

**REALIGNING: A GROUNDED THEORY OF ACADEMIC WORKPLACE  
CONFLICT**

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# **Realigning: A Grounded Theory of Academic Workplace Conflict**

by

**Melinda Nish**

## **Abstract**

This is a grounded theory that explains conflict in the academic workplace. The core variable is realigning, which is a basic social process that individuals experience in social organizations, such as workplaces. Realigning is the process by which certain behaviors are employed to bring individuals back in alignment with the system's core values or to realign individuals to a change in the organization's core values. The aim of realigning behaviors is to diminish the impact of the individual who is perceived as not being in alignment and include actions to erode, isolate, and separate that individual. Therefore, realigning may include removing an individual from the organization. The theory explains the conditions, stages, and processes in which realigning occurs. The primary condition of social organizations is existence of core values at the organizational level. Organizational core values determine the context in which conflict arises. Conflict in terms of core values leads to the stages of the realigning process. The four primary stages and processes are presented here as *changing tides*, *countering*, *justifying*, and, *resolving*. The significance of this theory is that it is centered in the concept of organizational values, which provides a holistic understanding of workplace conflict rather than looking only at individual behaviors. The theory presents a framework within which to understand how conflict arises, the purpose of conflict, the forms conflict takes, and the consequences of conflict.

Key Words: academic bullying, core values, grounded theory, realigning, workplace conflict.

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This work is dedicated to my loyal and ever patient companion, Roxey.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

#### **Overview**

This research study was conducted while serving as an administrator at an urban community college in California. During my employment at the college, there was a series of behaviors that I experienced as professional attacks, including a very public campaign against me. This introduced me to the study of academic bullying and mobbing which has received increasing attention recently, in part due to the primary educational level (K- 12) of student- to- student bullying, including cyber-bullying. After a brief foray into the literature pertaining to higher education, I discovered that there were very few attempts to conceptualize the issue of academic workplace conflict. Rather there was a focus on individual behaviors, not the larger context in which they occur, nor a theoretical framework that could explain the how, why, when, and potentially what to do in response. Furthermore, I could find almost no literature that examined conflict from the bully's perspective. Therefore, my intent was to use grounded theory to develop a holistic, rather than reductionist, theory that would help explain academic workplace conflict.

As is typical of a grounded theory study, my research took me far beyond the individual acts of bullying and brought me to an understanding of social organizations as the center in which conflict takes place. What began to emerge through the grounded theory process was a consistent pattern of participants stating their values. Participants who felt they had been victims of workplace conflict explained their experiences emotionally and in a value-based manner. Included in this study were participants who had been identified by other participants as causing the conflict. Closer examination revealed that individuals who felt they had been a victim of

workplace conflict described their experience in almost exactly the same manner as those individuals who had attacked others described their experience. This led me to look beyond the individuals to the context in which these experiences were taking place. What further emerged is that social organizations themselves, such as workplaces, have specific values and that when members of the organization behave in a manner that opposes the organizational values, a process of realigning begins. Whereas the realigning process is enacted by individuals, the center of the experience is the organization itself, with realigning being a process by which members of the organization are continually in a social dynamic of community based on shared values.

### **Structure of the Study**

This dissertation proceeds with a thorough presentation of the grounded theory methodology in Chapter 2. The methodology chapter includes specific reference to this study and how each methodological component was addressed. The following chapters introduce the theory of realigning beginning with a conceptual framework of systems and core values. This is followed by chapters that outline the four stages of the realigning process. These stages are conceptually identified as changing tides, countering, justifying, and resolving. Relevant literature is integrated into the theoretical chapters. The dissertation concludes with a general summary and discussion of implications for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Research Methodology and Design

#### Statement of the Topic

The purpose of this dissertation and its research process is to generate theory in the substantive area of academic workplace conflict. Interest in this area arose due to the recent attention to academic bullying and mobbing which are generally defined as workplace behaviors where an individual (bully) or group (mob) exercises escalated incivility toward a specific person within the educational organization. However, these types of activities are not consistently defined. To further complicate the area of study, the words used to describe and define these activities are extremely evocative, for example, *bullying*, *mobbing*, *ganging up*, and *swarming*. These words may confuse the understanding of the behavior since they have many pejorative connotations.

Therefore, the research imperative was not one of quantification, but rather one of clarification and theoretical development. Adding to the need for clarification is the development of websites, blogs, and other personal postings describing various types of academic workplace conflict such as mobbing and bullying. Additionally, websites offer training to avoid workplace conflict, solicit self-reporting of bullying accounts, and even debate if there is such a thing as academic mobbing. This online development is highly one-sided. The plight of the victim is emphasized but there is essentially no self-report by those that perpetrate conflict and why they do so. Indeed, all participants in the behavior should be included in the analysis. The appropriate methodology would allow the researcher to rise above the pejorative terminology and the lack of consensus indicative of specific examples of workplace conflict such as mobbing. Furthermore, the choice of a reductionist methodology would be inappropriate

given that the goal is to generate explanatory theory that can provide a holistic view of the entire experience of academic workplace conflict, not just a specific behavior such as bullying or mobbing nor from just one participant's perspective.<sup>1</sup>

For these reasons, classical grounded theory will be used as the methodology to study this social behavior. Grounded theory is a methodology that is highly conceptual and not descriptive; therefore, it can adequately rise above the mass quantities of information and look for patterns of relevance.

The grounded theory method allows the researcher to look at what is relevant to the participants, in this case all participants within the academic workplace when there is conflict. The method allows the researcher to transcend the details of description, including the use of pejorative terminology, and identify the general patterns, categories, properties, and dimensions of conflictual behavior within the academic workplace.

### **Grounded Theory Methodology**

The overall purpose of grounded theory is to generate theory directly from data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that grounded theory is the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research. As Glaser (1998) stated, "The goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory that accounts for the patterns of...behavior which are relevant...for the participants" (p.117). Grounded theory "accounts for the action in a substantive area" (Glaser, p. 115) and does so from the perspective of the people in the action scene rather than from the perspective of what the researcher thinks should be happening or should be important. Participants in this study all experienced conflict in an academic workplace. Additionally, all

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<sup>1</sup> The development of a theoretical model that has the ability to map crucial connections among basic sociological properties of a behavioral process of phenomenon is defined as an analytical model. See Turner (1986) for a detailed discussion of theoretical modeling in the field of sociology.

participants emotionally described their experiences in referencing the values that they held to be most important.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that the purpose of theory in the study of sociology is fivefold. First, theory must provide prediction and explanation of social behavior. Second, theory must be useful in promoting theoretical advances. Third, theory must be useful in giving the practitioner understanding and some control. Fourth, theory provides a perspective—a stance to be taken toward data. And, finally, fifth, theory is a guide and provides a style for research.

Therefore, the purpose of grounded theory is to generate theory from data which will allow the practitioner (both scholar and lay person) to understand, predict, and explain social behavior. The theory of realigning allows an understanding of academic workplace conflict and achieves the goal of predicting and explaining this behavior.

Grounded theory is not a deductive method of verification. The purpose of this methodology is to create theory, not to verify a predetermined hypothesis. Grounded theory is a “discovery” method which differs markedly from the more common verification methods. This discovery method allows the researcher to generate theory from data acquired by a rigorous research method. “Grounded theory is not findings, but rather is an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses” (Glaser, 1998, p.3). Grounded theory uses a systematic and inductive research method to collect and analyze data. The research method is explained in detail below. This method allows the researcher to discover patterns of human behavior from which theory is built. This theory is directly derived from and systematically grounded in the data (Glaser, 1992, pp.14 - 15).

Grounded theory does not preselect data to fit an existing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.3). A priori categories, concepts, hypotheses are not developed prior to the collection and

analysis of data. There is no presumption of relevance, as relevance emerges or is discovered from the systematic, constant comparison method of the data itself (Glaser, 1992, pp. 21 -26).

Grounded theory is aptly suited for the study of systems and meets the requirements of systems thinking. “Grounded theory has the purpose of generating concepts and relationships that explain, account for, and interpret the variation in behavior in [the] substantive area under study” (Glaser, 1992, p.19). Rather than breaking a complex system down into parts, a reductionist approach, grounded theory accepts the dynamics of the system and takes into account this complexity.

This is of particular relevance to the study since conflict in the academic workplace is a broad, complex, and value-laden behavioral phenomenon. The process of specific conflictual behaviors is best addressed as a holistic social behavior that involves more than just the individual situation in isolation. A systems approach to developing new theory in this area is required if the new theory is to have relevance to the area of academic organizational behavior in general. Grounded theory allows the researcher to approach this area as a whole rather than attempting to define one small piece that is of more interest than another for study.

