DIFFERENCES IN RESPONSE TO COMPANY GROWTH AS A FUNCTION OF

HIERARCHICAL LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study was designed to look at the range of possible employee responses to company growth and change utilizing one growing company as a case study. The study utilized theory founded in Barry Oshry's Power Labs to examine differences in the hierarchical levels (Tops, Middles and Bottoms). The study also utilized Self Determination Theory's (SDT) tenants of autonomy, connectedness and relatedness to evaluate responses from participants about levels of stress due to change. 22 volunteers among three hierarchical levels from Company X were interviewed and asked to respond to questions about their own experience with the growth and change they were witnessing in their daily lives at work. Responses were reviewed for recurrent themes and several raters also coded the responses for SDT variables and stress levels which were then analyzed using simple correlations. Results revealed that Company X employees do not strictly follow Barry Oshry's Power Labs experiments; Tops, Middles and Bottoms all varied from the theory's suggested patterns. In the correlations between SDT variables and stress, relatedness was the only variable found with a statistically significant negative correlation. Potentially confounding the results of this study was the fact that the researcher was an employee of Company X at the time of the study.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

*Background of the Problem to be Investigated*

People all over the world are experiencing change every day. In this qualitative study I am going to focus on the changes that accompany rapid growth in a particular organization with the hopes that it will serve as a case study of the range of human responses that are possible in the face of change. Specifically, I am going to focus on how those at various hierarchical levels within the organization view and experience the growth. It is the case that organizations, much like the people that inhabit them, can and will change. "Organizations have lifecycles just as living organisms do; they go through the normal struggles and difficulties accompanying each stage of the Organizational Lifecycle and are faced with the transitional problems of moving to the next phase of development" (Adizes, 1988). With the idea that organizations change, the question arises as to how and why this would have any impact on employees if they are so used to change as a normal part of life.

According to Paul Strebel, Director of the Change Program for international managers at the International Institute for Management Development in Switzerland, when a new employee enters into a work agreement with a company they form an understanding of how they fit and what they will do, in turn for which they will be rewarded (Strebel, 1996). Psychologist Harry Levinson uses the term "psychological contract" to describe the same concept (Levinson, Price, Munden, Mandl, Solley, 1962). The contract or compact may

have formal dimensions where company policy and procedure provide the answers. There is also a psychological aspect to this compact, which is answered largely by company culture and how the employee learns to behave and be taken care of within the environment. If the organization experiences a period of change, large or small, this may alter the understanding the employee initially formed about how things work. The alteration in the employee understanding of how they fit and what they need to do in order to be secure in their company could lead to stress on the part of the employee.

Hans Selye, an endocrinologist and researcher on stressors, defined stress as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change" (Selye, 1985). When changes are simple and straightforward there may be little stress; however this kind of low stress change is not always the norm. It can also be the case that change can be a time of ambiguity with little or no clarity about the goals or how the "end" will look. When much of the effects of a change are unclear, people can feel anxiety, which is the general state of fear and/or apprehension associated with a physical stressor. Because the stress any given person may feel in response to change is variable and may not be easily linked to a specific change it is often difficult for an individual to identify it as a problem or a reaction to change (Selye, 1985).

Much research has already been done on the stress and impact of external changes such as downsizing (Gowan, Riordan & Gatewood, 1999) and mergers (Terry, Callan & Satori, 1996). However, according to research by Rafferty and Griffin (2006) there are three properties of change itself that can lead to negative

or positive outcomes: the frequency, impact and planning of the change. If an organization is changing frequently, the employees are likely to view the change as occurring unpredictably and with no beginning or end. This can lead to fatigue and increased anxiety (Glick, Huber, Miller, Harold & Sutcliffe, 1995). In regards to the impact of the change, people are mostly concerned with the impact that any change has on them personally. A change that involves something new and unfamiliar, especially new values or fundamental ways of working, may be particularly stressful for individuals (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Thirdly, the planning involved in change processes can have an impact on the way a change itself is perceived. According to Lazarus and Folkman, change can be viewed as negative if there is no real or perceived warning or explanation before it occurs. When people perceive that preparation has occurred prior to a change taking place, they are more likely to view the change as deliberate and not threatening (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). All these factors have been shown to have some impact on how psychologically stressful change can be.

One of the variables that can alter how change is perceived and adopted is the leadership within an organization and how they personally are responding to and helping others to respond to the change (Kavanagh and Ashkanasy, 2006). According to Bridges (1991), if the people within the organization are not assisted through the transition process that accompanies any changes, then nothing will be different once the dust, from the change itself, settles down. In other words, in order for people to move through change in an organization successfully, they have to have assistance. "Nothing so undermines organizational change as the

failure to think through who will have to let go of what when change occurs"
(Bridges, 1991). Transformational leadership i.e. leadership that stimulates
interest, generates awareness and develops and motivates others, can promote a
healthy and positive outlook on change (Bass and Avolio, 1994). Leadership can
also influence organizational culture which can play a role in how change is
adopted (Schein, 1992; Mumford et al., 2002). There are also a variety of
techniques that leaders can use to assist with the change process.

One way that leadership can assist those in their organizations to cope
with rapid growth is suggested by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which is a
theory about human motivation. According to Ryan and Deci (2000) people are
intrinsically oriented towards growth and adapting to change while developing a
coherent sense of self. However this tendency needs to be supported with
autonomy, competence and relatedness. According to SDT, these three variables
when found together in someone's work life foster intrinsic motivation. This
means that someone will be motivated to do the best they can do at their job, not
because of money or perks (which are somewhat fleeting), but rather because of
an internal drive to do so. Baard, Deci and Ryan (2004) found that when
employees at a bank perceived support of autonomy from their managers, their
levels of job satisfaction increased and they had lower levels of anxiety.

A strategy for leaders who are assisting their organization and employees
through growth and change is to help create and reinforce an environment that
fulfills these needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. Research on
growth and transition in organizations also suggests that individuals need

involvement in the process to best adapt and move through change. In one study a telecommunications company received the directive to change processes to comply with laws and they involved their employees in discussions about how to implement these changes. The researchers found that, when it came time to actually take on the changes, the employees who had been more autonomously supported by their managers more easily adopted the changes (Gagné, Koestner and Zuckerman, 2000). If people have tasks that involve them in the change and at the same time foster autonomy, competence and relatedness they will be better able to manage their work load as well as personal reactions to the change.

With the available resources and information about how and why it is important to assist employees of a growing and changing organization through the change and transition process, there seems to be a question still as to why it is so difficult for companies to do so successfully. According to Strebel, aside from individual differences in companies, which can no doubt lead to differing outcomes in situations of great change, the single largest reason that so many companies do not move through large growth and change smoothly is that managers and employees all view change differently. "Both groups know that vision and leadership drive successful change, but far too few leaders recognize the ways in which individuals commit to change to bring it about" (Strebel, 1996). Top level managers and executives likely view change as an opportunity to strengthen their business, to take on new challenges or risks, to advance their careers or to align their strategy with a changing market. Employees however may see change in the form of rapid growth as disruptive and hard to grasp. This

difficulty that an employee may experience in the face of change can and does manifest on both the physical and the psychological levels.

Barry Oshry, a leading systems researcher focusing on power and hierarchy, suggests that someone's response to change may be influenced by their position in the existing hierarchy. According to Oshry's research and writings, people in systems (e.g. organizations) can be divided into categories of "Tops," "Middles" and "Bottoms" based on their power, authority and roles within the given system. These titles can be helpful in understanding the pressures and viewpoints of those at various hierarchical levels in an organization as well as a good theory to use as a foundation for how and why people at different hierarchical levels view change in the form of growth differently (Oshry, 1999). Although Oshry's work doesn't specifically address organizational change, this topic is a logical extension of the work that he has done and his theory.

"Tops" are those at the top of the hierarchy. In a company one might say that the executives and board members are the Tops as they have the most power in a traditional sense and access to the most resources as well as bearing the bulk of the responsibility. The Tops are responsible for "…mastering what is given and creating what is not given" (Oshry, 1999). Tops receive input from the system and from the environment in which the system exists and it is then their job to decipher and act based on said input.

According to Oshry's research, Tops, regardless of who they actually are will experience some fear in their lives as Tops. It can be in the form of anxiety about loss of resources, or it can be anxiety about how to handle said resources,

but there is always some element of fear for those in the top position. Coping with this fear is one of the pressures that Tops experience.

Another pressure for Tops is how to handle the burden of responsibilities around providing resources, information, security, vision etc. Tops in organizations often cope with this pressure by splitting their responsibility amongst their group so that one top is responsible for one part of the pressure while another top handles some other aspect of the work. While this division of labor can be helpful in tackling the responsibilities of their roles, it can also lead to specialization in one area and some competition over what areas of focus (e.g. customers, employees, market image etc.) are the most critical and need the most resources at any given time. This competition amongst the Tops can tear their group apart and actually lessen the support they feel from being part of the Tops group.

In addition, Tops may experience frustration with the other hierarchical groups (Bottoms and Middles) who may struggle in different ways to live up to the demands and needs of the Tops. Bottoms and Middles may also challenge the norms that the Tops set forth in order to keep the system on track as they see it. Middles may seem ineffectual to Tops and lacking in ability to carry out clear expectations. Bottoms may seem irreverent, liabilities, and not committed to the Tops and the vision they (Tops) are trying to execute.

In a situation where an organization is growing rapidly, the Tops have much on which to focus in addition to the new and increased power and status that comes from rapid growth. They see the demand for their work and so they see

the change and growth as necessary and positive as it is helping to meet a need. Their view of the situation is high up and broad and they may not be entirely aware of how this positive situation could lead to stress and anxiety on the parts of those who aren't as connected to it. This is a great time for Tops to connect to their organization, to offer a perspective that is appropriate for those with different responsibilities, to lead them, inspire Middles and Bottoms to keep pushing and to help each person see the opportunities for themselves no matter where they are in the situation.

The Bottoms, those with the least power and authority in a system, tend to feel vulnerable to those at the top. They work not necessarily knowing the future plans and strategies for their system, which may ultimately result in their not being deemed as necessary any longer. Bottoms feel pressure and demands but do not always necessarily see where the pressure originates. They feel deprived of resources that seem plentiful amongst the Tops and even Middles and so resentment may be formed as well as story lines that reinforce this viewpoint.

To cope with their feelings of vulnerability Bottoms will quickly come together finding strength amongst other Bottoms. This grouping together will result in an "us versus them" mentality towards the Tops and also possibly the Middles. Bottoms will find the greatest strength in a world without resources in each other, but this can also lead to challenges amongst the bottom group such as pressure towards "uniformity and conformity." According to Oshry, the Bottoms, because they find strength amongst each other, will not tolerate individuals within their group expressing feelings or desires to be individuals or to go in their own

directions based on personal beliefs as this could threaten their source of strength. The Bottom group may ostracize individuals who do make independent decisions.

In a rapidly growing and changing organization, Bottoms will surely feel and hear about increased workload and increased pressure. They may not be privy to the larger view that the Tops share and may feel stress and anxiety not knowing why the increased demand is occurring or what the landscape looks like.

