with discursive power were better able to establish narratives as dominant, this was not the only factor in their success. The ability of individuals to both access and disseminate narratives throughout the organization emerged as a very important factor. In both organizations, the public relations departments were very much engaged in constructing a single, dominant, and in both cases, management-centred, version of change. On public relations officer describes that process as follows:

Well specifically, a lot of it is done by example, what I might use in a presentation or what I might do in a writing scenario is an example that others who I work with would adopt. Just like I would learn from a person who would also do that, through publications that are produced about the institution, our annual report is an example, very vibrant language and we often produce presentations that support publications that we produce so that leaders of the institution are equipped to go out and use that
They can tailor it to their personality to communicate the information of the institution, develop key messages and briefing notes for people throughout the institution, speeches, releases, articles, lots of those different kinds of tools that can help to convey who we are today and how that translates now and into the future.

However, it became evident that those resisting a dominant management-led discourse could also be successful in putting forward a competing narrative, which in some areas of the organization, could become dominant. For example, the physician group at the CHC managed to put forward a narrative of ‘good’ medical care which has been quite successful in resisting the management language. This narrative was primarily interpreted by doctors in the health centre who were powerful in both their formal positions in the organizations, but also empowered by a broader social discourse of medicine. Actors in this group were very successful in maintaining the identity of the two former hospitals within their care teams, and, perhaps surprisingly, enacted completely separate medical facilities within the hospital for what should have been a merged service. The enactment of two distinct intensive-care units with distinct staff and budgets certainly contributed to the separation of the two cultural groups in that area of the health centre and served to further enhance the discursive power of the physicians.

Problematization of change from a genealogical position

A further theoretical contribution of this research is the problematization of “change” and its pervasiveness in current organizational theory. Organizational change in this case is viewed as an outcome which emerged from a specific set of power/knowledge relationships. As discussed in Chapter Two, this perspective is in contrast to the mainstream view of change programs as the inevitable outcome of a historical process of organizational development (Sturdy & Grey, 2003). In the management literature, and in the rhetoric of consultants, the pace of change today is typically described as
unprecedented. This statement characteristically sets up the assumption, either explicitly or implicitly, that this situation is a natural outcome of the evolution of society. And an acceptance of organizational change, therefore, is characterized as a naturally occurring requirement of business in today’s world.

Through a deconstruction of the discourse of change, this study supports the position that the acceptance of the need for organizational change as inevitable and essential to organizational survival is one particular truth claim (du Gay, 2003) privileged through language. The language of change exerts its power discursively, not through substantive evidence. The analysis of the sensemaking processes presented in the two case studies featured here further asserts that the discursive power of this language is maintained in a broader discourse of management. As such, a language of change is produced and maintained that creates expectations around fear, survival, and leadership; it is this language which enforces the discourse at the local level.

Theorizing a new approach to studying change

This study has proposed a new approach to the analysis of organizational change: one that views change as a process which is enacted, maintained, constrained and made sense of through language. In contrast to mainstream views of language as a tool to facilitate change agendas, this perspective highlights the discursive effects of language as it imposes order on a process of discursive change. This understanding of the language of change as discourse suggests that embracing organizational change may not be in the adoption of change practices but ultimately in the acceptance of language that reflects identity and a change agenda. The language itself has become the process of change, not
the actions, programs, or outcomes of change initiatives. The elusive nature of "solid" evidence of the profitability of change has lead to a re-characterization of what success looks like. As discussed in Chapter Two, this move from a discourse of the practice of change to one of a language of change has been described as "a subtle shift of emphasis from the substantive to the discursive" (Oswick et al., 2005:387). It identifies a discourse of change which focuses almost exclusively on meaning, conveyed through language, as opposed to tangible management outcomes.

In this context, those advocating organizational change should consider individual sensemaking as a key component in the process of change. The impact of language must be looked at not as a tool to facilitate change, but the context in which change happens from the perspective of identity construction, the enactment of discourse (values, beliefs, experiences) and the privileging of extracted cues.