### **Grounded Theory Properties.**

The properties of grounded theory differ from the standard criteria of deductive methods. Deductive methods are measured by their validity, reliability, and replicability. Grounded theory criteria are fit, relevance, understandability, generality, control, workability, generalizability and modifiability. Each of the eight grounded theory criteria is useful in analyzing systems (Vander Linden, 2006).



As defined for the purposes of this study, a system, such as a social organization, is a dynamic, complex entity, composed of interrelated parts. The substantive area of academic workplace conflict is inherently a complex entity as the area encompasses a wide array of participants including faculty, classified staff, administrators, and students. Additionally, this social organization is influenced by external forces such as legislation, accreditation, budget constraints, and community expectations. Human behavior in basically any social setting presents a complex system, the study of which requires a non-reductionist methodology if the goal is an understanding of the social organization itself and how it works. Therefore, a systems perspective is important as it increases the theoretical usefulness generated in the substantive area of academic workplace conflict. Specifically, adopting a systems perspective reinforces the strength of the grounded theory criteria.

***Fit.***

“Fit” refers to how well the theory explains the phenomenon under study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.3). Given that the phenomenon is a system, the theory only achieves fit if it understands and explains the system. The data that generate the theory are derived from the system itself which allows the theory to truly fit.

The data used in this study were interviews, blogs, memos, letters, and journaling excerpts collected from full-time faculty members, both tenured and not, part-time faculty members, and administrators all working within higher education institutions. Some of the organizations were public, some private, both not-for-profit and for-profit. Some organizations were two-year colleges and others were four-year and graduate institutions.

***Relevance.***

“Relevance” is truly systems-oriented. In grounded theory, relevance is determined from the data and the system itself, as expressed by those operating in the system, not predetermined by the practitioner. A theory is relevant if it deals with the main concerns of the participants and therefore is important to the action area (Glaser, 1978, p. 5; Glaser, 1998, p. 18). The relevance discovered in this study is primarily the value-based approach that all participants described.

***Understandability.***

“Understandability” is only achieved by understanding in a broader sense than achievable using deductive methods. With grounded theory diverse pieces of data from the system allow one to induce the latent patterns within the system and to have a better grasp of the whole system. It allows the participants in the system to understand the whole system, not just from the particular viewpoint where they are personally situated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 239 – 242; Vander Linden, 2006). Understandability is achieved with the theory of realigning as the theory allows all participants to understand conflict from a system-wide dynamic of value realignment rather than from an individual characteristics model.

***Generality.***

“Generality” and “generalizability” are key concepts in systems thinking. A grounded theory must demonstrate that its concepts may be applied to more than just one specific system. Grounded theory must be at a level of abstraction that allows one to view patterns from a holistic perspective, rather than being very specific, personal, and descriptive (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 242- 244). The theory of realigning is grounded in academic workplace data, but it is highly generalizable to other types of social systems such as other types of workplaces, community and non-profit organizations, religious organizations, and even families.

***Control/Workability.***

“Control” and “workability” are achieved when one truly understands how a system works. With that knowledge one can devise actions that would influence the system, thus demonstrating control of the system. The theory works if one can use it to effect change (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 245 – 249).

The property of control is perhaps the most attractive property presented in this study. Workplace conflict is generally viewed as an undesirable behavior. The theory of realigning demonstrates how workplace conflict can be a normal, dynamic behavior of social organizations, but it also explains how conflictual behaviors may intensify and become extreme. This understanding allows the practitioner to work within the system to address the underlying conditions of conflict in order to reduce the potential severity of conflict.

***Modifiability.***

“Modifiability” is central to systems thinking as all social systems are dynamic in nature. Grounded theories are about understanding and discovering variation, not making causal or absolute yes or no statements about a narrow subject, they remain open to easy modification, for whatever purpose. Grounded theories are modified, not “disproven.” (Simmons, 1997)

In other words, the theory must remain open to new information, and the theory itself will continue to change and evolve. “A theory is neither verified nor thrown out, it is modified to accommodate by integration of new concepts” (Glaser, 1992, p.15).

The modifiability of the theory of realigning is most likely to be observed in the future as new information allows the theory to evolve. The theory of realigning should be highly modifiable as it has integrated and extended several other grounded theory concepts including crusading and shoring-up which are discussed in the theoretical chapters below. Therefore,

being able to integrate and extend other grounded theories, indicates that the theory of realigning is most likely highly modifiable.

### **Stages in Grounded Theory**

A rigorous process of constant comparative analysis, performed in iterative stages, is used to generate grounded theories. This process is cyclical and repeated and includes data collection, coding, memoing, sorting, and outlining. The process is detailed here.

#### **Preparation.**

The first stage of the grounded theory research process is that of preparation. Preparation is the process of minimizing preconceptions. The researcher must actually self-interview or self-check. This self-check is to make sure that typical face sheet data have been set aside, and that the researcher has effectively suspended any preconceived ideas, assumptions, and concepts of the substantive area that will be researched. The purpose of this preparation phase is to increase researcher receptivity to what is relevant for participants rather than what is relevant personally for the researcher (Glaser, 1978, 1992).

Given that I have personally experienced workplace conflict, it was important to continually self-check and verify that I had not preconceived from my experiences what participants found to be relevant. Admittedly, this was difficult at times. Understanding and accepting this, I relied on members of my dissertation committee and dissertation workgroup to serve as constant touchstones during the analysis period. If I felt I was getting too close to the data and losing track of the priorities of the participants, I would stop the analysis process and discuss the issues with my committee or workgroup members. This allowed me to honestly maintain an open and non-preconceived approach.

Preparation for this research project included 2 years of formal academic training and practice in the grounded theory methodology. This training promotes the development of “theoretical sensitivity.” Theoretical sensitivity, at its most basic level, is the ability to generate concepts from data while remaining true to the data. In other words, the researcher enters the research with as few predetermined ideas as possible and then records events without filtering these through preexisting hypotheses. The researcher must remain open to what is actually happening (Glaser, 1992, pp. 2 – 3).

The researcher must be able to exercise conceptual ability. To develop this conceptual/theoretical skill, the researcher needs not only a firm understanding of the grounded theory methodology, but must also practice the activity of generating concepts (Glaser, 2001). Dissertation workgroups meeting on a regular, bi-weekly, basis have served as an additional means by which to develop the theoretical proficiency necessary for this particular research project.

### *Literature review.*

Most research methodologies require that a thorough review of the existing literature in the substantive area be conducted at this stage in the research process. However, the use of classic grounded theory as a methodology requires that the theory emerge from the data rather than a literature review. The researcher must suspend preconceived concepts and theories so that the grounded theory that emerges is truly grounded in the data, not in preconceived theories. In order for this to happen, the researcher must be uninfluenced by other studies, theories, and concepts. To quote Glaser (1992),

Grounded theory is for the discovery of concepts and hypotheses, not for the testing or replicating of them. Thus the license and mandate of grounded theory is to be free to discover in every way possible. It must be free from the claims of related literature and its findings and assumptions in order to rend the data conceptually with the best fit.

Grounded theory must be free from the idea of working on someone else's work or problems. (p. 32)

Finally, related literature is brought into the grounded theory method once the core variable of the theory has emerged from the data and the theory has begun to take form. The literature itself becomes data at this point and is subject to the same analysis as all other data. Therefore, the literature included in the grounded theory study will earn its way into the theory. Rather than being cited, it will actually be analyzed. This is the approach taken in this dissertation and the reader will find that literature has been integrated into the theory rather than separated out.

### **Data Collection.**

The second stage of the grounded theory process is that of data collection. The most common type of data is that of interviews and observations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The typical study begins with identifying the broad substantive area of investigation, in this case, academic workplace conflict, and then interviewing a participant in the area beginning with a *grand tour question*. Grand tour questions are open-ended and intended to allow participants to begin to freely express what they find relevant.

It is important to understand that from a grounded theory approach "all is data," and other methods of data collection, as well as types of data, may be used. Glaser (1998) stated,

The basic tenet of grounded theory... is that "all is data."...The briefest comment to the lengthiest interview, written words in magazines, books and newspapers, documents, observations, biases of self and others, spurious variables, and whatever else may come the researcher's way in his substantive area of research is data for grounded theory. (p. 8)

The "all is data" dictum literally means that anything that is happening in the research area should be taken into consideration by the researcher. Academic workplace conflict is a

topic of many personal blogs from academic and other non-profit websites as well as public memos and business letters.

Once the substantive area of this study was defined, and full Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained, data collection began. The first piece of data collected was an online monologue, posted on the author's personal website. The monologue was public information and was a prominent link found on several websites of academic mobbing. The author specifically stated that the site was open to the public and encouraged the public to read the author's story of events from her former workplace, a theological university.

Data collection continued with five more interviews conducted with faculty and administrators. These participants all signed IRB releases, agreeing to be interviewed concerning academic workplace behaviors. The grand tour question posed to these participants was, "Tell me about your experience working at [name of the academic institution]."