To Bottoms, the work itself is their world and even without growth, the pressure can feel intense and unrelenting at times; and with little information passed along from the top, it may start to feel difficult to manage. This is also a time of opportunity for Bottoms to really band together to make the organization successful and pull through a challenge by working together as a team while also possibly taking on new and different tasks and responsibilities. However, the risk for the Bottoms group is that they will see individual achievements from their bottom level peers as threats to integration and strength, the "we versus them" bonds that hold the Bottoms together. This could lead Bottoms to go along with behavior or ideas that they don't share for the sake of keeping the group together.

The Middles such as managers in a company, according to Oshry are in a position where it is easy to become dis-empowered, but it is also a position of great potential power. Middles are often torn between the demands of Tops and the demands of Bottoms. They often times spend their time running back and forth between the two groups communicating, explaining, and justifying what is occurring amongst the top and the bottom groups. As a result of this, the Middles are often seen by Tops and Bottoms as ineffectual and without viewpoints of their

own and therefore are not supported by Bottoms or Tops. Because of their middle-ness, those in middle positions can see what is happening in all areas of the organization: however they often do not feel empowered to use this knowledge; and in many cases they do not even see that being in the middle is a position with a power all its own. They often can become isolated from other Middles and burnout is a common occurrence among those in middle roles in any organization or group (Oshry, 1980).

In Oshry's learning labs where he creates the top, middle and bottom positions in order to study them, he sees common patterns amongst Middles. Oshry claims that, in response to the pressures and demands of their middle-ness, they often respond in one of the following ways. First, they may remove themselves from the middle position by aligning themselves with either the Tops or the Bottoms. This strategy gets them out of the middle but doesn't allow them to utilize the potential strength that they have as a result of being in the middle.

Second, Middles may become entirely unresponsive to anyone and therefore not exposed to the pressures from the top and bottom levels. This also removes them from the middle position but also excludes them from everything that is happening within the system. Oshry recognizes that these responses are normal but he recommends a third strategy, which is that those in middle positions just allow themselves to be their own hierarchical level. That is to say, he suggests that Middles use their knowledge of the top and bottom positions to bring the two together to communicate on their own and to help support Tops and

Bottoms working directly with each other rather than going through someone in a middle position.

In situations of rapid growth in an organization, Middles may be increasingly torn between ensuring that Bottoms are handling additional workload to meet demand while also making sure that information is passed back and forth between Tops and Bottoms appropriately and effectively. This may be a time where finding strength in one's middle-ness is even more difficult because those in the top and Bottom conditions are under increased pressure and stress and will therefore put more pressure on those in the middle to be the communication wires through which everything about the change and growth is explained.

Given that these tendencies are natural and may occur in any system, Oshry suggests general tactics for creating balance and success at each level. These tactics are a good jumping off place, but they are not complete plans for action. In general for Tops he suggests the following to mitigate the differentiation and isolation that can occur amongst their own group: walking in the shoes of other Tops to better understand their roles and pressures as well as to be able to better evaluate their success or failure in their own areas later on, sharing information with each other about their situations and challenges they may be facing as well as coaching each other, and most importantly agreeing upon a mutual shared vision and commitments that can be disseminated amongst everyone in the system without variations (Oshry, 1999).

For Middles, as mentioned above, Oshry believes that they need to feel strength and power in being a Middle rather than just being a conduit through

which Tops and Bottoms communicate. Middles also need a shared vision specific to the middle group that contributes to the collective goals of the system but also unifies the Middles based on their needs and responsibilities. Middles need regular communication and meetings amongst their group alone where they can share challenges as well as coach each other and band together as Middles so that they are not torn apart by Tops and Bottoms. For Bottoms Oshry suggests encouragement of differentiation and recognition of various strengths and even ways of working since Bottoms tend to forget and override their unique abilities and skills in an effort to just get the work done (Oshry, 1980).

Oshry also suggests that everyone in a system needs to come to the table understanding that they are not guests, but rather they are the system, and leadership can spring from any level. Take opportunities and muster courage to acknowledge the truths about a system so that it is not a stigma or some unspoken issue, but rather something that everyone is aware of and can learn to manage. Hiding things can only separate and distance people from their goals.

Thus, change within an organization is inevitable and it is something of which people within the system will take notice and respond. The change may be positively viewed and adopted easily, or it may be resisted and stressful. There are a multitude of factors that play a part in how people respond to change in an organization such as the timing and planning. There are also factors within the organization such as leadership style and position in the hierarchy that may have an impact on how the change is implemented and perceived. Given how frequently it occurs and how important the consequences are, organizational

change, the nature of the companies in which it occurs successfully, how it is managed and how it affects others seems to be worthy of study.

*Current study and statement of hypotheses*

My exploratory study will focus on the sudden and rapid growth of Company X[1] and the subsequent changes within the company as viewed by members of the various hierarchical levels of the organization. In this study I will use Oshry's theory about how Tops, Middles and Bottoms may function in times of growth in an organization as a jumping off point. Oshry's theory offers insight into how the hierarchical levels may function in a company, but my study will also focus on how the various levels are responding to the growth and change as well as to the other levels. I hope to gain insight into how each hierarchical level may view the change and growth, what aspects of the change are the most stressful or provide the most opportunities, and how the various levels are coping with the stresses and taking advantage of the opportunities as a whole.

My interest in this topic arose when I arrived at Company X as an intern and learned, though my own lack of on-boarding that the overall process for on-boarding and acclimating new hires was only through trial by fire. About a month after my arrival and personal expressed interest in on-boarding, the CEO announced that the company was going to be entering into a phase of significant hiring that would be a drastic change from the amount of hiring that was done in the past. He also stated explicitly that the length of this growth phase and amount of new hires was undetermined but that it was going to be significant. At that time Company X was comprised of approximately 80 employees working across the

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[1] Company name has been changed to protect confidentiality

U.S. and Europe. Now, three years later, Company X is comprised of 300 employees.

As someone with an interest in organizational process, I was asked to take on much of the creation of an on-boarding process and in that capacity I got to hear a lot about how those in leadership roles at Company X were viewing the growth, the possibilities and the concerns/fears. In my role within Human Resources at Company X, I was also privy to a lot of information about how tenured employees at Company X were reacting to the growth as it was occurring. Additionally I was interacting with all the newest hires and had the opportunity to hear, from their perspectives, what the company looked like from a new and un-assimilated perspective. I was, in these dual roles, able to see some differences between how the tenured employees were viewing the growth and change as well as how the newest hires were experiencing the growth which was also what allowed them to have their jobs.

The review of the literature on reactions to organizational change, which was summarized above, suggested the following hypotheses. Hypotheses 1-3 come from the work of Barry Oshry, and Hypothesis 4 from Self Determination Theory.

*Hypothesis 1: Tops at Company X*

Hypothesis 1-a: Tops within the organization will express enthusiasm and optimism about the growth and changes at Company X.

Hypothesis 1-b: Tops will also express some form of anxiety about being able to manage all of their responsibilities.

Hypothesis 1-c: Tops will also express some frustration towards Middles and Bottoms who, from their perspective, may not living up to their respective responsibilities.

Hypothesis 1-d: The source of greatest stress for the Tops will be how to hold everything together.

*Hypothesis 2: Bottoms at Company X*

Hypothesis 2-a: Bottoms at Company X will express feelings of stress and pressure to increase the amount of time they put into their work and how much they can produce in their roles.

Hypothesis 2-b: Some Bottoms will band together and camaraderie will arise from the idea that everyone is feeling tense and overworked.

Hypothesis 2-c: The greatest source of stress for Bottoms will be the pressure to get everything done with less resources and less time.

Hypothesis 2-d: The greatest opportunity will be the ability to prove to other levels that they can manage everything successfully.

*Hypothesis 3: Middles at Company X*

Hypothesis 3-a: Middles within Company X will feel a lot of pressure from trying to meet the demands of the Tops and the Bottoms while also managing their own increased workload.

Hypothesis 3-b: Middles will have insight into the stresses of the Tops and the stresses of the Bottoms, but will not have as much clarity about their own stress.

Hypothesis 3-c: To alleviate the stress of their middle-ness, some Middles will align themselves upwardly with the Tops while others will align themselves more with the Bottoms.

Hypothesis 3-d: The greatest source of stress for Middles is managing the disparate needs of the Tops and Bottoms.

Hypothesis 3-e: The greatest opportunity for Middles is to move out of the middle position upon proving how well they can manage it.

*Hypothesis 4: Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness*

Hypothesis 4: The participants who express that the work environment at Company X fosters autonomy, competence and relatedness will express lower levels of stress about the changes.

CHAPTER II

Methods

*Participants*

The subjects in this study were volunteers from the current active employee base of Company X. Company X is a software company headquartered in Colorado. At the time of this study Company X had approximately 250 employees based globally. Populations excluded from this study were those who were considered "Contractors." The reason for this is that contractors do not work exclusively at Company X, which may limit their ability to fully disclose information about the company specifically. Those with the title "Intern" were also not included in this data pool as their hours at Company X were limited and their tenure at the company lasts no longer than three months making them less able to speak on behalf of the changes occurring over time as a result of the growth.

With permission granted from the CEO of Company X, an email was sent to the entire staff explaining the study and requesting volunteers. The CEO had also asked that he be allowed to view and edit this communication prior to distribution and that a disclaimer be included clarifying that this study was not requested by the leadership of Company X. The initial email contained information about the general purpose of the study, the need for participation, the voluntary nature of their participation, the excluded populations and the confidentiality involved (See Appendix A for the Initial Request for Participation). The researcher's personal contact information was also included

and interested participants were instructed to contact the researcher at her personal phone or email address using an email or phone number not affiliated with Company X. The email also contained a copy of the informed consent so that those considering participation were able to review it prior to participation and for their records. They were informed that they would be required to sign a written copy of the same consent form and return to the researcher before any interview questions will be asked (See Appendix B for the Consent Forms). Lastly, potential participants were informed that, at any point in the study should they wish to discontinue participation, their data would not be used and their identity would remain confidential.

Those who wanted to participate were asked to provide the researcher with the desired method of contact so that interviews could be scheduled at a time and location that did not interfere with work at Company X. Participants who were not located at the Company X headquarters were scheduled for phone interviews and those who were based at the company headquarters were scheduled for face-to-face interviews.

*Data Collection*

At the time of each scheduled interview, participants were reminded of the voluntary and confidential nature of the study and were asked to sign the consent form or give verbal consent. The researcher explained to the interviewee that, in her role as interviewer she was not functioning in her known company role of a Human Resources Assistant. Interviewees were also told that, should the interviewer hear of any information about physical harm being done to or by the

interviewee, she would be required to break confidentiality. This preamble allowed the interviewee the opportunity to determine what information they wanted to share.

Once consent was given, participants were asked a series of open-ended interview questions about the rapid growth at Company X and what, if any, experiences and observations they had throughout the changes (See Appendix C for the Interview Protocol). Participants were also asked a series of demographic questions (See Table 1 for a summary of the participant demographic data). The interviews were scheduled for 30 minutes and the researcher acted as time keeper. If the participant had not completed the interview at the 30 minute mark, the researcher reminded the participants of the time and gave them the option to continue speaking if they had additional time or schedule another time slot for finishing the session.

During the collection of demographic data, the researcher coded the participants as "upper," "middle" or "lower" to refer to the hierarchical level of the participant's role in Company X. "Upper" was applied to those roles at the highest level working internally within the organization (i.e. the CEO and his direct reports). "Middle" was applied to those who were hierarchically lower than the executives at the company but who were in manager or director positions with direct reports. Lastly, "lower" was applied to those who had no direct reports and who only reported upwardly to a manager or director level employee. The researcher assigned these categories to the participants rather than asking for their assessment so as to avoid different categorization rules.