**Methodological Contribution**
The framework of critical sensemaking offers a useful contribution to this discussion. By focusing this analysis on properties of critical sensemaking, which allow individuals to create discourse as meaningful within organized settings, I was able to view a process of how individuals interpret, enact, create and maintain the discourse which becomes dominant at the local level. Using techniques of critical discourse analysis ensured that the language privileged in this research for analysis reflected the central concerns of power and language.
Through the use of critical discourse analysis, this study has focused on the impact of power and privilege, and the importance of language, on discursive practices in organizations. Consequently, the discourse of the language of change has been presented as a discursive process by which individuals experience change exclusively through language. The conceptualization of change as existing in the enactment of meaning through language requires a method of critical discourse analysis which allows us to see the building blocks of sensemaking that lead to the acceptance of or resistance to this language. In order to see the discursive effects of the specific language of change, we must look at the process of how individuals within organizations make sense of meaning and language and ultimately view the effects of that language on individuals. Critical sensemaking, as a method of critical discourse analysis, provides a connection between the importance of power effects reflected in discourse, but also provides a framework whereby we can see the components of a change process that lead to individual understanding of the change environment. This methodology is useful in uncovering process and structures which serve to privilege some narratives as sensible, plausible and, potentially, dominant within the organization.

However, the combination of poststructuralist and sensemaking methodologies is not without its challenges. Allard-Poesi (2005:186) suggests that the poststructuralist refusal to claim universal knowledge and legitimacy “suggest a posture of local resistance, behind which it seems difficult to find reasons for acting.” Likewise, Weick (1995:38) refers to the deconstructionism associated with a poststructuralist approach as potentially
“undermining the faith and beliefs necessary to get [the researcher’s] sensemaking started.”

In this study, however, critical discourse analysis has positioned critical sensemaking as a methodology for deconstructing the power and privilege that informs language. It has, in essence, given critical sensemaking an active role in that deconstruction process. This may serve to address Allard-Poesi’s (2005) concern that poststructuralist research may be more focused on resistance to sensemaking than active engagement in sensemaking. By using the sensemaking properties as a lens through which to observe the processes of language and change in organizations, the deconstruction of meaning becomes participative, as both researcher and organizational members engage in a spoken / written retrospective of how meaning has maintained or constrained (as the case may be) discourse.

In her conclusion, Allard-Poesi (2005:192) cautions that an increased focus on reflexivity has placed increased scrutiny on “the theoretical tools and frameworks we use to make sense of organizational life. In so doing, researchers have tended to lose sight of the fact that our experience and research are equally structured by the methodological tools we use to uncover and communicate the ‘objects’ under study. Changing one’s methodological tools changes the way one ‘sculpts’ reality (Weick, 1993). This encourages us to use or invent new tools so as to make sense differently.”
That, in essence, has been the methodological objective of this study. By employing a poststructuralist critical discourse analysis within a framework of critical sensemaking, this analysis offers an opportunity to make sense differently in the experiences of two organizations involved in change. By focusing on language and power in the analysis this method creates a bridge between the broader socio-cultural discourse and the local site. At the same time, by engaging study participants in a process of active sensemaking as they share their narratives of change, this study contributes to the need for space for multiple voices in the investigation of the language of organizational change. The experiences of individuals within organizations need not reflect consensus on the change experience. In the cases studied here, in fact, narratives of change reflected diversity of sensemaking in both organizations. This resulted in the identification of competing narratives of change, as well as other narratives which were not privileged within the organization. It also served to emphasize that individuals may make sense differently of the same language and circumstances. Although this concept has been presented in previous work (i.e. Helms Mills 2003) this case highlights the manner in which language and power affect these different sensemaking processes.

**Limitations of the study and implications for future research**

This study was not an attempt to compare sites or the relative success of their respective change initiatives. The intent here was to look at how meaning is constituted in two different organizational experiences. Because sensemaking is specific to the individuals and environments in which they work, the study of additional sites, with their own power relationships and unique use of language, will add more breadth to our understanding of how sensemaking occurs in change. This may prove to be most interesting in the area of
leadership and the concept of leading change. The leadership experiences described in the
two organizations here may offer a first step in a more focused study of leadership and
language within the sensemaking process.