Additionally, public memos and letters from two other faculty members were included in the dataset. Given Glaser's dictum "all is data" and my personal experience of workplace conflict, I was encouraged by dissertation committee members to use myself as a source of data. I did so by analyzing a personal journaling piece which I wrote from my perspective as a college administrator.

In this manner, the relevance of any specific workplace behaviors emerged from the participants rather than be forced through leading interview questions. In fact, what emerged was not directly related to a priori notions of academic mobbing at all, since grounded theory is built upon a non-reductionist methodology whereby the researcher does not come to the substantive area with a preconceived theory. For this reason, it was critical that the interviews be

open-ended with the interviewee discussing what was relevant to them, not the interviewer posing leading questions which would have biased the responses.

All participants in this study work within higher education organizations. Some participants came from public community colleges, some from non-profit universities, and one from a for-profit university. Some participants were faculty members, full-time, part-time, tenured, and not tenured. Some participants were administrators. The size of the academic workplaces varied from 63 total employees and 300 students to 1,300 total employees and 26,000 students.

Finally, data are not used to describe nor are data rated as per accuracy. Data are used to derive conceptual categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 23). This is an extremely important consideration in terms of the data. I specifically included data from opposing sides. Four of the participants accused another of having aggressed them. No one of these participants was right. In other words, there was no rating of the accuracy of any one participant's account of events. Each participant was entitled to their perspective and their sharing of what was important to them. The data provided generated concepts, not truths.

#### **Data Analysis/Theoretical Sampling.**

The next step in the grounded theory process is data analysis. Data analysis begins with the first piece of data that is collected.

The researcher analyzes data by using the method of constant comparative analysis. The researcher begins to ask questions such as, "What groups or subgroups does one turn to next in data collection? And for what theoretical purpose?" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 47). As these questions are addressed, the researcher allows the data to move the direction of the research itself.



Therefore, the collection of subsequent data is based on the analysis of previous data. Glaser (1992) stated, "The process of data collection is controlled by theoretical sampling according to the emerging theory" (p. 101).

Data are conceptualized by constant comparison of incident with incident. This comparison is conducted by the use of coding and then the identification of key elements and their subsequent constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

***Substantive coding.***

With respect to coding, there are two basic types: substantive, which includes both open and selective coding, and theoretical.

*Open coding.*

The coding process always begins with open coding (Glaser, 1978). Open coding is the initial coding process whereby the conceptualization begins. A code literally is a concept that has been abstracted from the data. The researcher analyses each piece of data, begins to identify concepts, and then begins to organize the concepts into categories as well as identifying the properties associated with these concepts.

There are specific rules to follow when open coding. Glaser (1978) expressed these as a series of three questions that the researcher must ask constantly: "What is this data a study of? ...What category does this incident indicate? ...What is actually happening in the data?" (p. 57). Open coding continues until the researcher has established a core variable.

The full list of elements involved in the coding process is concepts, categories, indicators, properties, dimensions, and a core variable. Each of these will be defined.

First, concepts are the underlying meaning or pattern that the researcher identifies from the descriptive incidents in the data. Identifying concepts is the procedure by which the

researcher transcends the descriptive nature of the data. This allows for abstraction and generalization (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992). For example, one concept that was identified very early in open coding was “justifying.” No participant actually stated that he or she was justifying, rather the concept transcended the descriptive nature of the data and explained the behaviors of the participants.

A category is defined as a type of concept. Specifically, a category is a higher level of abstraction concept that allows the researcher to group other concepts that are similar (Glaser, 1992, p. 38). Justifying became a category as many different concepts came to be grouped under a general pattern of justifying. For example, “appealing to a higher authority” was a concept that was a behavioral example of justifying.

Indicators are simply something in the data, an incident, which points to a coding component (Glaser, 1978). An example of an indicator in this study was the use of emotional language.

Properties are again types of concepts, but whereas the category is a concept at a higher level of abstraction, the property is a type of concept at a lower level of abstraction. A property is a type of subconcept of a concept, or a conceptual component of a concept (Glaser, 1992, p. 38). A property discovered in this study was the degree to which a system was open or closed.

Dimensions are properties that vertically integrate, or cut across, categories. A dimension is a component of one or more categories and it may divide up a single category or it may be common to several or many categories. For example, time may be a component in a category and is similarly also an important component in other categories (Glaser, 1978). A common dimension in the theory of realigning was that of cycles. Many behaviors displayed cyclical movement over time.

A core variable is a key concept in the process of analysis and conceptualization. A core variable is defined as that concept that explains the ongoing behavior in the substantive area of research. It is the concept that is at the highest level of abstraction. It is reoccurring and accounts for and relates the other categories. The core variable is the goal of the open coding process. It becomes the focus of the research and is the core of the new theory (Glaser, 1978, pp. 94 – 96).

The core variable discovered in this study was “realigning.” This concept explains the conflictual behaviors experienced in the academic workplace. Every category of other concepts relates to and is a component of the realigning process.

*Selective coding.*

Selective coding will begin once the core variable has emerged from constant comparative coding. “To selectively code means to cease open coding and to delimit coding to only those variables that relate to the core variable” (Glaser, 1992, p. 75). Selective coding is also known as “closed” coding as this type of analysis only codes elements that are related to the core variable. The core variable now becomes a guide to future data collection (Glaser, 1978, p. 61).

Selective coding will continue until the researcher has saturated categories and properties, which is to say that no new categories or properties are generated in the coding process. “Theoretical saturation of a category occurs when in coding and analyzing both no new properties emerge and the same properties continually emerge” (Glaser, 1978, p. 53).

*Theoretical coding.*

Theoretical coding follows selective coding. Theoretical coding is the process of conceptualizing how the codes identified heretofore relate to each other as hypotheses to be

integrated into the complete theory (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1992). At this point, the researcher focuses on building relationships between the substantive codes that have emerged through the open and selective coding processes.

Theoretical codes are at a higher level of abstraction, but have no meaning and are not grounded in the data unless they weave together the substantive codes (Glaser, 1978, p. 72). Glaser has identified over 25 theoretical coding families (1978, pp. 74 – 82; 1998, pp. 170 - 175). These general, higher level codes, which are already identified by Glaser, must earn their way into the analysis, just as the substantive codes must earn their way in via the constant comparative analysis process. Finally, theoretical codes are a means of “putting back together the story” after “fracturing” the data in the open coding process (Glaser, 1978).

### **Memoing.**

Another key stage of the grounded theory process is that of memoing. Memos are theoretical writings about concepts and conceptual relationships. “Memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding” (Glaser, 1978, p. 83). Therefore, memoing is an ongoing process that overlaps with the process of data collection and coding.

Memoing is an informal process that takes precedence over data collection in that memos are the written expression of what is emerging from the data. In other words, the memos are the ideas that are emerging and are to be recorded theoretically. They are not descriptions of the data. Memoing cannot be delayed or the entire process of developing a grounded theory will be delayed. Memos need to be recorded at the earliest occasion since memos contain ideas which are much less tangible than the actual data itself (Glaser, 1978, pp. 83 – 92).

**Sorting.**

The next stage in the grounded theory process is that of sorting and creating the theoretical outline. Sorting refers to the conceptual organization of the memos (Glaser, 1978, pp. 116 - 127). This is the process whereby the researcher integrates and sorts the contents of the memos into concepts and conceptual relationships. It literally may be a cut, paste, and sort process that is performed with scissors and tape or with a word processor. In this study, the cutting and pasting was done with a word processor and was an iterative, continuous process until completed.

Sorting is literally comparing each memo to see if it belongs with another memo. Memos that belong start to create categories. Sorting continues until all memos are accounted in as many connective patterns as possible. This process allows the researcher to see the interconnectedness of the data as well as any gaps where additional theoretical sampling may be necessary.

**Theoretical outline.**

The theoretical outline begins to emerge from the process of sorting. The theoretical outline organizes the major concepts, properties, categories, and dimensions. This process of organization orders the presentation of the theory itself. However, sorting will generally continue as the outline is being created as the process of sorting will often promote further memos, which in turn may produce additional coding (Glaser, 1978). This is indeed the experience that I encountered while working on the theoretical outline for realigning.

Once the theoretical outline is in place, it is the appropriate time to integrate literature. Existing literature within the field of study is regarded as data and is analyzed and subjected to the process of constant comparative analysis, coding, and memoing. The data obtained from

literature in this manner “earns its way into” the theory. This type of literature integration also provides a method to limit existing literature to that which is relevant to the theory rather than to that which may have been relevant to the researcher at the onset. This type of literature integration is not akin to the typical literature review that provides an overview and attempts to find the missing hole for the research to begin. Rather this type of integration focuses on what is relevant, not what has been left out. Furthermore, the relevance of existing literature is raised to a conceptual level, and is not merely further description of the data (Glaser, 1998, pp. 67- 79).