Table 1
*Summary of Participant Demographic Information*

| Demographic Category | Demographic Groups | Number of Participants |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 12 |
| | Female | 9 |
| Hierarchical Level | Top | 2 |
| | Middle | 5 |
| | Bottom | 14 |
| Tenure with Company X | Less than 1 year | 7 |
| | 1 year | 3 |
| | 2-3 years | 5 |
| | 4-5 years | 2 |
| | 6+ years | 4 |
| Location | Colorado | 14 |
| | Massachusetts | 1 |
| | Vancouver, BC | 1 |
| | Other | 5 |

The researcher took notes both during and immediately after each interview. These notes contained personal thoughts and reactions to the responses provided. This allowed for the researcher to locate any patterns in her own responses which may have been helpful data, as well as helped mitigate the potentially conflicting feelings she may have experienced between her role as a researcher and as an employee of the same company.

*Data Analysis*

*Content Analysis*

This study, in the form of an auto-ethnography, required the researcher to keep detailed written notes of all interview data. Once all the interviews were conducted the researcher transcribed the interview notes. During this stage of the process, the researcher used descriptive coding (Richards and Morse, 2007) from the demographic data collected to separate the participants into groups to best be able to describe any patterns in the type of participants (e.g. location of most participants).

Themes were then sought out in the data using content analysis. The researcher coded the interviews by topics that were mentioned in the narratives. Any topics that appeared more than once across demographic groups or even across the entire sample group became themes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Once the researcher noted all the themes, she then assessed whether there were patterns in themes among the various demographic groups (e.g. themes amongst "Middles").

Once they were extracted, the most frequently reported themes were presented to the CEO. At his request the researcher presented a PowerPoint presentation with the themes in bullet pointed fashion (See Appendix D for the Themes presentation slides). Once approved by the CEO, the presentation was also sent via company email to the entire executive team at Company X and via personal email to all participants. Along with the presentation the researcher sent instructions to contact her with any questions or concerns. Only themes were

presented to the CEO, executive team and participants: no individual data or identifying information was included and none of the individuals who received the themes presentation reached out to the researcher for any clarification.

*Check of Reliability*

As the researcher had a dual role and was also an employee of the company, the themes extracted from the data had the potential to be biased. To reduce bias during the data collection and content analysis phases, the researcher took personal notes to manage her own reactions during the interviews and themes were only considered if they were heard more than once from the participants. In order to further rule out researcher bias in the data analysis phase, a check of reliability was conducted. The researcher enlisted two additional raters. These raters were similar to the researcher in gender and understanding of organizational psychology having been in the same graduate program as the researcher. However, the two raters were unfamiliar with the participants and Company X and would therefore serve to be more neutral in their analysis of the data.

The researcher asked each rater to go through all the transcripts from all the interviews and highlight all statements supporting Hypotheses 1-3. Each rater was also asked to assign several scores for each participant. For Hypothesis 4 readers were asked to assign each participant four scores, one each for how much autonomy, competency and relatedness were reflected in the transcript as well as how much stress each participant indicated (See Appendix E for rater

instructions). The researcher then followed the same procedure herself and the results were compared.

For each hypothesis the researcher looked to see whether each rater found supporting statements and took note of how many were found.

*Correlations*

For Hypothesis 4 the researcher computed Pearson correlations for each rater on the following sets of relationships: stress and autonomy; stress and competency; stress and relatedness. These correlations were run in Microsoft Excel. The results from each correlation were also checked for significance using the standard Table of Critical Values for Pearson's *r*.

CHAPTER III

Results

*Tops' Reactions to Changes at Company X*

Overall, two Tops participated in the study. In regards to Hypothesis 1-a, "Tops within the organization will express enthusiasm and optimism about the growth and changes at Company X," all three raters found supporting statements within the data. (See Table 2 for results relating to the first set of hypotheses.) One Top said, "The executives are the best suited now to this change than they have been before because the CEO has invested a lot into the team. We're good support and ears for each other." Another Top said, "We're ready for this phase because we're a high performing team with a diversity of styles and perspectives and we're all accepting of each other's styles."

However, two of the three raters also found statements that seemed to refute Hypothesis 1-a. For example, one Top participant stated, "The consistency in hiring has been crummy. I see it mostly in the leadership positions we've filled. It is a waste of people and money." Another Top participant stated, "As the organization gets bigger it gets slower, sense of time expectations versus reality get separated as you grow. It is hard to retain the value set." These statements do not support Hypothesis 1-a. In sum, all three raters found statements that supported Hypothesis 1-a, but two of the three raters found more refuting statements than supporting ones.

For Hypothesis 1-b, "Tops will express some form of anxiety about being able to manage all of their responsibilities," all three raters found supporting

statements within the data. One Top said, "I feel stressed because I am out of touch with individuals yet there is still pressure on me and on them to keep producing." While another Top said, "We're using velocity as an excuse for poor and inconsistent communication and this is a result of the growth because in the past it was different." None of the three raters found any statements that seemed to refute Hypothesis 1-b.

For Hypothesis 1-c, "Tops will express some frustration towards Middles and Bottoms who, from their perspective, may not be living up to their respective responsibilities," all three raters found at least one supporting statement within the interviews. Two of the raters could find only one supporting statement, and the third rater found only two supporting statements. However, no refuting statements were found. The one supporting statement came as a response to the question concerning what is least pleasurable about the role: one Top responded, "The politics of being a growing company. The consistency in hiring has been crummy. I see it mostly in the leadership positions we've filled. It is a waste of people and money."

For Hypothesis 1-d, "The source of greatest stress for the tops will be how to hold everything together," all three raters found several supporting statements within the data, and none of the raters found any statements that seemed to refute Hypothesis 1-d. One Top said, "It feels like I cannot do a good job at everything anymore." Another Top said, "An unspoken consequence of constant rapid growth is that people can live without answers for some time but not forever. I am seeing that some people are starting to want answers."

Table 2

*Number of Supporting and Refuting Statements for Hypotheses 1 Referencing Tops*

|  | Rater I | | Rater II | | Rater III | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Support | Refute | Support | Refute | Support | Refute |
| H1-a<br><br>Enthusiasm and optimism about change | 5 | 13 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| H1-b<br><br>Anxiety about managing responsibilities | 9 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| H1-c<br><br>Frustration towards Middles and Bottoms | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| H1-d<br><br>Greatest stress is keeCompany Xeverything together | 7 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 |

*Bottoms' Reactions to Changes at Company X*

Overall, fourteen Bottoms participated in the study. In regards to

Hypothesis 2-a, "Bottoms at Company X will express feelings of stress and

pressure to increase the amount of time they put into their work and how much

they can produce in their roles," all three raters found supporting statements

within the data. (See Table 3 for results relating to the second set of hypotheses).

In response to the question about what was least pleasurable about the role, one Bottom said, "Pressure. The role is still all over the place and undefined. There is a lot of uncertainty and not knowing what to do in all situations." Another Bottom, in reference to what aspect of their role was most challenging said, "Keeping up with the workload."

Two of the three raters also found several refuting statements within the data. One Bottom said, "It hasn't been overwhelming for me at all." Another Bottom stated, "I like the growth, I don't get nervous about this." These statements do not support Hypothesis 2-a. However, all three raters found more supporting statements than refuting ones.

For Hypothesis 2-b, "Some bottoms will band together and camaraderie will arise from the idea that everyone is feeling tense and overworked," all three raters found supporting statements within the data. One Bottom said, "It's positive. People are helping each other to get things done. We all realize the pressure." However, all three raters found more statements that seemed to refute Hypothesis 2-b than supporting ones, suggesting that Hypothesis 2-b is not supported by this data. One Bottom said, "The office is full of strangers. I don't recognize a lot of people or know what they do." Another Bottom said, "At the beginning people took the time to get to know me and introduce me to others so I could feel somewhat welcomed. Now the new people are unknown maybe for too long." These statements, although from the same data set, do not support Hypothesis 2-b.

For Hypothesis 2-c, "The greatest source of stress for Bottoms will be the pressure to get everything done with fewer resources and less time," all three raters found supporting statements within the data.  Two of the three raters found no refuting statements while the third rater found only one. In response to the question about challenges associated with growth at Company X, one Bottom said, "Non-stop change that is happening so quickly that it is hard to get standards and procedures in place. We need to get things done so maybe they just aren't done right." Another Bottom said, "Everybody is inundated. There are bandwidth issues for everyone. I am fried."

For Hypothesis 2-d, "The greatest opportunity will be the ability to prove to other levels that they can manage everything successfully," all three raters found supporting statements within the data. One Bottom said, "I especially want to be as competent as possible in all aspects of my role." Another Bottom said, "It hasn't been overwhelming for me at all." No statements that seemed to refute Hypothesis 2-d were found in the data.

Table 3

*Number of Supporting and Refuting Statements for Hypothesis 2 Referencing Bottoms*

| | Rater I | | Rater II | | Rater III | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Support | Refute | Support | Refute | Support | Refute |
| H2-a<br><br>Stress and pressure in role | 17 | 5 | 8 | 0 | 10 | 6 |
| H2-b<br><br>Bottoms will band together | 6 | 17 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 9 |
| H2-c<br><br>Pressure to get things done with fewer resources | 7 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| H2-d<br><br>Greatest opportunity is proving ability to manage change | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 |

*Middles' Reactions to Changes at Company X*

Overall, five Middles participated in the study. In regards to

Hypothesis 3-a, "Middles within Company X will feel a lot of pressure from

trying to meet the demands of the Tops and the Bottoms while also managing

their own increased workload," all three raters found supporting statements within

the data. (See Table 4 for results relating to the third set of hypotheses). One Middle participant stated, "The rate of growth, finding the right people. It is hard to do a job under so much pressure and also carry a quota and show results." Another Middle stated, "I feel pulled in many ways." Only one of the three raters found refuting statements within the data, but the number of refuting statements was fewer than supporting statements from that rater.

For Hypothesis 3-b, "Middles will have insight into the stresses of the Tops and the stresses of the Bottoms, but will not have as much clarity about their own stress," there was little support. Two of the three raters found only one supporting statement each. Also, the statements identified as supporting the hypothesis did not seem to support it very strongly or clearly. For instance, one of the statements identified as a supporting statement by a rater was, "I see and hear people venting about things but I also see people turning to others for help." Another supposedly supporting statement was, "This is normal but some people can't tolerate it." Thus, there seemed to be little support for Hypothesis 3-b.

For Hypothesis 3-c, "To alleviate the stress of their middle-ness, some Middles will align themselves upwardly with the Tops while others will align themselves more with the Bottoms," all three raters found supporting statements within the data. One upwardly aligned Middle stated, "Here the CEO has grown over the years to be a great leader and he has learned how to let go. His focus on people is clear and apparent." A downwardly aligned Middle stated, "The managers and executives dislike the complexity." None of the three raters found refuting statements in the data suggesting support for Hypothesis 3-c.

For Hypothesis 3-d, "The greatest source of stress for Middles is managing the disparate needs of the Tops and Bottoms," all three raters found one supporting statement within the data, "The pressure is to hire but also to hire the best people so I feel pulled in many ways." Although no refuting statements were found, there were no other supporting statements found in the data to suggest very strong support.