The question of whose sensemaking matters most in organizations is one that calls for
further work in the area of both formal and informal leadership in the discourse of the
language of change. In this study two very different leadership examples factored into the
respective sensemaking processes of the organizations. That being said, the complexity
in the environment surrounding the health organization, as opposed to the challenging but
less complicated world of the College, is certainly a factor in terms of the impact of
leadership on meaning. In the case of the College, where cues had been extracted and
privileged in a manner consistent with “success” relative to the dominant narrative of
change, participants were much more likely to describe change as having worked. At the
health centre, where cues were inconsistent and reflective of different change agendas,
the conclusion was less positive.

Further study of leadership through language in different sensemaking contexts, and the
impact of sensegiving through privileged communication will add to the preliminary
work done here. Likewise, the area of resistance to change is one that is discussed in this
study but offers the possibility for further research in terms of the relationship to
language and power. This study begins with the perspective that organizational change
does not appear to be ‘working’ for organizations and certainly is not working for
individuals within organizations. Given that change can be such a stressful experience
for individuals, how can this reading of the discourse of the language of change contribute to some alteration of these discursive effects?

Individuals in the two organizations studied here have provided insight into this question in two ways. The first is in their sensemaking of resistance to the language of change. The second is reflected in the ways in which identities are drawn from sensemaking landscapes which go far beyond organizational boundaries. In the CHC example, some employees said they chose to stay in a “toxic” work environment because their identity as family member or potential health care consumer had an over-riding effect on their sensemaking as strictly employee. This illustration of how societal-level identities impact on individual actions within organizations suggests an avenue of future research into the impact of competing narratives within individuals as well as within organizations.

**Implications for Practitioners**

This study poses some interesting questions for practitioners about the practice of change, and specifically the language of change, within organizations. For example, the relative complexity of the organizational environment in terms of available identities and competing discourses presents important dimensions to the way in which individuals make sense of change. Further studies in this area may investigate organizations which reflect differing degrees of complexity in these two areas. There may be some connections as well between the degree of constraint available in terms of the broader social discourse and the complexity of the local site. Sensemaking may occur more readily in circumstances that offer fewer alternatives in terms of identities.
For example, the broader social discourse of nationalism over the past several years has placed a heightened importance on the need for individuals to identify patriotically with their nation states. As a result, an identity as a "Canadian" community College might be more acceptable to those making sense of their identities today than it would have been in a time where the language of nationalism was less prevalent. The language of change at the College was couched in the need for a national calibre college, comparable to other Canadian institutions.

**My own sensemaking**
Sensemaking itself is a reflexive process – individuals make sense of their worlds through their own experiences, language and understanding. Likewise, this thesis has been an exercise in reflexivity from my perspective as I have endeavoured to answer some of the questions I encountered in my own experiences as an employee, student, and facilitator of change. At the same time, I am mindful that, as Weick (2002:898) emphasises to researchers, "we are not the point. In the name of reflexivity, many of us tend to be more interested in our own practices than in those of anybody else."

In this research, I have attempted to balance my own sensemaking of my experiences as an employee of these two organizations and, as a researcher, with the description of sensemaking processes that have emerged through this study. To this end, I have been careful to clearly identify contributions to this study which are directly from my personal experience as such, whenever they occur in this paper.
I acknowledge, however, that critical sensemaking offers a framework which itself privileges aspects of the process above others. At the same time, this approach illustrates the on-going, social and retrospective nature of the analysis. As a result, the research environment must be continuously made sense of. As well, the focus of this research, the language of change, highlights the impact of the constitutive nature of language on the enactment of meaning within changing organizations.