### **Theoretical write-up.**

The final stage in the grounded theory method is that of the explanatory theory write-up. Sorting and creating the theoretical outline provides the draft of the theory. The completed sort should be a first draft. This draft will be theoretical rather than descriptive. The final write-up is the theoretical explanation of the sum of the data. This write-up continues with the grounded theory method and is not the conjecturing of pre-conceived notions of the analyst.

The write-up begins with the sorted memos and follows strictly the theoretical outline (Glaser, 1992, p. 193). The analyst has now reached yet another level of conceptualization in the final writing where a story has been “fractured” descriptively and “put back together conceptually” (Glaser, 1992, p. 194). The remainder of the process is the refinement of the first draft into a final draft which reads well, is logical and understandable, and complies with citation standards (Glaser, 1978).

These stages of the research process fit together in a systematic method in the order listed above. Theory write-up cannot precede data collection, integrating literature cannot precede memoing, and so on. However, the process should not be seen as strictly linear. For example, memoing is ongoing during the coding process. Sorting takes place after memoing, but may, in

turn, generate more memoing. Generating grounded theory is a systematic process, but some of the stages may be performed in a parallel manner.

The final theoretical write-up is a conceptual narrative that presents a systematic, logical framework of concepts with theoretical statements of the relationships between the concepts. The focus of the theoretical write-up is on the process and not the specific people. “The most important thing is to write about concepts, not people” (Glaser, 1978, p. 134). Keeping the write-up theoretical is another means by which to assure generalizability. However, the write-up also includes examples from participants as a means by which to demonstrate grounding and aid the readers’ comprehension of concepts.

The theoretical write-up of realigning is presented in the next six chapters of the dissertation. These chapters provide an overview of the entire theory, and provide a detailed description of the value-base of workplaces and the four stages of the theory. These four stages are changing tides, countering, justifying, and resolving.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Introduction to the Theory of Realigning

This grounded theory explains conflict in the academic workplace. The core variable is realigning, which is a basic social process that individuals experience in the social organizations of workplaces. Realigning is the process by which certain behaviors are employed to bring individuals back in alignment with the system's core values or to realign individuals to a change in the system's core values. Realigning may include removing an individual from the social organization. Realigning behaviors aim to diminish the impact of the individual who is perceived as not being in alignment and include actions to erode, isolate, and separate that individual. The theory explains the conditions, stages, and processes in which realigning occurs.

The theoretical presentation first describes the social organizational environment and the value-based foundation of conflict. All social organizations have core values. These values are the theoretical center of the study. All workplaces are social organizations and all organizations have some level of cohesiveness. The cohesiveness of a social organization will, in part, be based on values and norms that the members of the system are expected to share. If all members correctly understand the core values of the workplace, and if their individual values are closely aligned to those values, then internal conflict is generally minimal and there is little tendency to use realigning behaviors. However, individuals whose behaviors appear to threaten the values of the workplace will tend to experience realigning behaviors and will perceive themselves as targets.

The point at which someone is perceived as a threat will depend on the degree to which the organization is closed. Closed organizations are difficult to enter and to leave. Members tend to stay in these organizations for a relatively long time. Higher education institutions are



good examples of workplaces where the majority of full-time employees, faculty members, tend to stay for decades, often their entire career. Additionally, smaller organizations are inclined to be more closed. Closed organizations tend to have tighter/closer boundaries around the accepted core values. Behaviors that appear to be crossing the core values' boundaries trigger the realigning process. The more closed an organization, the more quickly and drastically realignment behaviors will occur.

The theory proceeds with four stages of behaviors presented here in a sequential manner but which may occur in a more cyclical pattern that will be described and illustrated. The first stage of the theory is that of "changing tides." Changing tides refers to the constant shifting of real and perceived power in an organization such as a workplace. If there is a shift in the power structure of a workplace, then there is a tendency for value conflict to arise. As a result of the power shifts, certain values may become more important or may start to change. Individuals in alignment before the power shift, and subsequent value change, may now be seen as a threat. If an individual's behavior seems not to be in accordance with what others perceive the organizational values to be, then that individual may be seen as a potential threat.

"Countering" is the second stage. Countering is the process of employing measures, or tactics, which are perceived by the targeted individual as attempts to erode his/her power in the organization, isolate him/her from others, and/or separate him/her entirely from the workplace. There are a variety of countering/realigning tactics employed which include overt and covert delaying strategies, insulting, bullying, and other acts that the targeted individual perceives as uncivil and unwarranted.

Generally, targets of realigning are individuals who are naïve regarding the power structure of the organization, who are exceptional in some manner, and who tend to be relatively

idealistic. These three conditions also influence the degree to which countermeasures are employed.

The third stage of realigning is “justifying.” This is the stage in which targeted individuals react to the countering measures. Initially, individuals understand countering measures as unwarranted and undermining their self-worth. The targeted individuals perceive themselves as victims. Through the process of justifying, they work to restore a self-image that is not at fault and did not deserve the treatment they perceive was directed at them. This is an individual process, but may be conducted in a very open manner. Some individuals remain in the justifying stage and may never move to the final phase of resolving.

The fourth stage is “resolving.” This stage begins as the target individual of realigning behaviors moves beyond the reacting and justifying stages to start processing what has happened. Initially, the targeted individual generally experiences the realigning behaviors as negative. This negativity triggers the fourth stage as the target tries to understand at a higher organizational level what and why these acts are occurring. Individuals also have core values and as the individual starts the process of understanding why he/she has been targeted, he/she begins to experience an inner conflict which will resolve itself in either remaining in the organization or separating. Therefore, resolving is the final phase of the process. However, targets entering this stage may take a very long time to fully understand, and in fact, may not ever completely move through this final phase.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Having Core Values: The Organizational Environment**

The theory of realigning provides a conceptual framework for understanding conflict in the academic workplace. The foundation of the theory is an understanding of the workplace as a social organization. A defining feature of the workplace social organization is that of core values.

“Having core values” is the basic premise that an organization’s cohesiveness, its very existence, is based on values. Having core values is the overarching concept that explains the workplace as a social organization. The value-based nature of organizations and the normalizing behaviors that may be used to reinforce values are discussed below.

Related to the organizational core values are behavioral boundaries. The concept of value boundaries and how these boundaries are determined is the second concept discussed as a component of the workplace.

Third, all members of systems assert their own values as individuals, and these personal values may or may not align with the core values of the organization. “Asserting values” and how this concept relates to the individual and the system are presented below as an additional dimension of the core value organizational model.

Finally, “conflicting the core” is the last concept of this chapter. This concept helps to provide a value-based understanding of behavioral conflict.

### **Value-Based Organizations**

Values have been an important concept since the inception of social sciences as modern fields of study.<sup>2</sup> Not only individuals, but all social workplace organizations have a set of core values. Organizational core values are those perceived by the members of the organization to be the dominant values. These values are those most important to the majority of the members of the organization and are influenced by the power structure of the organization. A basic human value is that of belonging.<sup>3</sup> Due to the primary desire to feel a sense of belonging, people ordinarily want to be involved in organizations where the group's, or organizational, values align with their personal values. In this study, all participants expressed an affective sense of affiliation with their workplace. This sense of belonging was a common value that emerged from the data.

All participants in this study expressed their desire to achieve goals which directly related to their sense of belonging. The more closely individuals feel that their values are aligned with the majority of those in the workplace, the more they feel they are able to achieve professionally. This aligning deepened as the more the participants achieved, the more they felt aligned and the more they felt they belonged. The opposite holds true; the less one achieves, the more one feels out of synch with the organization and the values of the majority.

The positive relationship between achievement and aligning may exhibit any number of variations. For example, an individual may feel that his/her values closely align with what the individual perceives to be the organization's values, but he/she also observes that the majority of those in the workplace are behaving in a manner that is not aligned with these values. Despite

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<sup>2</sup> Both Durkheim (1893/1933) and Weber (1905/1958) employed the concept of values to explain organizational change. Recent research demonstrates that regardless of culture, there are basic, core human values that all people recognize (Schwartz, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> The literature is not consistent as per the term "belonging" but related concepts are consistent. Schwartz's (2009) equivalent term is "security."

not being aligned with the majority, the individual feels he/she is aligned with the institution. Therefore, achievement is still possible.

This variation may be readily observed in academic workplaces where the institution's core value is often publically stated as teaching and learning. An individual faculty member employing pedagogical practices that are out of alignment with the majority of other faculty members' practices still believes that he/she is in alignment and achieving if he/she experiences improvements in teaching and learning.

Belonging may be understood as one of the most fundamental values of the organization. For example, another workplace value may be collaboration. When organization members experience their work behaviors as being highly collaborative, they feel they are able to achieve more, they feel more aligned to the workplace, and they express a sense of satisfaction. The primary core value in this example is belonging, but belonging to an organization that also exhibits the secondary value of collaboration. Collaboration is a secondary-level value that is either reinforced and leads to a deeper perpetuation of the value of belonging, or, if collaboration is not emphasized or even allowed, the individual who values collaboration may begin to lose the sense of belonging or aligning with the organization.