For Hypothesis 3-e, "The greatest opportunity for Middles is to move out of the middle position upon proving how well they can manage it," all three raters found supporting statements within the data. One Middle participant stated, "I feel positive about the growth and my role is becoming more significant. I feel included." Another Middle participant stated, "There is a growing responsibility to put the right people in charge." One of the three raters found only one supporting statement while two of the three raters found more supporting statements. No statements that seemed to refute Hypothesis 3-e were found by any of the three raters.

Table 4

*Number of Supporting and Refuting Statements for Hypothesis 3 Referencing*
*Middles*

|  | Rater I | | Rater II | | Rater III | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Support | Refute | Support | Refute | Support | Refute |
| H3-a<br><br>Increased pressure to meet workload | 7 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| H3-b<br><br>Insight into stress of others but not own | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 0 |
| H3-c<br><br>Middles will align with Tops or Bottoms | 8 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 12 | 0 |
| H3-d<br><br>Greatest stress is managing Tops and Bottoms needs | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| H3-e<br><br>Greatest opportunity is moving out of middle position | 1 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 7 | 0 |

*Self-determination Theory and Company X*

In response to Hypothesis 4 "the participants who express that the work environment at Company X fosters autonomy, relatedness and competence will express lower levels of stress about the changes" correlations between each variable and stress revealed differing results. However, only one of the nine correlations computed for the three raters reached statistical significance.

In looking at the correlation between autonomy and stress for all twenty-one participants for each of the three raters, there was a consistent negative correlation suggesting that as autonomy increased stress would decrease. However, autonomy showed the weakest correlation to stress levels among the three variables of autonomy, competence and relatedness, and none of the correlations were statistically significant. See Table 5 for correlations between stress and autonomy, competence and relatedness for all participants.

Table 5
*Correlations between the Three Self-determination Variables and Stress*

|  | Rater I | Rater II | Rater III |
|---|---|---|---|
| Autonomy | -0.06 | -0.26 | -0.21 |
| Competence | -0.40 | -0.35 | - 0.26 |
| Relatedness | -0.60** | -0.31 | -0.27 |

n = 21

** = Correlation is significant at the .05 level

There was also a negative relationship between competence and stress across all three raters suggesting that as competence increased for all participants stress decreased. The correlation coefficients suggest that competence, as compared to autonomy, is a bit more strongly negatively correlated with lower stress. However, these correlations also did not reach statistical significance.

In looking at the correlations between relatedness and stress there was another negative correlation consistent across all three raters. These findings were somewhat stronger for relatedness. For two of the three raters, relatedness had the strongest negative correlation with stress among the three variables; and for one of the raters the correlation was statistically significant.

If the variables are broken down and correlated with stress for each of the hierarchical levels, there is more variation in how autonomy, competence and relatedness correlate to stress. When looking at the Bottoms, autonomy had the weakest negative correlation with stress according to two of the three raters. For the third rater, autonomy had a positive correlation with stress. A positive correlation suggests that, as autonomy increases in the role of Bottom, stress also increases. However, this correlation was not statistically significant, and only one other correlation – a negative correlation between competence and stress for one of the raters – was. See Table 6 for correlations between stress and autonomy, competency and relatedness for Bottoms.

Table 6

*Correlations between Self-determination Variables and Stress among Bottoms*

|  | Rater I | Rater II | Rater III |
|---|---|---|---|
| Autonomy | -0.04 | 0.29 | -0.03 |
| Competence | -0.18 | -0.8** | -0.08 |
| Relatedness | -0.50 | -0.11 | -0.27 |

n = 14

** = Correlation is significant at the .05 level

When looking at the Middles, two of the three raters found the strongest relationship was a negative correlation between stress and competence suggesting that as competency in the role increased, stress for Middles decreased. One rater found that relatedness offered the strongest negative correlation with stress for Middle participants, but the correlation between stress and competence was also strong. See Table 7 for correlations between stress and autonomy, competency and relatedness for Middles.

Table 7

*Correlations between Self-determination Variables and Stress among Middles*

|  | Rater I | Rater II | Rater III |
|---|---|---|---|
| Autonomy | -0.32 | -0.95** | -0.17 |
| Competence | -0.68 | -1 | -0.56 |
| Relatedness | -0.81 | -0.33 | -0.41 |

n = 5

** = Correlation is significant at .05 level

Because only two Tops participated in the study, no correlations were computed for Tops.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

*Review of Results*

*Tops at Company X and Hypothesis 1*

Hypothesis 1-a states that Tops within an organization will be the most enthusiastic about company growth and change because they have the most resources at their disposal; they also have more insight into where the growth and change will potentially lead. However, Hypothesis 1-b states that Tops will also express anxiety around being able to manage all of their responsibilities as they shift during growth. According to Hypothesis 1-c, Tops may also feel some frustration towards Middles and Bottoms within the organization for not living up to their respective responsibilities. Lastly, according to Hypothesis 1-d, Tops will cite as their greatest source of stress keeping everything within the organization together during times of change and growth.

Some of the data provided by the two participating Tops fall in line with Hypothesis 1 and with Oshry's theory, but within the same data set there is information that seems to refute the theory. More specifically, support for Hypothesis 1-a was weak while the data seemed to support Hypothesis 1-b, 1-c and 1-d.

There is little support for Hypothesis 1-a because the most responses from Tops came around two topics: anxiety and stress revolving around managing all their responsibilities, and keeping everything at the company together. This

suggests that while there is some enthusiasm about the growth, overall there are more mixed emotions which include stress and anxiety.

Potentially these Tops do have less stress and anxiety than they would have if they were not in the Top position, but based upon the data that were collected, both Tops do have a great amount of anxiety and stress still.

One of the reasons that Tops might not be so positive about the changes at Company X, as stated by one of the Tops in an interview, could be attributed to the idea that comes from William Bridges (1991): in order for people to move through a change successfully, the very first step is to acknowledge that there is an ending to the way things were before, to identify who is losing what and to openly discuss and mourn this ending. In this way people have to face that in fact things are going to change, and this helps people begin the mental transition that accompanies any concrete changes.

I did not have exposure to any meetings and discussions that occurred among the Tops prior to and during the change, so I cannot speak to the amount of discussion that occurred in that group about the changes. However I can say that no company-wide meetings took place. A meeting such as this would have allowed Tops to work with the employees to deal with the ending and beginnings that arise out of change. According to Bridges, "Managers are sometimes loathe to talk openly, even arguing that it will 'stir up trouble' to acknowledge people's feelings. What such an argument misses is that it is not talking about a loss but, rather, pretending that it doesn't exist that stirs up trouble." For the two Tops, topics such as hiring and retaining the original value set were still not being

addressed, and it was having an impact on their ability to view the overall growth and change as positive.

*Bottoms at Company X and Hypothesis 2*

Oshry's theory suggests that, overall, Bottoms will be the least enthusiastic about company growth and change because they have the least resources at their disposal. Additionally Bottoms will also have less insight into where the growth and change will potentially lead. According to Hypothesis 2-a, Bottoms will feel increased stress and pressure to be productive during times of growth and change. According to Hypothesis 2-b, the Bottoms will find connection with others at their same hierarchical level based on the shared experience of stress and pressure. According to Hypothesis 2-c, Bottoms will indicate that the greatest source of stress for them during the growth is the increased workload expectation with fewer resources available to them. Lastly, Hypothesis 2-d states that Bottoms will find some opportunity within the time of change and growth to prove that they can manage it all.

As with Hypothesis 1, some of the data provided by the participating Bottoms fall in line with Hypothesis 2 and with Oshry's theory, but some data seem to refute the theory. There was mixed support for Hypothesis 2-a, with multiple supporting and multiple refuting statements found within the data. There was some support for Hypothesis 2-b, but there were more refuting statements than supporting ones. Hypothesis 2-c and 2-d were generally supported by the data.

With regards to Hypothesis 2-a, many of the Bottoms mentioned that they did not feel increased pressure, and they were fairly unaware of additional workload. The reasons for this could be many, but potentially these Bottoms may have been working in a department with a Middle manager who was managing the pressure for them. Another potential reason could be that many Bottoms were also relatively new to the company at the time of the study and so had little past history of work expectations to compare to the current state of affairs.

Hypothesis 2-b suggests that in times of great pressure and stress, Bottoms will band together and find a source of power within their own hierarchical group. However, the Bottoms did not express a high sense of camaraderie with other Bottoms suggesting that, at the time of this study, the Bottoms who participated in the study were not feeling very much pressure and felt no need to find strength in their own group. Based on the research that Oshry did on power and hierarchy, this is a surprising result. Again, one reason that Bottoms may not have banded together could be that the pressure they felt was not strong enough to push them in that direction; also, they may have still felt somewhat supported by their managers and the company.

However, based on my personal experience at the company I speculate that there may have been cultural reasons for this deviation from the theory. Company X has several traditions internally that involve going out with coworkers to relieve stress in more social situations. These outings are generally attended mostly by Bottoms and paid for by the company. One speculation as to why Bottoms did not feel a need to band together is that they felt no adversarial

relationship to the Tops who were arranging these events. This would be an area for further study as these events occurred in all office locations, but those employees in more remote locations did not have the opportunity to participate and their results could show something different.

The greatest support for Hypothesis 2 came in regards to Hypothesis 2-c: most Bottoms indicated that they did feel fewer resources were available. As the company grows there are naturally less resources available. Most of the comments around resources referenced a shortage of time either in the form of one's personal time to accomplish tasks or the time of others who might be able to help out.

In regards to Hypothesis 2-d, several Bottoms did mention that they felt some opportunity to prove their ability to manage the changes. However there were very few supporting statements found suggesting that while this may have been a topic that some Bottoms focused on in their day-to-day lives at work, it was not very important for them. This finding further suggests that Bottoms, while feeling some pressure, were for the most part pretty stable during the time of growth and change. Again one speculation for this could be some Middles were holding the stress for the Bottoms and keeping them somewhat sheltered from the pressures that were coming from the Tops and the changes.

*Middles at Company X and Hypothesis 3*

Oshry's theory and Hypothesis 3 posit that, overall, the Middle group will be the most torn between positive and negative reactions to company growth and change and will have stress from many directions based on the needs of those

around them. Hypothesis 3-a states that Middles will express increased pressure and stress to meet the demands of increased workload. Hypothesis 3-b states that, because of their middle position, the Middles will have insight into the stresses of the Tops and Bottoms but won't necessarily be able to see their own. Hypothesis 3-c states that Middles will align themselves upwardly with the Tops or downwardly with the Bottoms rather than functioning in a unique middle position. According to Hypothesis 3-d, Middles will find their greatest source of stress to be managing the disparate and possibly conflicting needs of the Tops and Bottoms. Lastly, Hypothesis 3-e states that Middles will see their greatest opportunity available to them throughout the change to be moving out of the middle position.

The trend of less than uniformly strong support that occurred with the last two hypotheses holds somewhat true for Hypothesis 3 as well, although none of the five parts of Hypothesis 3 were strongly refuted by the data. Hypothesis 3-a, which states that Middles will feel increased pressure to meet an increased workload, was somewhat supported by the data with only a few refuting statements found. This is to be expected as with a growing company there is increased work, but some individuals may handle it better than others.