To the extent that this study serves to produce, maintain or constrain the language of change it is reflective of that dynamic, socially-constructed organizational environment. As a result, the discussion presented in this chapter is not so much a conclusion, but a reflection on the analysis presented in these previous chapters. It is my own sensemaking of the discourse of the language of change encountered in their development.
Appendices

Appendix A: Defining Terms

The following six definitions are intended to provide consistency of language and to help ensure alignment on key institutional strategies.

Learning Centered College
The learning-centered College is an organizational model that mandates an institutional focus on learning. The Learning Centered College paper states “Every decision, every policy, every process must support our fundamental reason for being – to create and facilitate learning” (p.1). Canada’s Portfolio College is one example of a learning-centered College and our way to implement the concept.

Portfolio Learning
While many institutions have adopted learning centered approaches, the College chose to do so through the portfolio learning model. It is how we describe our particular institutional model of learning. It is intended to be a student self-directed, self-development process. Two corner stones of portfolio learning are reflection and choice. As opposed to the traditional model of learning, which is content-oriented, faculty-centered, and monological and values only formal education, portfolio learning is content and process-oriented, learning-centered, dialogical and values all types of learning.

Portfolio Education
The lines between portfolio learning and portfolio education are blurred and often both terms are used interchangeably. While portfolio learning encompasses the experience, portfolio education refers to the system of education and includes curriculum, credentials, academic policies and procedures, timetables, programming, etc.

Portfolio Development
Portfolio development is a process that focuses on you as a person. It is based on reflection. It acknowledges that learning happens everywhere. It helps you make sense of what you learn and where you want to go. It enables you to build a profile of yourself. It builds self-confidence and self-esteem. The student portfolio development process most often takes place as an integrated part of college programs. Occasionally, it occurs as a stand-alone course in a program. The college also offers faculty/staff the opportunity to engage in a portfolio development process as part of our capacity building MOU with the PLA Centre. This professional development course allows an experiential understanding of the reflective process which assists faculty/staff to help learners fulfill the graduation requirement for portfolio.
A Portfolio
A portfolio is a personal record! For our students, it should help them address among other issues: Where am I? Where do I want to be? How do I get there? It is the means by which a student makes sense of his or her learning. In the language of the Student Guide, "a portfolio enables you
- To take personal inventory
- To identify and demonstrate what you have done and what you know you can do
- To examine gaps in your knowledge and skills
- To highlight your employability skills as well as technical skills
- To transfer skills and knowledge gained in the past and present to different settings"

A student portfolio is often contained in a three-ring binder, a CD, video or website.

A Career Portfolio
Sometimes a portfolio is specifically designed for the job market. "If you’re looking to find the right job, stand out among the competition, prove yourself, and feel confident in the interview process, you are ready to create your career portfolio" (Williams and Hall, Creating your Career Portfolio, 2001, p.xi). A career portfolio tends to be more prescriptive than the college portfolio described above. It is sometimes an expanded version of a resume.

Portfolio Learning Office
June 30, 2005

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Appendix B: Sample interview guide

Interview Questions

- Please describe your experience with change at this organization.
- How do you typically describe your role in the organization?
- How long have you been involved in change management at this organization?
- How would you characterize the current state of change in this organization?
- How do you describe the change process to employees at this organization?
- What language / vocabulary is associated with this change process? Was it new to the organization?
- The change initiative identified in this organization is one of empowerment. How do you typically explain the concept of empowerment to employees?
- How are organizational power and employee empowerment reflected in this organization’s change process?
- In your opinion, how has this change initiative contributed to the development of organizational identity?
- Has the way you describe and facilitate the change initiative changed during your time with this organization?
- What are some of the typical questions or concerns you respond to about organizational change from within this organization?
- What do you see as the challenges facing your organization in terms of organizational change?
- What do you see as the benefits of the change process for this organization?
References


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Levinson, B. M. (2005). Putting People in Their (Right) Place; When your business goes in a new direction, your IT organization is in for a wild ride. Four CIO 100 honorees steer their staffs to new jobs, better performance and different approaches to building systems. *CIO, 18*(21), 1.


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