Therefore, workplace organizations tend to have a concept of belonging at their core. Additionally, there are other values closely associated with belonging that help form the core as well. These additional core values will vary from workplace to workplace, depending in great part on the members and their individual values.

### **Normalizing.**

One method organizations use to help instill a sense of belonging is "normalizing." Normalizing activities bring satisfaction to the majority of the organization's participants.

Normalizing activities are not necessarily performed to bring an organization back into alignment, but may be employed at any time to enhance, reinforce, and/or promote core values.

An example of a normalizing activity is the hiring process. A majority of participants in this study spoke of their involvement with hiring committees. When the involvement was related as a positive experience it was always associated with a description of a common understanding of the ideal person to hire as a new colleague in the immediate working environment. When organizational members participated in normalizing activities such as the hiring process, they felt as though they were accomplishing something of value. Thus normalizing activities are seen as promoting the goal of achieving and fostering the feeling of belonging.

However, what may be a normalizing activity for some members of an organization may actually end up becoming a realigning experience if there are one or more individuals who do not behave in alignment with the core values being emphasized by the majority. Individuals and groups use realigning behaviors, such as those experienced by members of a hiring committee, to preserve what is important to them.

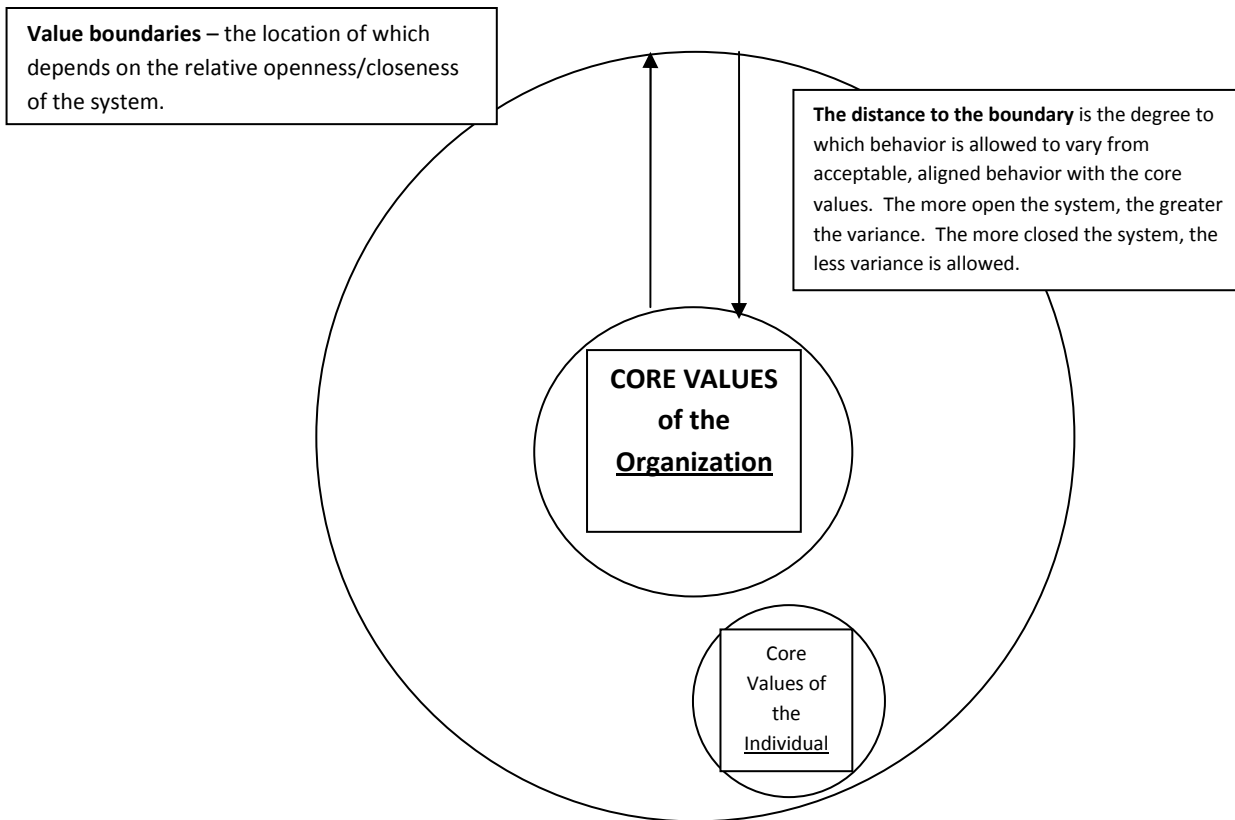
Having core values and perpetuating these values are both an organizational behavior and an individual behavior. Belonging is a basic value that is associated with social organizations such as the workplace. Belonging is not the only value of a social organization, but it is a fundamental affective center for most social organizations. Normalizing activities help define and perpetuate core values and organization members feel more secure when they perceive that their individual values align with the organizational values.

**Value Boundaries**

Social organizations are value-based and the organizational values are limited by boundaries. Boundaries are the degree to which the group tolerates variations of members' behaviors from the core values. The concept of value boundaries is similar to that of "moral boundaries" as developed by Lakoff (1996) to explain acceptable action.

It is common to conceptualize action as a form of self-propelled motion...Moral action is seen as bounded movement, movement in permissible areas...Immoral action is seen as motion outside of the permissible range...transgressing prescribed boundaries. (p. 84)

Organizations may be more open or more closed and the degree of openness will influence the boundaries around organizational core values. The more closed an organization, the closer are the boundaries to the core values. Nonalignment will be less tolerated, and the organization will move more quickly and forcefully to realigning behaviors. The opposite also holds true; the more open an organization, the more variation in core values is allowed, and therefore, the less reactive the organization is to realigning. The concept of value boundaries is depicted in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Core values of organizations have value boundaries. The closeness of the boundary to the core value depends on how open or closed the organization is.

### **Closed versus Open Organizations.**

A closed social organization is distinguished from a more open social organization by the variance in three basic properties. These are the degree of difficulty in entering and exiting, the size of the organization, and the degree to which a strong moral core value is publically perceived.

#### ***Entry/Exit.***

A closed organization is hard to enter and leave. Members tend to stay a long time once they obtain entry. There may be structural elements of the workplace that affect the ease of entry



and/or exit. The tenure process is one such structural element in higher education. Once faculty members gain tenure, they have a high level of job security and tend to remain employed with the same institution for a relatively long period of time, often their entire careers.

The hiring process may also be a structural factor in the ease of entry. When the hiring process is a long, multi-stage event with the understanding that the actual hire is the most significant investment an institution or organization makes, then this process itself creates a more difficult means of entry into the organization.

Related to the anticipated length of employment and the barrier of the hiring process is the notion of “fit.” Fit is a common concept used in hiring that refers to the degree to which an individual is assumed to have the right personal mix of skills and behaviors so as to mesh, rather than conflict, with colleagues. The longer the expected duration of time a person will be a member of a specific workplace, the more important fit becomes. Given that a fundamental human desire/value is that of belonging, fit becomes very important when hiring a new employee for long duration in a relatively closed organization. Faculty member hires, particularly those that are tenure-track, would be an example in which fit is an important consideration. Therefore, the idea of fit in hiring is reaching the goal of hiring someone who will align, belong, and help propagate the core values of the organization for an extended period of time.

When an organization’s hiring process emphasizes fit, an indication of the importance of perpetuating the core values of the organization, there will tend to be a quick response toward those who behave contrary to the values they were hired to support and perpetuate. Therefore, the organization tends to be more sensitive to alignment and seeks to realign more quickly, potentially using more extreme tactics to achieve alignment. This illustrates the concept of

having relatively close boundaries around the core values, that is, not much behavioral variance is tolerated before the first stage of realignment begins.

*Size.*

Smaller organizations tend to be more closed. The fewer members in an organization, the more impact each individual member's behavior has on the organization. The more impact each individual's behavior has, the more important it becomes that each individual's values align with others' values. Otherwise, conflicting behaviors, among even a small number of organization members may lead to the demise of the organization itself. Given that existence is perhaps the most fundamental value of all, small organizations, being more vulnerable to survival, will tend to have close boundaries, not tolerating much behavioral deviance. Furthermore, in a smaller organization, behavior is simply easier to observe, which accentuates the degree to which members' behaviors are important.

Additionally, very small, cohesive social organizations generally experience less entry and exit than very large organizations, where turnover is more frequent and in greater number. Less entry and exit will tend to reinforce the degree of being closed that smaller organizations experience.