With regards to Hypothesis 3-b, that Middles will have insight into other hierarchical levels, there was weak support suggesting that the Middles, while they may align with Tops or Bottoms, are not engaged and included as full members of those groups, thus keeping them somewhat isolated still. Hypothesis 3-c, which states that Middles will align upwardly with Tops or downwardly with

Bottoms, received the strongest support from the data. In the transcripts from each Middle participant it is apparent that they each hold themselves responsible for their own work. Some may find some support from Tops, if they are upwardly aligned; and some feel that their primary role is to support their direct reports, if they are downwardly aligned, but there is no mention of connection, support or interaction with other Middles. It appears that each Middle participant is like an island unto him or herself: they each mention change felt as a result of growth as a personal change, and they are not able to comment on observations they have or changes they have witnessed amongst their group or any other hierarchical level, thus suggesting again that they exist in a very isolated space.

According to Oshry, "systematic dis-integration" occurs when members of a group neither share a common mission nor support each other in pursuit of this mission (1999). The Middles at Company X seem to display this dis-integration: and one possible reason may be that, much like with the Tops, there was no company-wide meeting which would have set forth the mission towards which the Middles, and those to whom they report and supervise, should be working. As a result, each Middle participant continues to work towards whatever mission seems the most pertinent to them as an individual: and thus they cannot be supported by anyone else. Again this furthers the Middles' isolation from others especially those at their own hierarchical level.

With regards to Hypothesis 3-d, that Middles will find the greatest source of stress to be managing the needs of Tops and Bottoms, there was support from the data however there were very few statements made about this particular topic

suggesting again that this is not a large focus for the Middles. Perhaps this is because the Middles felt sufficiently able to manage the needs of the Tops and Bottoms and the growth did not decrease their ability to do so.

Lastly with regards to Hypothesis 3-e, that Middles will see movement out of the middle position as a great opportunity during the growth, there was support found within the data. It seems that Middles, however they were individually coping with the growth and change, were still looking to improve their own personal situations and movement away from being in the middle seemed to be a possibility that came about during the growth.

*Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness at Company X:  Hypothesis 4*

The research on autonomy, competence and relatedness together come from Self Determination Theory (SDT), part of which states that in order for people to function and grow optimally, and to further intrinsic motivation, which is helpful in times of change and growth, they require high levels of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Hypothesis 4 posits that participants who express that the work environment at Company X fosters autonomy, relatedness and competence will express lower levels of stress about the changes. The data in this study did not overwhelmingly support Hypothesis 4 although with a low N it is hard to draw decisive conclusions. The data did show a trend of support for the hypothesis despite the lack of statistical significance. It is important to examine the correlations in search of small significances and trends as well as to note interesting relationships worthy of further study.

In looking at the correlations between stress and the variables of autonomy, competence and relatedness for all participants, the only statistically significant relationship found was the negative correlation between stress and relatedness for one of the three raters. This suggests that high levels of reported relatedness are connected (more so than autonomy and competence) to maintaining peoples' stress at lower levels. There are many possible reasons that relatedness and stress might be negatively correlated and the implications for that in the workplace is an interesting area for further study. I discuss this below.

In looking at the correlations between the SDT variables and stress within hierarchical levels, the only statistically significant correlation found among Middles was a negative correlation between stress and autonomy for one of the raters, suggesting that as autonomy increases for Middles, their stress levels decrease. Given Oshry's theory about Middles functioning independently as individuals rather than a unified group, this finding makes sense. With higher autonomy Middles would best be left alone for the most part to be able to function as islands unto themselves. With less autonomy there would be more oversight into their work, which might particularly stressful for those who exist within the world of a Middle.

In looking at the correlations for the Bottoms, the only statistically significant one was a negative correlation between stress and competence for one rater. Given Oshry's theory and the hypotheses in this study about Bottoms being concerned with managing increased workload and feeling stress and pressure to do so, it is not surprising that the difference in perceived competence seemed to

be more strongly associated with stress than were perceived autonomy or relatedness.

Although it was not the focus of this study in particular, it would be interesting to further investigate the importance of relatedness for people at work. Concern about human relationships was a strong theme in the interviews in this study. Knowledge of other employees and references to a familial culture seemed to be present in many of the transcripts. Some participants mentioned that they felt a strong connection with others at Company X because they were going through the growth together. Still other participants mentioned that they felt the familial culture was changing and there no longer was such a sense of connection with other employees since there was so much more work and so many more people.

The emphasis that the Company X employees place on relatedness is not without merit. There are many studies that have shown that social support, which can be defined as information that leads someone to believe they are cared for, loved, esteemed, valued and belonging to a network of communication and mutual obligation (Cobb, 1976), has been shown to have an impact on well being and may also be connected with reducing stress. As mentioned earlier, stress can arise when a person experiences one or even a collection of circumstances, e.g. change at work, as threatening and also does not have an adequate coping mechanism for the situation (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman 1984). This stress and inability to cope may even lead to feelings of helplessness and, in the case of work, poor performance. Relatedness or social support can intervene in

this process by allowing a stressed individual or group feel that there are more support resources to manage the stressful event(s). This could then lead to a reduced stress response by increasing self-esteem or increasing positive affect or even creating distractions and serving as a "buffer" (Cohen and Wills, 1985). Perhaps the participants from Company X who mentioned the loss of connections were those who found social support most valuable for coping with daily stress and during the change, with all the potential for increased stress,  relationships with others and the benefits they derived from them became much more salient.

With all the new people and increased potential for interaction, one could presume that relatedness would increase as new human connections become more frequent. However, according to Baumeister and Leary (1995), in order for relatedness to occur effectively there must be "frequent affectively pleasant interactions" and these interactions must occur in a "temporally stable and enduring framework of concern for each other's welfare." Perhaps participants who mentioned a loss of connection or relatedness with others are not experiencing both of these conditions and this could have led them to feel that, although there were new people to meet, the quality of the relationships was low.

*The Role of Culture*

One of the informal tasks associated with this study, as set forth by the CEO of Company X, was for me to assess culture. According to Edgar Schein, culture of a group is, "A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new

members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems." Additionally Schein states that culture is powerful in an organization because it "operates outside of our awareness" (Schein, 2010) The shared norms and beliefs guide the behavior of people within the culture and set expectations for how people entering the culture should learn and behave as well as how information is passed along to them. Culture provides stability to a group as well as ensuring that the organization can survive in the marketplace.

Cultures can spring up from three sources, "1) the beliefs, values, and assumptions of founders of organizations; 2) the learning experiences of group members as their organization evolves; and 3) new beliefs, values, and assumptions brought in by new members and new leaders" (Schein, 2010). The most influential of the three of these sources is the founder. The founder(s) of an organization lay the groundwork by choosing the environment in which the culture exists and operates but also the values and mission by which it will function. The founder guides the initial learning and adaptation as well because he or she chooses the initial group members and his or her beliefs and personal background have an impact on how those members behave.

As the organization grows and new members are brought in, leaders and founders will need to embed the culture so that the organization continues to function as the leadership desires. They may use a variety of methods, but typically things such as what leaders pay attention to, where they allocate resources and how people are recruited will embed the culture into the members. Also how the organization is designed, the "rituals" of the organization, stories

that are shared as well as statements about the organization will embed the culture (Schein, 2010).

As the organization grows, culture will also differentiate based on a variety of factors such as geography, hierarchy or department/role. This is a natural progression of the organization since it does need to be able to change to survive the changes in the surrounding environment. New members will be taught the ways of the culture but they will also add their own flavor to the environment and so over time, through the changes in the market, the growth and maturation of the organization, changing makeup of the employee base or even discovery of inefficiencies, the culture will inevitably need to change. This change may be incremental or it may be quick, but it is a natural and healthy part of organizational life.

While I was not able to perform a full cultural analysis, I did ask participants what role they thought culture played in the changes as well as what, if anything, about the culture itself had changed. For the purposes of this study, my definition of culture was as follows: an organization's widely shared values, symbols, behaviors and assumptions. Every participant in the study told me that Company X culture is either very important to them or it is the most important aspect of the company. However, nobody could really define the culture specifically other than in very simplistic terms, for example, "Here we work hard and we play even harder." According to Goffee and Jones (1998) the inability to define a company's culture is a very common phenomenon for business professionals. "Most working people, senior executives and entry-level employees

alike, however, never encounter these academic definitions of culture. Instead their definitions of culture are experience based." I found this experience based style of definition to be true in Company X as well.

When I thought about my own experience and history at Company X, I was not able to define what I felt about the culture until it seemed to have changed and I was looking back at what was different. When I started at the company there were approximately sixty people in total, and what stood out the most to me was that, although everyone was busy working hard on their own tasks there was a sense that everyone was united working together towards a greater goal in which everyone could celebrate. There were rituals defined that were physical manifestations of these celebrations, however there was also a general familial feeling. As the company grew and more people were around that I didn't know, it became important for me personally to be involved with all the new hires in some way.  In that way I was able to keep an understanding of who the new people were and I was also able to get to know them so that they felt somewhat familiar keeping the familial feeling intact for me. My role in Human Resources afforded me this opportunity to stay involved with new hires through developing and facilitating all new hire orientations. Other employees in other departments did not have this same luxury and so new people would start and other employees at the company would not necessarily know who they were. In my own small way I tried to help everyone get to know each other by scheduling a social hour after every orientation where all employees were invited to mingle with the new hires. Some people took advantage of this while others were too busy. As the growth

continued I realized that the feeling at the company was different. I didn't feel like everyone was united and, in fact, I felt people were becoming more disconnected from each other because the speed and changes due to growth were so many and so quick that people didn't have time to do anything but stay afloat. The familial culture, despite the efforts I felt I had made to keep it going, had changed.

In my interviews almost every single participant had something to say about culture, with the exception of the newest hires and folks who had been with the company only a few months, who felt unable to really shed any light on the topic.

The same feeling about culture and its change that I personally experienced was echoed in many of my interviews as well. Some participants expressed that the greatest loss in culture was a loss in connection and relatedness to others as a result of the growth and changes. One participant said, "The culture has changed, yes. There used to be more intimacy in the past and that was the focus. Now it is different." Another participant said, "At the beginning people took the time to get to know me and introduce me to others so I could feel somewhat welcomed. Now the new people are unknown maybe for too long. Also supervisors, from my perspective, don't take the time needed to introduce people around." In looking at the results that came out of my correlations, stress as was significantly negatively correlated with relatedness suggesting that feelings of disconnection could have a negative impact on the employees manifesting in the form of increased stress.

One participant made the comment, "The culture is spooky meaning in the past it was real because the CEO would lead by example. But now it is a myth." This comment suggests that, for some, the CEO played a large part in how the culture manifested and, as the CEO focuses other needs of the company, the culture doesn't show itself in the same way. This, according to Schein, is also normal, but it could be that for some people at this company, the culture as they know it depends upon the leadership moving it forward.

Another perspective on culture that came out of the interviews was that the changes in culture were deep rooted and also expressed a sense of what might be lacking in the culture as the company grows. One participant said, "We're using velocity as an excuse for poor and inconsistent communication and this is a result of the growth because in the past it was different. If people don't understand the origin of a decision then they cannot extend it." This quote suggests that the culture around company wide communication was important but it had changed in a negative way as a result of growth and could therefore have a negative impact on the company going forward.

