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# **PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF A CROSS- SECTOR TERTIARY MERGER**

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## ABSTRACT

Using a qualitative case study, the merger of the Palmerston North College of Education with Massey University, this research had two main goals.

**Goal One:** To provide an objective, analytical account of the merger.

**Goal Two:** To generate a substantive theory of change.

To achieve these goals, two sets of specific questions were formulated, focusing on aspects of the merger and the change principles that could be used to guide organisational change.

The research data were obtained, over a period of twelve months, during 1997 and 1998, from four main sources: organisational change literature, official merger records, key players' recollections and views, and staff recollection and views. Responses from key players and staff were obtained through structured interviews and questionnaires.

The focus of the research was on the period from 25 October 1989, when merger negotiations were formally initiated with a letter to the Principal of the Palmerston North College of Education from the Vice-Chancellor of Massey University, until 1 June 1996, when the negotiations were formally completed.

The research methodology involved the use of a qualitative case study design with a modified grounded theory approach to the collection and analysis of data.

The research is presented in three parts.

**Part One: Setting the Scene,** the writer outlines the research project, reviews the change literature relating to organisational change generally, and mergers in particular, and describes the grounded theory methodology used to collect the data.

**Part Two: Collecting the Data**, summarises the merger discussions as revealed by official records, by key players and by staff of the merged institution, the Massey University College of Education.

**Part Three: Telling the Stories** contains the researcher's report of the merger negotiations, the presentation of a principle-based theory for facilitating organisational change, a summary of the research and suggestions for further research.

The theory presented argues for a principle-based approach to organisational change and provides ten principles for consideration: the Trust, Timing, Vision, Valuing, Communication, Consultation, Culture, Compromise, Commitment, Change and Serendipity principles.

In providing a detailed examination of one significant organisational change, and by presenting a principle-based theory of changing, the study claims to have added further to our knowledge of the change process.

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## THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE

As background information to the study reported in this thesis it is important to acknowledge the dual roles that the researcher had as both a participant and as the researcher.

In my role as Vice Principal of the Palmerston North College of Education, I was directly and very closely involved with the merger negotiations at all stages of the process. I was a member of the three main committees that operated throughout the merger period: the Joint Steering Committee, the Working Party and the Merger Implementation Group. As Vice Principal, I was present at the College of Education Council meetings, I was Co-Chairperson of the Programme Sub-Committee and I participated in a wide range of formal and informal meetings concerning the merger with staff and executive officers from both the University and the College of Education.

In my role as the researcher, I sought to distance myself from my Vice Principal participant role and to maintain a researcher's objectivity. During the collection and reporting of the research data, I endeavoured to not let my own personal views obtrude and to report accurately and clearly what the participants had to say. My own analysis of these reports appears in Chapters Eight and Nine and represents my own interpretation of the data that were forthcoming. As the study progressed I became more aware of the different organisational cultural perspectives that existed between the two institutions and the influence that these had on the merger negotiations. I also came to appreciate more clearly the extent to which the affective domain, intruding upon the cognitive domain, at times worked to impair, rather than promote, effective judgement.

The fact that I filled these dual roles brought with it some ethical considerations. With my position as a senior member of the College staff, there was the possibility that this might in some way impose constraints on the responses that staff felt free to make. This issue was considered fully by the University Human Ethics Committee when approval for the research was sought. The Committee satisfied themselves that, in view of the fact that I was shortly to leave the University and that responses to the staff questionnaire were to be made anonymously, this would not be a problem. To clarify the situation, the following statement was included in the Information Sheet which accompanied the questionnaire. (Appendix 3). "While I was directly involved with the Merger negotiations as part of Senior Management, and some of you may have been aware of my views, I am no longer part of the Senior Management team and will be examining the change involved from a research perspective."

The views to which reference is made in this statement concerned my general disposition towards the merger and the approach that would need to be taken to examine the issues involved in the merger. I was clearly supportive of the view that, if the practical details could be satisfactorily solved, then the synergy resulting from the two institutions working together, rather than in competition, would be beneficial to all concerned. In exploring this possibility, I was of the view that, if a merger was to be effected, a good deal of compromise and commitment would be required and all negotiating parties would

need to establish a solid basis of trust upon which their negotiations could be secured. However, in undertaking the research, I endeavoured to be as open minded as possible, to all views as they were expressed. Similarly I endeavoured to prevent any such predispositions, as that described above, from influencing the direction of my research.

Finally, in presenting this study, I am aware that the world is a highly subjective place and that meaning is largely a social construct. Perhaps put another way, we tend to believe our own perception of events. Beliefs, rather than facts, however, often form the basis of perception and this accounts for much of the variance that occurs in everyday reporting. Aware of the tensions posed by my dual roles as researcher and participant, I have done my best to be faithful to the data I have presented. I have viewed, reported and interpreted events as I perceived them. I acknowledge and accept the fact, that others may see things differently.