*Publically recognized values.*

Finally, closed social organizations tend to have more publically well recognized sets of highly moral values. Examples of such organizations would be religious orders, military organizations, and certain professions such as medicine with the widely recognized public perception of medicine's Hippocratic Oath expressing the value of "do no harm." Educational institutions have a publically recognized value of teaching and learning. Members of educational

systems perceive these as *moral* values, not just as important social goals. Post-secondary educational institutions in general have the added value of research.

The more a social organization has well recognized highly moral values, and therefore the more closed it is, the more security and conformity are valued. Thus, the boundaries are tighter and realigning behaviors tend to be more quick and severe.

### **Asserting Core Values**

Social organizations as a whole are seen as being value-based. The concept of having core values explains both the organizational perspective of core values, such as belonging, as well as the individual dimension. Individual members of organizations have their own core values which will relate to the larger, organizational core values. “Asserting core values” is the act of stating or demonstrating what the individual’s values are. Asserting core values is an important concept as it is a means by which individuals identify themselves. An individual’s most important values are literally how he/she perceives individual being or existence in a context beyond a physical entity.

Asserting one’s values is not an objective or rational process. Rather, individuals tend to assert their values in a very primary manner, based on feelings and non-objective assumptions of being right. All participants in the study asserted their own core values.

Asserting core values tends to be highly idealistic as values are conceived of as beliefs and ideals, and transcend specific activities. For example, an individual core value may be honesty. Honesty is understood by the individual as a specific idea and as an ideal to which to aspire. Furthermore, the individual’s value of honesty is not just honesty at work, but a more global sense of honesty that applies to overall interactions. The actual values of each individual will vary and the way each individual conceives of a specific concept will vary. For example,

one person's understanding of honesty may vary from another's, even though both may assert honesty as an individual core value. Common value patterns that emerged from this study's data sets were security, acceptance, achievement, independence, collaboration, and change.

Core values are emotionally based. Therefore, reactions to behaviors that challenge those values tend to be highly emotional. The more important a value, the more heightened the emotional response will be to actions and behaviors that are inconsistent with that value. Given that belonging is a common, basic, human value, challenges to one's sense of belonging to an organization elicit high emotional responses. All participants defended and justified their values using very emotional language.

### **Conflicting the Core**

The theory of realigning is derived from the observation of workplaces as value-based organizations. Organizations have core values limited by boundaries that depend on the degree of organizational openness. Additionally, the organization is comprised of individual members with individual core values that are openly asserted and that reflect the identity of the members. Having core values at an organizational level and at an individual level, leads to the concept of how these two levels relate. When the values at both levels are similar enough that an individual's behavior is perceived as taking place within the boundaries, then the levels are aligned. However, when values are not similar, a different dynamic may occur that affects the organization and individuals. This dynamic is conceptualized as "conflicting the core."

Conflicting the core happens when mutually opposing core values exist between members in the organization to such an extent that at least one member is seen to be acting beyond the acceptable boundaries of what others perceive as the organizational core values. Conflicting the core is highly personal and based on perception. Since perception is also a very

personal experience, a member that is perceived by others to be out of bounds may not be conscious that his/her values are actually conflicting.

People decide what is good or bad, justified or illegitimate, worth doing or avoiding, based on possible consequences for their cherished values. But the impact of values in everyday decisions is rarely conscious. Values enter awareness when the actions or judgments one is considering have conflicting implications for different values one cherishes. (Schwartz, 2009, p.2)

When the organization experiences conflicting the core, there will be emotional reactions and responses. The emotional degree of reactions and responses will depend on the degree of the value conflict. The deeper the conflict, the greater the emotional response will be. A deep level of conflict is conceptualized here as “cutting to the core.” Both of these concepts, emotional reacting and cutting to the core, are discussed below.

#### **Emotionally reacting.**

As stated above, values are affective and are emotionally based. Therefore, when there is a value issue, such as a conflict or challenge to that value, there is “emotional reacting.” The degree to which the core values are consciously in conflict will determine the level of the emotional responses from members of the organization. “Values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect. When values are activated, they become infused with feeling” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 2).

The degree of the emotional response is directly related to how deep and close the conflict in values is. For example, if people have a core value of independence, and they perceive that this is threatened, they will feel despair if they are unable to protect it. The degree to which they feel despair will be greater the more they feel their independence will be removed, which is the degree of depth. Additionally, the degree to which they feel despair will be greater, the greater the speed with which the removal of independence is perceived to be taking place, which is the degree of closeness.

In this study, there was a common emotional reaction to the value of collaboration. A majority of respondents asserted the high value they placed on professional collaboration. When they were able to successfully collaborate, they described how happy and fulfilled they were with the achievements. When they were blocked from collaboration, they described feelings of despondency, frustration, and anger.

All participants in this study not only used emotive language themselves, but there was a common pattern of describing the behavior of others as highly emotional as well. Often, the participants felt that their workplace colleagues had acted emotionally out-of-proportion to the particular events they described. This would indicate that the colleague had perceived a relatively deep conflict to his/her own values, which then created the highly emotional response. Additionally, it would indicate that those colleagues who saw this as out of proportion did not experience as deep a conflict and perhaps experienced no value conflict at all. This interesting dichotomy in perception and experience is based on the nature of value conflict.

***The nature of value conflict.***

If there are some common and fundamental values, such as belonging, why do we experience value conflict? In other words, what is the nature of values and does this help explain how value conflict arises?

Values have been defined in this study as beliefs and ideals that individuals hold to be personally important. These values are so important, that asserting one's values is not only a way to state what is important to an individual, but the act of asserting is also a means of how the individual understands his/her own identity. Value conflict may arise when individuals prioritize the same value differently, or when individuals define the same value differently, or when the values have an inherent difference.

Individuals and organizations have a set of core values, and one of the distinguishing features of the set is the priority, or hierarchical order, of the values in the set. Belonging has been identified as a fundamental organizational value in workplaces that is of a very high priority. Another core value may be security, which in the workplace may translate to employment security. Even if all members in the organization share the same set of core values, if they order the values differently, they may experience conflicting the core.

Conflicting the core may occur if the same value, with the same priority, is not defined in the same manner. In effect, when the same value is defined differently, it no longer is the same value at all. This produces an experience in which members of the organization may be acting across one another without really understanding what the others are doing. An example from the dataset was a faculty member who asserted that discipline was a core value of the organization as well as personal core value. However, this participant defined discipline as including the duty of publically standing up against wrongdoings, whereas the actions of the other colleagues asserted the value of discipline as maintaining silence. Each side in this workplace used the value of discipline to describe the social organization and themselves personally, but each side had a different definition or personal understanding of the value. This leads to the state of conflicting the core.

Even if organization members agree on the definition of specific values, values may have inherent differences. Values may be understood as being more personal and self-oriented, or more social and expansive in nature. Some values will be congruent and will mutually support and reinforce one another, such as the values of conformity and security, both of which have a more social focus. However, self-enhancement goals such as personal achievement will conflict with socially oriented goals of conformity. This type of dichotomy illustrates the concept of

inherent difference. The inherent difference between personal values and social values may lead to a dynamic of conflict. In other words, this may create the conflicting the core environment.

The values that lead someone to work in a specific field, such as higher education, may by nature be conflicting. For example, one common value in higher education is academic freedom which many faculty members view as the right to be nonconforming. Yet another highly held value is employment stability and a stable workplace is a workplace that conforms. The dichotomy may be overcome if there is a common shared value that has a higher priority over the inherently different values such as freedom and security.

Other structural obstacles may complicate the inherent value dichotomy. Sometimes an organization is structured in such a way that when one part of the system pursues its goals, it does so at the expense of another part of the system. One such structural example in the workplace is unionization. The union as a bargaining unit pursues a personal advancement goal of income and benefit maximization. However, when attainment of this personal advancement goal comes at the expense of someone else, such as those members belonging to the classified staff union, then an internal value conflict in the organization is virtually automatic.

Another example of value conflict in the academic workplace was observed involving collaboration and change. Collaboration and change were frequently asserted to be values by individuals who perceived themselves as having been targeted and subjected to realigning behaviors. Collaboration may be viewed as in conflict with the self-oriented values of academic freedom and independence. Collaboration is a socially oriented value. An example of collaboration may be a group approach to curriculum development, which could create conflict when one or more of the faculty members place a higher priority on their value of academic



freedom and therefore value and prefer to develop curriculum on an individual, independent basis.

Change may be perceived as in conflict with the socially oriented goal of security and conformity. If a social organization member highly values change but is in a relatively closed organization that values belonging as a form of security and conformity, then this difference may lead organization members to see the change-lover as behaving in conflict with core values. Indeed, participants in this study who perceived themselves as targets seemed to have more open and transcending values, but they found themselves in workplaces where personal advancement (academic freedom, independence, master of the classroom) and security (status quo, tenure, maintaining the power relations) were the organizational core values.