Another participant said, "As the organization gets bigger it gets slower, sense of time expectations versus reality get separated as you grow. It is hard to retain the value set." This quote suggests that the culture and its relationship to the initial values of the company were becoming more separated.

One more positive perspective offered by participants was that the culture of the company is still strong amidst the growth and the culture is what keeps people in place. One participant said, "Culture can keep people in place if it is

supportive. This company created a culture of inclusion and retention. I enjoy working here because of the culture." Another participant said, "The culture here is performance oriented. We're an irreverent partying company… but culture is truly an important factor, maybe the single most important factor. Mentoring and smarts are valued and technical leadership as well."

Overall, it seems that through all the interviews with all the participants, there was a sense that the culture of Company X was part of what made it successful in attracting the best people in the past or to keep it growing and that there is a need to keep that culture, whatever it might be, strong and in place. There was not as much discussion in my interviews about culture change as a natural part of company growth and that it is ever evolving. This could be, in part, because the changes at Company X are so many and so quick that people feel culture isn't holding anything steady. It could also be in part because there were no company wide discussions about culture, the pros and cons of culture change or even a plan for solving the problems that do naturally come along with growth and cultural change. This type of open forum would have allowed everyone to voice their concerns, share their feelings and thoughts, and go through the process of mourning the old culture while celebrating the new culture together. As Bridges (1991) mentions when he discusses the lifecycles of companies, it is important to acknowledge the ending of the way things were if you are going to welcome in the way things are.

As culture was not a major focus of this study, I did not delve into it on any more than a superficial level for the purposes of the CEO. However, based

upon the fact that all participants had something to say about the culture being critical in the change, this would be a topic for further research and study.

*Use of Self*

*Insider Status*

"All individuals have vested interests in their own organizations. Even if individuals did not press their own interests, other members of the system would be unable to accept a consultant relationship from a peer, and the complete insider would be rendered ineffective as a result. Being at least partial outsiders, therefore, is part of the equipment of the organizational consultants" (Alderfer, 1980). One of the elements of this study was the fact that the researcher was already an employee of Company X and had been for several years at the time the data collection began. This facet of the study offered some benefits and also some challenges.

Alderfer states, "Entry begins with the first encounter between client and consultant …Entry is also a time for data collection, as the consultant begins to learn about the client system…" (1980). In my case, entry into Company X occurred in April of 2010, two years prior to the onset of data collection. In those two years I worked and operated within the company culture as a full time intern for one year and a full time employee for one year. A downside to this is that by the time data collection began, I had long lost my initial thoughts and observations about the system and had formulated a set of expectations and perspectives based on my own experiences within the company. My role as employee can be seen as a source of bias within the study and therefore something

to be moderated. However, a benefit to my tenure was that, by the time data collection began, employees of the company were well aware of my personality and my vested interest in the company.

As an insider, I was aware of the anxiety that could be generated from the study, but less so aware of the anxiety that may have been generated by my presence as both an employee and a researcher at the same time. As an outsider I might have been forced to be more aware of myself and my effect because I would have had to establish relationships based upon my consultant status. In a way, some employees may have felt that my sudden status as researcher could have been a betrayal or a separation of myself from them for the purposes of a study. This may have felt demeaning to them and while in no way was this intentional on my part it has to be considered as a possible source of bias within the study.

*Group Memberships*

I wonder why there were not more tenured participants in the study as they have many more years of experience within the company from which to draw their perspectives on the growth and change as compared with someone who arrived at the company during the changes. I also wonder why more Middles and Tops did not offer their perspectives on the changes they were enacting from their leadership positions. I wonder too, if my group memberships as a young, white, female working in the stereotypical role of nurturer within Human Resources had any impact on who felt comfortable participating and what they wanted to share regardless of the efforts I made to separate myself from that position. I wonder

whether my position of graduate student and this study, which is the culminating piece of my doctoral degree, seemed in some way slighting or appealing to employees based on their own perspective and experience with higher education. I also have to examine how these group memberships may have had an effect on me as well.

As a woman in the working world, I personally feel that I am always dealing with struggles about how to be heard in an environment filled with men. The leadership of Company X is entirely male and significantly older than I.  I have to wonder if my own struggles with my ability to represent a strong and competent female had any impact on this study. In my interviews with male and female participants I made great efforts to keep notes of my own feelings as well as behaviors that the participants displayed that might contradict or confirm the words they were speaking. I did not find any differences in my own notes between male and female participants' transcripts, but I wonder if my gender had any impact on what people wanted to share with me.

The percentage of male participants was 57% (n = 12) and the percentage of female participants was 43% (n = 9) so there was a near equal split. Although more men did participate the difference seems less significant to me, but it would be interesting to know if there was some sort of effect of my gender on the participants. Did my being female encourage or discourage people from participating and if they did volunteer, did it affect what they shared with me. These are questions that would be interesting to research further; whether gender

of the researcher has an effect on whether people volunteer to participate in a study and also if it has an effect on what volunteers do share in interviews.

In addition to being female, I was also working within the Human Resources department at Company X at the time of this study. Part of what drew me to HR and to organizational psychology in general was a desire to help other people feel better at work where we spend a large portion of our lives. I think my desire to nurture, to understand and to help others fueled this study as I anticipated that there may be some challenges that people were having with all the growth and changes.

In my role in HR I was not in a high enough position to have access to the employee relations issues that were coming up during the time of growth and this study may have been my attempt to understand the employees and their concerns, if any. It ended up being a bit of a catch 22 for me because I had to then separate myself from my HR role in order to collect my data and had to make it clear to participants that any complaints or issues pertaining to their work would have to be brought to HR separately. The identity struggle I had to be at the same time in my nurturing HR role but also to separate myself and be a professional may have been felt by the employees. It may have prevented some people from sharing true insight for fear that it would violate the boundary I had set or that it would not be heard fairly because I was not acting in my HR role. This may also have encouraged others to share feeling safer than if I had not set the boundary that I was not in my HR role. This struggle to set up objectivity is another reason why it is challenging to study the organization in which one also works.

Another aspect of this study to consider which may have affected everything from the idea of the study to the design and interpretation of the results is that I was not only an employee of Company X but I was also a Bottom. As a Bottom, I felt that the changes and growth were having an impact on me and while I may have wanted to understand the direction and vision for the growth, I knew very little. This may have been frustrating for me to the point that in doing this study I was trying to elevate myself out of the Bottom role and gain knowledge and perspective on the growth that I wouldn't have had otherwise.

This Bottom status may also have prevented Tops or even Middles from being comfortable about participating because they wondered if any information they might provide me would affect my ability to perform as a Bottom. Perhaps other Bottoms were feeling a need to be involved somehow, to feel engaged in the changes they were feeling and this study offered them a chance to do so. Tops and Middles were more directly involved in enacting the changes and perhaps may have felt less inclined to be involved.

Additionally as a Bottom I may also have viewed the organizational change as more significant than it is in the larger business world. Companies grow and change all the time, but as a Bottom I was very much at the mercy of the changes and so they may have felt more significant to me and worthy of study. The results of the study reveal that my hypotheses were not fully supported and this could be because of the small number of participants but it could also be that my hypotheses were very much based on assumptions that I made from my

position as a Bottom (with some theoretical background) rather than more objective observations.

*Personal Concerns about Trust and Openness in Data Collection*

As an effort to create trust between myself and the potential participants, I did go to what I would call "great" efforts to ensure the company employees that my study would be entirely confidential, that data would be kept anonymous. Additionally, at the request of the CEO, I also included the fact that this was a personal study and was not intended to provide the Human Resources department (of which I was a part) with information. It did seem to me that there need not be such great concern on the part of the CEO about differentiating this study from the needs of the organization and I was initially a bit offended that he and I didn't have a more trusting relationship. However the state of the company at the time was changing rapidly and according to Alderfer, "soliciting any information beyond what is publicly available raises questions…" It is unknown to me whether the repeated assurances of confidentiality may have given people suspicions, but in the service of keeping people fully informed it was important to me that it be very clear to any interested participants that they would be fully able to be honest.

I found it interesting that multiple participants approached me at my work desk or the common kitchen area and spoke very publicly about participating. Initially I was a bit frustrated with the disregard people showed for my instructions and attempts to safeguard their identities. However, it also occurred to me that potentially these individuals wanted their identities known or were in

no way worried about participating. Perhaps the environment and the pressure I felt to be extremely careful were not true to the experience of those who approached me publicly.

*Use of Personal Notes*

In the interviews I kept records of my own experiences, thoughts and reactions to what each participant was saying in an attempt to make more transparent how my biases might influence my impressions from each interview. I noticed a few patterns in my own notes. First, I noticed that when participants expressed nothing but positive experiences and feelings my notes included hints of doubt and disbelief about the honesty of the participant. There could be many reasons for this; but ultimately, in my personal experience as an employee with the growth at Company X, the communication, planning and management of the growth was not entirely positive and so it was difficult for me to believe that anyone else could have a purely positive response. Having the personal notes turned out to be most helpful in this instance because it allowed me later to look back and see that the information actually provided by the participants may have been quite different. Looking physically at the discrepancy between my personal reactions and the actual data was a reminder for me to continually strive for objectivity in the researcher role.

Second, I noticed that the interviews with people in the Denver office, where I was based, contained more personal notes about speculations and reactions than interviews with participants with whom I had less daily interaction. I had been able to formulate opinions and even share experiences with some of

the Denver-based participants and so it was more challenging for me to remain

fully impartial in my thinking than it was when I was interviewing participants

with whom I was less familiar. In thinking about how the growth was occurring at

Company X, this lesson was an interesting one for me. As the CEO was based in

Denver, and all communications about change came from Denver and from the

CEO, it is hard for me to fully comprehend how people located in other offices

experienced any aspect of the company prior to or during the change. This is also

true for those managers or leaders who may have been attempting to help people

through the changes and who were located in different places than their

employees. This brings up the challenge of working within a global and dispersed

company and how to ensure that separate and unique cultures and experiences are

valued while also maintaining the feeling of being part of the same company.

I will never know if some people had suspicions about my motives,

aversions to some aspect of my self as the researcher or any other reaction that

held them back from participating, but based on the low number of interviews (N

= 21), the high level of interviews from those at the same hierarchical level as

myself (14 Bottoms compared to 5 Middles and only 2 Tops) and the tenure

demographic represented in the sample (48 percent of participants had tenure of

one year or less), I must wonder about how my own personal reactions and

others' reactions to me may have contributed to bias in this study.

*Limitations*

Although the results of this study are revealing and suggest areas for

further research, this study was not without limitations. These limitations can be

found both in the design and execution (please see "Use of Self" section for some of these limitations) as well as in the results and their ability to be generalized to situations outside of Company X. As with the results and findings of any study it is important to also note the study's limitations.

*Limitations to design and execution*

One limit in the design of this study was in the interviews themselves. I used a semi-structured interview and the CEO had asked that I schedule interviews for no longer than thirty minutes. However, in the course of conducting the interviews sometimes it took ten minutes just to get through the instructions and general questions from the participants. This left twenty minutes for the actual interviews and that was not enough time to cover the range of topics that I was asking about in the sessions. I did offer to people that we could end the interview at thirty minutes and schedule additional time if we didn't get through all the questions, but only one participant was okay with this suggestion and so I had to limit the amount of probing questions that I asked to follow up on issues and topics brought up in the sessions by the participants. If someone were looking to increase the richness of the data they were collecting, interviews with the range of topics and number of questions contained in my protocol should be no less than forty five minutes to allow time for instructions, questions from participants and probing questions from the interviewer.