The general conclusion of the nature of values which leads to conflicting the core goes beyond higher educational workplaces. All social organizations may experience conflicting the core when there are differences in value priorities, differences in the member's understanding of shared values, and inherent differences between personally oriented and socially oriented values.

### **Cutting to the Core.**

When a social organization experiences conflicting the core, the degree of conflict will depend on the degree of value conflict. The degree of conflict depends upon the importance of the value perceived to be threatened by the actions of others and how serious the threat is perceived to be. Conflicting the core becomes "cutting to the core" when both the degree of importance and seriousness of the threat are perceived to have reached a critical state by an organizational member.

"Cutting to the core" is the act through which an individual perceives that his or her most important core values have been completely disregarded or devalued by others. The conflict is

consciously recognized as being so significant that it triggers a response. Because the conflict is so deep, the responses that are triggered are highly emotional. An example of cutting to the core was the recognition by one of the participants that the behavior of a colleague was “like a knife to the chest.” The actual behavior, when described during the interview, seemed relatively banal. However, the participant recognized the behavior as a flagrant disregard of the participant’s core value of keeping one’s word, and becoming conscious of this deep conflict was described as literally cutting to the core.

A consequence of cutting to the core is the perception of danger. This perception of danger arises when a person feels that his or her core values are being disregarded to such an extent that it calls into question the very concepts that define him/her as an individual. Participants often used the language of being in danger, being in a dangerous situation, or described others as dangerous individuals. This sense of danger is heightened if core values are threatened to the extent that individuals begin to question if they can maintain their core values without losing the sense of belonging. In other words, individuals may start to experience an internal quandary of having to decide between giving up core values that define them as a person in order to remain in the organization – to belong.

To choose between belonging and one’s own identity, one’s core values, may lead to existential angst. If one chooses belonging over one’s identity, then one is acting in what Sartre (1943) defined as bad faith. Sartre argued that individuals must understand that one’s existence is separate from one’s projection of self. Projection of self refers to one’s social condition such as one’s occupation. However, Sartre failed to consider that identifying with one’s occupation is a highly fulfilling means of experiencing existence if one’s experience of one’s occupation aligns with one’s core values.

When one's core values are in such conflict with others in a system that cutting to the core occurs, an individual may have to choose to abandon core values in order to remain in the system. Conversely, an individual may have to choose to lose the primary human value of belonging, leaving the system, in order to maintain the individual's core values. Choosing to abandon values illustrates the concept of "losing your religion" whereby an individual literally loses those values that were once deemed as extremely important to the individual's own perception of self-identity. However, individuals will resist losing their religion. Once cutting to the core occurs, they will feel compelled to act, with losing their religion being one of the last options considered.

***Taking a stand.***

A common next step, once action is triggered, is "taking a stand." Taking a stand is the act of defending one's values or calling into question others' values. This behavior is generally observed by others and therefore public. Thus, taking a stand includes risk. Participants in this study all described their cognizance of the degree of risk when taking a stand, and by their own accord, determined that they should do so, implying that the benefit was greater than what, at least initially, they perceived as the cost of the risk.

Taking a stand is often experienced as something that must be done. This sense of being compelled to act is a reflection of cutting to the core, where there is more risk to one's values if one does not act than if one does act. Commonly, participants stated that they "had to do something." Had the value conflict been less deep and less close, that is, not cutting to the core, the feeling of being compelled would probably not occur.

***Being at war.***

Taking a stand may lead to “being at war.” Warfare may be defined as the phenomenon of organized, violent conflict. Although most workplaces do not include experiencing physically violent behavior, given the high emotional value of core values, individuals do perceive a type of emotional violence, which in turn aids understanding why they often describe conflictual events in warfare-like terms.

Participants in this study felt so strongly when experiencing cutting to the core, that they often described the experience as being destroyed and being attacked. This illustrates the concept of being at war and is yet again another consequence of the high emotional stakes that are perceived by individuals when there is a conflict in core values. As an example, one data set described a campus environment using such terms as *wrath*, *revolution*, *winning versus losing*, *divisive*, and *fighting*.

***Traumatizing.***

Having experienced being cut to the core, taking a stand and then feeling as though one is at war culminate in being traumatized. “Traumatizing” is the process of psychological injury/suffering resulting from an extremely stressful experience. One participant succinctly summed up her workplace experience as, “Nothing, since my mother was killed in an auto accident in 1969, has taken such a severe emotional toll as has the inexplicable treatment of me in the past three-plus years.”

A complete disregard for one’s core values is viewed as an unwarranted experience. When the actions of someone else demonstrate disregard for one’s values, it calls those values into question, which in turn calls into question the value of the individual. These acts then tend

to exact an extreme emotional toll. Participants experiencing an “unbelonging” often then experience a severe psychological wound.

Experiencing cutting to the core is, in many ways, similar to the experience of trauma felt by abuse victims. A recurring situation of threatening behavior and verbal abuse is a common example of an emotionally abusive situation. Many participants described similar situations. One of the participants described a recurring experience in which the participant was called into the office of a supervisor and was then subjected to door slamming, door kicking, and yelling. The participant did not tell anyone about the negative experience, in great part due to the asymmetry of power between the participant and the supervisor.

The extent to which trauma is experienced is related to the degree to which the organization is closed and the difficulty of exit. Most individuals will not willingly subject themselves to traumatic situations. However, if people are in a closed organization and leaving is very difficult, they may feel they have no choice but to stay and remain vulnerable to the abuse and subsequent trauma. The constraints that make the organization difficult to exit include physical constraints, financial constraints, legal constraints, moral constraints, and psychological constraints, real or perceived. Therefore, the greater the degree to which the organization is closed due to barriers of exiting, the greater the trauma individuals may experience due to conflicting values.

The data for this study were collected from participants in academic workplaces and a common observation was participants speaking of not being able to find employment elsewhere. This becomes both a real and perceived constraint for faculty members once they obtain tenure as leaving a tenured position is often a very difficult personal decision. Regardless of the type of employment, the longer one has been employed in an organization the more the person perceives

a barrier to exit. A person may feel so vested in their institutional identity that the loss would be too great to recoup by starting over somewhere else. Additionally, an employee may believe that potential employers would question the reasons a long-time employee would leave a job, thus making the acquisition of a new job more difficult.

### **Summary**

The theory of realigning looks at social organizations as its starting point. Social organizations are based on the existence of identifiable core values shared by the majority of the system's members. These values are affective and are recognized at an emotional level to a much greater degree than a rational level. Once a conflict in core values occurs, the members of the organization will start to experience behaviors that are described in highly emotional terms. The deeper and closer the conflict of values, the more extreme the experience is. If the conflict is deep and close enough to create a situation of cutting to the core, an individual may feel compelled to react, often taking a stand publically. The intense nature of the experience may lead to descriptions using terms of warfare, with individuals suffering emotional wounds leading to trauma.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Changing Tides – The First Stage of Realigning

In the previous chapter, the environment of having core values and the effect of conflicting values was presented. A value-based social organization is conceptually important as the theoretical starting point, and is the center from which the process of realigning occurs. In this and subsequent sections, the process of what realigning is and how it occurs will be presented. This process is conceptualized as a series of four stages. The first stage is “changing tides.”

Changing tides is the theoretical understanding of how core value conflicts arise. Essentially, value conflicts occur as a consequence of power movements. Changing tides is the continual back- and -forth movement that social organizations experience in terms of real and perceived power. There is a natural movement within systems. No social organization is completely static: There are always dynamic processes, including power movements, occurring.

The concept of changing tides is characterized by the property of the balancing/unbalancing movements that occur in social organizations. These movements tend to not be linear and are reflections of attempts to change power relations. The changing tides system movements may be understood to happen at the organizational level and the individual level.

At the organizational level, there are velocity and location dimensions to changing tides. The velocity of power movements refers to the speed at which these movements occur. Location dimensions may be conceptualized as cycles or spirals. A cycle is a movement that may bring the organization back to the same place, such as a hiring cycle where the members are doing essentially the same activity each time. A spiral is a movement where the organization ends up

in a new place; such a leadership change results in a new set of organizational priorities. There are also time dimensions to the changing of tides. Some cycles, such as hiring, may have a more constant timing dimension. Participants all described how there were specific cycles in the movements in and out of various power structures.

At the individual level of changing tides, the primary power movement is one of gathering and attempting to increase power, a behavior most members of the organization engage in. Additionally, changing tides acts as a trigger mechanism and sets realigning behaviors into motion. These concepts, their relations, and how they move the social organization to the next stage are explained below.

### **Balancing/Unbalancing**

“Balancing” is a property of changing tides and refers to the rocking back-and-forth movements as the organization hovers near and around equilibrium. Equilibrium is reached by perpetuating organizational core values. The organization is in balance when the movements keep the majority of the organization’s members around the core values. However, when an individual or a group hits an organizational boundary or bypasses the boundary, the organization is then unbalanced, and it automatically seeks to return to equilibrium.