Another limit to the design and execution of the study was the format and timing of the request for participation. At the time that I sent my request for volunteers there had recently been several emails to the company about other

initiatives across the company for which people could volunteer and participate should they so desire. My request may have been lost among those other emails and employees may have experienced some amount of fatigue in response to these emails thereby not taking my request as seriously as they might have should it have been sent at time when there was less email flurry about volunteering. Additionally, the CEO asked that I use a list serve to send my request that is not one that all employees check or even see. All employees are subscribed to this particular list serve when they begin at the company but because it is not a mandatory list serve and its purpose is for non-work related messages some people opt to take themselves off or they don't check it with much frequency. This may also have had some impact on the number and type of employees that volunteered to participate.

*Limitations to generalizability*

The largest limitation to generalizability, and one that can be seen in a few areas of the study, is the low number of participants as well as the distribution of participants based on demographic factors. Overall there were twenty-one participants, which is only about seven percent of the company. There are many ways that a researcher could increase the number of total participants: offering incentives to participants and making the interviews mandatory are two of these ways. As I was an employee of Company X at the time of the study and the company management had not asked me to complete the research for any particular purpose of theirs, I was not in any position to make the interviews mandatory. Additionally, doing so may have created an environment of suspicion and anxiety which I did not want to create. I also did not want to entice people to participate with incentives such as money because I wanted employees to feel free to offer their perspectives should they choose to do so rather than in order to gain some reward.

In terms of the demographic representation present in the sample, only two Tops participated in the study. Additionally, 67% of the participants were employees based in the Colorado office, only two of the participants were employees from outside the United States, and 50% of the participants had tenure of one year or less at the company and were fairly limited in their ability to speak to long term change at the company. There may be many reasons why more Tops, tenured employees and employees outside the United States did not participate, but their populations are not fully represented even in this sample size and so it is

difficult to be clear about whether the results represent a very limited population within the company.

Additionally, this study was conducted using one company as an example and this is also a limit to how well the results can be generalized to any other companies even if they are similar is size, products, location and rate and type of growth. To increase generalizability to other like companies, it would be helpful for a researcher to conduct the same study utilizing data from multiple companies to rule out factors specific to Company X that may or may not be relevant anywhere else. As it stands now, this study is useful to practitioners in terms of understanding some of the range of possible responses to growth and change, but is not a comprehensive model of responses.

*Implications for Further Research*

The purpose of this study was to use Oshry's theory about power and hierarchy to try and understand how employees within a growing company might respond to change. Some of Oshry's theory was supported by this study, and some of the results did not conform to the theory.

Oshry formulated his theory based on his observations in the Power Labs. These labs were artificial settings that were set up to create distinct and differentiated hierarchical levels, with people falling neatly into one level based on rights, privileges and so forth. People were then observed as they learned how to navigate their assigned level and rights. After many of these labs Oshry saw patterns of behavior and from those patterns he created his theory. While there is much that can be learned from his theory, it is clear from the results of this study

that Oshry's theory is not a full proof model for how people at various

hierarchical levels will behave.

One reason for this discrepancy between Oshry's theory and this study of

Company X, and an area for further investigation, could be that hierarchical levels

within the Power Labs were clearly defined and in natural settings it is never that

clear cut. Company X had less than clearly defined hierarchical levels. For the

purposes of this study I defined them based on very basic elements; however

rights and privileges were not necessarily demarcated by those same hierarchical

dividing lines. Essentially, Bottoms may have been coded as Bottoms for the

purposes of my study, but within the informal hierarchy of Company X these

people may not have been true Bottoms because they could have had informal

power and access to information or resources that other Bottoms would not have

had, or even responsibilities more closely linked to what someone in a middle role

might have. As a result their responses to my questions and reactions to the

changes may not have been in line with how the theory predicted a Bottom might

behave. Further research could look into how company hierarchy is set and

maintained and how a theory created in an artificial hierarchical setting relates to

a true company environment where power and advantages are not as clearly

delineated as they are in a lab. In order to look deeper into what hierarchical

levels people actually hold it might be valuable to ask people to put themselves

into a category and give a reason as to why they are there and also possibly speak

to what they think the true hierarchy is based upon. That may provide a more

realistic view of the structure of the organization as well as provide additional insight into the culture and what is considered valuable.

Another reason for the difference between the theory and the results for Company X which could lead to additional research is that the settings in which the behaviors were observed were different. Oshry created labs in various settings, and some of them included work situations: however they were basically settings where people were living their whole days for a certain amount of time. Company X is a relatively young and growing software company and people come in the morning and leave at night. Perhaps this makes a difference in how and with what kind of clarity the hierarchical levels behaved. It would be interesting to create a Power Lab that corresponded more closely to Company X in terms of type of work, location, number of employees, hierarchical divisions and see if the same patterns that Oshry observed in his labs presented themselves.

A third area for further research revolves around the way that the data were collected and how this could have had an effect on the results. In Oshry's labs the researchers were fairly passive observers who took notes on what occurred throughout the experiences. In this study I was an active participant, asking specific questions that, although they were based on my observations as an employee, were still creating a topic around which the participants spoke specifically (i.e. change, growth and their roles) and could have led them down a particular path in terms of how they responded. Another area of research that could come from this study is to truly compare how people behave in their day-to-day work life to what they say in a more formal interview setting.

One fourth area where further research could be conducted is around the topic of relatedness. Relatedness was specifically mentioned in my interviews and its importance in relation to stress was suggested in the results. One could look deeper into the meaning of relatedness at work, whether and how its importance and meaning changes during times of growth in a company and whether certain things can be done specific to relatedness that help employees during ambiguous times.

Lastly, it seems that the groupings that I created based on hierarchical level defined by title did not accurately represent the true authority levels at Company X, but that doesn't mean there wasn't some other kind of hierarchy that existed. One could delve further into trying to figure out those different groupings of people at Company X. One might want to look at the geographic location and whether there would be some sort of patterns in responses of participants that is correlated somehow with their geographic location. For example, after I left the company, the CEO relocated temporarily to the West Coast to try and build some relationships with venture capitalists in that area. It would be interesting to look into whether the move of the CEO changed the way that people in the headquarters offices versus the outlying offices viewed themselves and their authority and how they were viewed by others one the CEO had changed locations. Another way that employees might be divided into hierarchical groups may be by personality. At Company X the CEO is looked to and known as the originator of the culture of the company. Perhaps there is some sort of informal authority given to those who are more similar or most different to the CEO.

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APPENDIX A

Initial Request for Participation
Understanding Perspectives within Hierarchical Levels on Company Change Due to
Growth

Hello,

Many of you may know that I am, in addition to being an employee at Company X, also a graduate student of Organizational Psychology at Rutgers University. As a graduate student one thing that I am required to do is to write a dissertation containing original research. We, at Company X, are currently undergoing a period of growth and change and so I am using this company as a case study to research and understand the range of possible perspectives and experiences that employees may have during such a growth period.

I am writing this letter to ask for your participation in my study.

My request: One interview with me for a period of 30 minutes to cover questions about your experiences throughout the growth here at Company X.

Things to Note:

1) Participation is entirely voluntary and is not mandated by Company X. You may elect to participate or not. You may also discontinue participation at any point throughout the interview with no penalty to you.

2) This research is separate from Company X and confidential. The research records collected from the interview will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response exists however it will be coded to protect confidentiality. Some of the information collected about you includes your name, your role at Company X, your department and your tenure at the company. Please note that I will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keep it in a secure location unbeknownst to anyone at Company X. The records will be kept in a locked safe in my private possession so as to ensure that nobody can access the confidential records.

3) If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented, back to Company X management or at a professional conference, only group results will be stated and no linkage between your identity and the data will be present in any report. All study data will be kept for a period of three years.

4) Company X has not requested this study. It is a separate and confidential research project conducted by myself for the pursuit of my graduate degree. However, Company X is aware that I am reaching out to you to ask for your participation and has given me permission to do so.

5) All employees are eligible to participate. Those who are not eligible are those with the title of "intern" and those who are contractors with reporting roles to additional companies other than Company X.

6) There is no compensation being offered to participants.

7) In person interviews: Participants located in Denver, Colorado will be asked to sign a consent form for an in-person interview conducted by me. Place and time for the in person interviews will be determined by the individual participants and myself but will not be in proximity to Company X and will not be during business hours.

8) Telephone interviews: Participants located outside of Denver, Colorado will be asked to give verbal consent for a telephone interview conducted by me. Time for phone interviews will be determined by the individual participants and myself but will not be on Company X phones and will not be during business hours. You may provide me with a personal number to reach you for the interview, or you may call my personal cellular phone listed below.

9) All participants will receive a copy of the consent form for personal records regardless of location.

10) Interviews will not be recorded, however I will take written notes.

If you would like to participate please contact me with your interest and any questions using only the personal contact details provided below. Please do not respond to this request from your Company X email or Company X phone.

Address: 138 Fox St.
            Denver, CO 80223

Email: adaina@eden.rutgers.edu
Phone: 732-648-6232 (personal cell phone)
Thank you very much in advance,
Amber Daina

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent for In-Person Interviews

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Amber Daina, who is a student in the Applied and Professional Psychology Department at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to understand if changes, due to growth at Company X, have had an impact on the various hierarchical groups. Approximately twenty subjects between the ages of twenty-one and seventy years old will participate in the study, and each individual's participation will last approximately 30 minutes.

The study procedures include interviews with voluntary participants. Participation in this study will involve the following: one in person interview to last approximately 30 minutes. Upon agreement to participate, you and Amber Daina will determine a private location in which to hold the interview.

This research is confidential. The research records collected from the interview will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response exists however it will be coded to protect confidentiality. Some of the information collected about you includes your name, your role at Company X, your department and your tenure at the company. Please note that Amber will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keep it in a secure location unbeknownst to anyone at Company X. The records will be kept in a locked safe in Amber's private possession so as to ensure that nobody can access the confidential records.

Please note, in conducting these interviews Amber is functioning in the role of researcher and not that of HR Assistant. The only situation in which she would be required to break confidentiality would be if she were to hear of physical harm being done to or by an employee at Company X or if she were to hear of any persistent and pervasive patterns of harassment including but not limited to harassment on the basis of age, sex, race, color, religion, national origin or disability.

Amber, her dissertation committee and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented, back to Company X management or at a professional conference, only group results will be stated and no linkage between your identity and the data will be present in any report. All study data will be kept for a period of three years.

 There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study.


Participant Initials ___

The benefit of taking part in this study may be: the opportunity to express your experiences throughout the Company growth. Your individual coded results from the data collection will only be available to you upon completion of the data collection and analysis phases. Please contact Amber Daina directly if you would like a copy of your coded results.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact Amber directly at:

138 Fox Street
Denver, CO 80223
732-648-6232
amber.daina@gmail.com

You can contact Amber's faculty advisor, Dr. Cary Cherniss, at:

The Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology
152 Frelinghuysen Road
Piscataway, NJ, 08854-8020
848-445-3981
cherniss@rci.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.
Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Subject (Print ) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

<u>Verbal Consent to Participate in a Phone Interview</u>

I am a graduate student in the department of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University, and I am conducting interviews for my dissertation. I am conducting this research to understand if changes, due to growth at Company X, have had differing if any impact on the various hierarchical groups.

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions as to your own impressions and experiences in your role at Company X. This interview was designed to be approximately a half hour in length. However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

This research is confidential. The research records collected from the interview will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response exists however it will be coded to protect confidentiality. Some of the information collected about you includes your name, your role at Company X, your department and your tenure at the company. Please note that I will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keep it in a secure location unbeknownst to anyone at Company X. The records will be kept in a locked safe in my private possession so as to ensure that nobody can access the confidential records.

Please note, in conducting these interviews I am functioning in the role of researcher and not that of HR Assistant. The only situation in which I would be required to break confidentiality would be if I were to hear of physical harm being done to or by an employee at Company X or if she were to hear of any persistent and pervasive patterns of harassment including but not limited to harassment on the basis of age, sex, race, color, religion, national origin or disability.

Myself, my dissertation committee and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented, back to Company X management or at a professional conference, only group results will be stated and no linkage between your identity and the data will be present in any report. All study data will be kept for a period of three years.

You are aware that your participation in this interview is voluntary. You understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, you wish to stop the interview, you may do so without having to give an explanation.
There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study.

You have been told that the benefits of taking part in this study may be: the opportunity to express your experiences throughout the Company growth. Your individual coded results from the data collection will only be available to you upon completion of the data

collection and analysis phases. Please contact me directly if you would like a copy of your coded results.

You may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to your personal identity.

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact me directly at:

138 Fox St.
Denver, CO, 80223
732-648-6232
amber.daina@gmail.com

You may contact my graduate faculty advisor, Dr. Cary Cherniss at:

The Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology
152 Frelinghuysen Road
Piscataway, NJ, 08854-8020
848-445-3981
cherniss@rci.rutgers.edu

Additionally, if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers (which is a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect research participants). The IRB Administrator at Rutgers can be reached at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be offered a copy of this consent form, sent to a personal email account not associated with Company X, for your own reference.
Once you understand that you can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, you need to let me know, via a verbal yes or no, your decision to participate in today's interview.

Do you have any questions? Yes     No

Then by participating in this study, do you agree to be a study subject?     Yes          No

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Thank you once again for agreeing to participate in this research study. You should now have now given your consent to participate and have been informed about the process and the voluntary and confidential nature of this study.

Do you feel that you have been adequately informed about all aspects of this study and the process involved?

Do you have any additional questions?

I am going to ask you a series of questions about your position at Company X, your experience there and your views about the growth. If applicable, I will also ask you some questions about how the growth may or may not be affecting your peers and/or direct reports. Please answer the questions completely and honestly. If, at any time, you wish to discontinue this interview, please inform me and I will end the session and your responses will not be included in the assessment.

Are you ready to begin?

1) Please describe the circumstances that brought you to Company X

2) What attracted you to Company X?

3) Briefly describe your role and responsibilities

4) What elements of your role are the most pleasurable for you?

5) What do you like least about your role?

6) What other departments and roles do you work with most often?
   a. How would you describe your experiences working with other departments?

7) How would you describe the growth at Company X?
   a. Challenges?
   b. Opportunities?

8) What changes, if any, have you observed at Company X as a result of the growth?

9) How has your role changed due to the growth?

10) Has the growth affected your attitude about your role, if at all?

11) What do you personally find most challenging about the growth and changes?
    a.   What has helped or could have helped you to deal with these challenges?

12) Did you feel prepared for the growth?
    a.   If so, what helped you to feel prepared?
    b.   If not, what would you have needed in order to feel prepared?

13) Talk about the following elements. Are they a part of your role now? Do you see them as valuable? Why or why not?
    a.   Autonomy
    b.   Competency
    c.   Relatedness

14) How have you observed your peers responding to the growth and subsequent changes?
    a.   From your perspective, what has been done, or could be done to assist your peers with the changes that are occurring due to the growth?

15) How have you observed the other hierarchical levels responding to the growth and subsequent changes?

16) What role does Company X's culture play the growth and changes? What elements of the culture are demonstrated?
    a.   What elements of the culture have changed due to growth?

*Questions 17-19 are optional based on role:*

17) *How have you observed your direct reports during the growth?*

18) *Do you feel able to assist your direct reports with the challenges they face due to the growth and changes?*
    a.   *If so, why?*
    b.   *If not, why? What could assist you?*

19) *From your observations and discussions, what, if anything, do your direct reports need to assist them with the changes that are occurring due to the growth?*

20) Is there anything else that you would like to add about the growth and subsequent change at Company X?

**Demographic Information**
Now I am going to collect a few pieces of demographic information. Are you ready to begin?

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Upper                        Middle                              Lower
*(category to be assigned by interviewer)*

If applicable, number of direct reports: _____

Office                         Remote

Location: _____
Gender: _____
Tenure at Company X: _____

## **Closing:**

We are now finished with the interview. I want to thank you very much for your time and for your participation. Please remember that any and all data presented to Company X will be grouped together as themes and will not have any identifying information. Your interview data will be stored in a locked and safe location, unknown to anyone at Company X aside from myself, for the duration of three years after which it will be destroyed by shredding.

Do you have any follow up questions for me?

Thank you once again.

APPENDIX D

Themes Presentation

# DISSERTATION THEMES

**DATA COLLECTED BY AMBER DAINA FROM 23
VOLUNTEER COMPANY X EMPLOYEES FROM
AUGUST 1, 2012 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2012**

## CONFIDENTIALITY

**The data presented here is intended for Company X only.**

**The data contained here is anonymous and does not link to
any particular individuals here at Company X.**

**This data represents the viewpoints of a limited sample of
Company X employees and does not represent the entire
employee base.**

## DATA STATS

- 65% of participants do not have direct reports
- 61% of participants are based in Denver office
- 57% of participants are male
- 43% of participants had tenure of 1 year or less with Company X (at time of interview)

## QUESTION 2:
### WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO COMPANY X?

- CEO's personality/leadership style
- Financial payoff
- Opportunity to work in small growing company/industry
- The people I met who already worked at Company X
- Opportunity to work at a startup

**HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE GROWTH AT COMPANY X? CHALLENGES? WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES THAT ARE PRESENT AT COMPANY X?**

**Challenges**

•Don't know coworkers as well

•There is less communication company wide

•More focus on process/structure with less time to organize process

•Hiring the best is a challenge

•Workload is heavier

**QUESTION 7:**
**HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE GROWTH AT COMPANY X? OPPORTUNITIES?**

**Opportunities**

•Financial payoff

•Freedom to try new roles/tasks/lots of movement

•Diversity of people and ideas

•Ability to work with high caliber people

**QUESTION 8:** WHAT CHANGES, IF ANY, HAVE YOU OBSERVED AT COMPANY X AS A RESULT OF GROWTH?

- **Don't know everyone anymore**
- **Know people less well**
- **More movement of people internally**
- **More processes**
- **HR department is growing**

**QUESTION 12:** DID YOU FEEL PREPARED FOR THE GROWTH? IF SO, WHAT HELPED? IF NOT, WHAT WOULD HAVE HELPED?

**Felt Prepared**

•Having been through growth before helps one feel prepared

**Did Not Feel Prepared**

•Need: more communication about growth from leadership

•Need: more assistance while getting used to role

**QUESTION 16:** WHAT IS THE CULTURE OF COMPANY X AND WHAT ROLE DOES IT PLAY IN THE GROWTH AND SUBSEQUENT CHANGE?

- **Culture is:**
  - **Startup culture**
  - **CEO is the culture**
  - **Fun/parties/events to socialize**
  - **Flexible to meet needs of employees**
  - **Remnant of past Company X, hasn't grown with the company**
  - **Spoken about but not always lived**

- **Culture's role:**
  - **Retention**
  - **Brings in the best hires**

APPENDIX E

Instructions for Raters

For the purposes of this research study the following operational definitions were used:

"Tops" are defined as those at Company X with executive or vice president titles;

"Middles" are defined as those with direct reports and "Bottoms" are defined as those who have no direct reports. The transcripts for Tops will be coded with a "U", for Middles they will be coded with an "M" and for Bottoms with an "L".

Hypotheses I, II, and III are based upon theory from Barry Oshry.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact Amber Daina at 732-648-6232 or amber.daina@gmail.com.

1.  Please read through the transcripts for the two Tops and look for any statements that support or refute the following hypotheses.  Please mark or and label the statements you find with the appropriate hypothesis code (e.g. H-1 a).

> H-1a:  Tops within the organization will express enthusiasm and optimism about the growth and changes at Company X.

> H-1b:  Tops will express some form of anxiety about being able to manage all of their responsibilities

> H-1c: Tops will express some frustration towards Middles and Bottoms who, from their perspective, may not be living up to their respective responsibilities.

> H-1d: The source of greatest stress for the tops will be how to hold everything Together

2. Please read through the transcripts for the fourteen Bottoms and look for any statements that support or refute the following hypotheses.  Please mark or and label the statements you find with the appropriate hypothesis code (e.g. H-2 a).

> H-2 a: Bottoms at Company X will express feelings of stress and pressure to increase the amount of time they put into their work and how much they can produce in their roles.

> H-2 b: Some Bottoms will band together and camaraderie will arise from the idea that everyone is feeling tense and overworked.

> H-2 c: The greatest source of stress for Bottoms will be the pressure to get everything done with fewer resources and less time.

H-2 d: The greatest opportunity will be the ability to prove to other levels that they can manage everything successfully.

3. Please read through the transcripts for the five Middles and look for any statements that support or refute the following hypotheses. Please mark or and label the statements you find with the appropriate hypothesis code (e.g. H-3 a).

H-3 a: Middles within Company X will feel a lot of pressure from trying to meet the demands of the Tops and the Bottoms while also managing their own increased workload.

H-3 b: They will have insight into the stresses of the Tops and the stresses of the Bottoms, but will not have as much clarity about their own stress

H-3 c: To alleviate the stress of their middle-ness, some Middles will align themselves upwardly with the tops while others will align themselves more with the Bottoms.

H-3 d: The greatest source of stress for Middles is managing the disparate needs of the Tops and Bottoms

H-3 e: The greatest opportunity for them is to move out of the middle position upon proving how well they can manage it.

4. Please read through each transcript individually and give each participant a score of indicating whether or not they believe the company fosters autonomy, competence and relatedness.

Autonomy - Autonomy is defined as freedom of choice. Autonomy is high when individuals feel they are engaging in exercise because they choose to do so, not because they feel pressured by other people or external factors.

Competence - Competence is defined by a perceived self-belief in one's ability to perform well in an activity.

Relatedness - Relatedness is defined by a sense of shared experience.

Each item should have a score on the following 5 point scale (so for this step you will give each participant 3 different numerical scores).

1 = Company does not foster at all
2 = Company fosters very little
3 = Not able to detect
4 = Company fosters somewhat
5 = Company fosters fully

5. Please give each participant a score on a scale from 1 to5 indicating how much stress they seem to experience as a result of the growth and subsequent changes.

       1 = no stress due to growth and change
       2 = minimal stress due to growth and change
       3 = N/A
       4 = much stress due to growth and change
       5 = maximum stress due to growth and change