This is similar to the concept of homeostasis (Buckley, 1967), but the difference is that the equilibrium core values do not necessarily remain constant, but can change depending on the changes in power in the social organization. Additionally, the closeness of boundaries around the core values may change as well, which will influence the occurrence of unbalancing. Thus, the organization is in a constant state of movement and is always seeking balance around the organizational core values.



In summary, continual changes in power are occurring, this is the concept of changing tides, and these changes may lead to core value changes. These core value changes, and/or other dynamics, may lead to changes in the degree to which the organization is closed. The degree to which the organization is closed will determine how close the boundaries around the core values are. When organizational members' individual core values and their actions supporting these values hit or bypass a boundary, the organization is unbalanced. Since boundaries tend to shift with continual changes in power, the organization can, and frequently will, experience unbalance. Once this unbalance occurs, the organization's natural response is to move backward to the prior or forward to the new core value equilibrium. Figure 2 includes the concept of the changing tides stage of realigning.

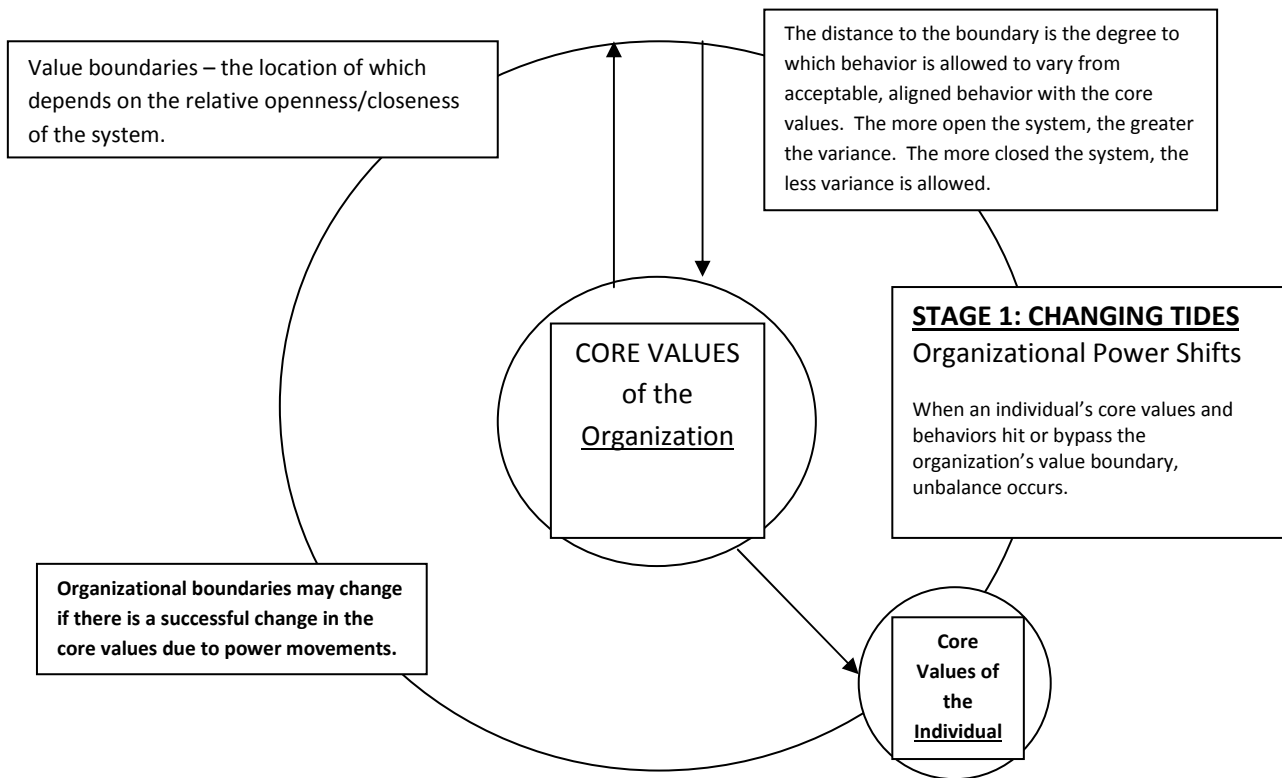


Figure 2. Changing tides refers to the constant dynamics of power shifting at both the organizational and individual levels. Unbalance and boundary changes may occur as a result.

**Organizational dynamics**

The balancing/unbalancing movements of changing tides are a persistent and continuously present dynamic of the social organization. From the perspective of the organization as a whole, these movements are either a type of cycling or spiraling. Whereas both cycling and spiraling are variations of the balancing/unbalancing behavior of changing tides, they are separate concepts with unique variations to themselves.

**Cycling.**

Changing tides implies movement. Balancing and unbalancing are the movements within the organization as it moves around core values. The way organizations move may be conceptualized as “cycling.” Cycling is a reoccurring behavior such as moving in and out, flipping, or spinning and has the property of repetitive behaviors. These behaviors may bring the organization back to the same place. Cycling behaviors may occur at the same speed, or they may increase or decrease in speed, but there is always a temporal element associated with a cycle.

There are three common forms of cycling. These are described as “moving in and out,” “flipping,” and “spinning.” These are all related forms of movement that social organizations experience, each having specific characteristics, as presented below.

***Moving in and out.***

One of the common cycle behaviors of workplace organizations is that of “moving in and out” which is the cyclical pattern of entering (hiring cycle), length of tenure (the time of employment), and separation (retirement cycles). The moving in and out cycle does not just refer to the number of people in each of these behaviors, but the repetition and timing, or the velocity, of the cycle. The amplitude, or size, of the moving in and out cycle, measured by the

number of people involved, relates to the degree to which the organization is open or closed discussed earlier. Therefore, the larger the amplitude of the moving in and out cycle, the more open the organization tends to be and vice versa.

In most higher education workplaces there is a very specific hiring cycle that is related to the academic calendar. For example, hiring is planned in the fall, recruitment is launched in the winter, interviewing begins in the spring with job offers made late spring/early summer, and employment beginning mid to late summer. Hiring cycles are also an example of a type of normalizing behavior as discussed earlier. The process of bringing new members into the organization is a means of reinforcing core values, if those that enter the organization are perceived by the majority of organizational members to support the same core values.

Additionally, the timing and act of hiring tend to be normalizing. Members of the social organization are reassured that the organization is secure when the hiring cycle is taking place and the timing is basically the same. Changes tend to signal something being different and potentially a threat. For example, a department that is not allowed to hire during one of the cycles, despite a need or desire to hire, will view the prohibition as a decrease in their relative power. When the entire organization implements a hiring freeze, the majority of the members experience this as a threat to the continuance of the regular workplace events, with the potential threat of ending the system, depending on the degree and the length of the freeze.

The threat of changes to the normal hiring cycle also occurs with changes to the length of employment. This directly relates to the degree to which the organization is open or closed, as discussed earlier, with the longer the cycle of employment, the more closed the organization. If there is a change, for example, the organization experiences members leaving after only a few years instead of a few decades, this change tends to signal a threat. Or, if terminating an

organizational member's employment for cause is experienced by others as a significant and generally rare event, and then this type of event becomes more and more frequent, the organization members will perceive a threat to their value of secure and continued employment. Similarly, organization members who are involuntarily transferred to another site or to a different department are often quickly viewed by other organization members as inferior in some aspect if transferring is not a common behavior within the employment cycle.

Another aspect of the length of employment cycle is associated with the potential of power accumulation. The longer one is employed, the greater may be the perceived power of the person, which may additionally be related to the "positional power" of the person. Positional power is the institutional power that is associated with particular employment titles and positions, with the higher the position in the organization, the greater the potential positional power. For example, the longer a faculty member is employed, the greater may be the perceived power that person has, which will be demonstrated in the deference paid to the person, the attention and influence of the individual's words and acts, and the tendency to award these individuals publically for length of service.

An individual with greater positional power, such as a president, will also experience increases in power as the length of employment increases and at a greater rate than the faculty member due to the difference in the positional power. Thus, a president will enter the social organization with a degree of deference, attention, and influence far greater than the faculty member's at his or her entry, but the president, just as the faculty member, will continue to accrue power the longer he/she remains employed in that position.

Retiring cycles are not quite as regular in timing as hiring cycles, with retirement in higher education organizations occurring at any time during the year, but generally more faculty

members will retire at the end of the academic year. The size of the retirement cycle, or the amplitude, may lead to an unbalancing of the organization and subsequently to power changes. This is experienced when the amplitude is larger than normal. One of the participants in this study described this event as creating a vacuum in the organization due to the abnormally large number of members retiring in one cycle.

***Flipping.***

Another behavioral form of cycling is “flipping.” Flipping is the act of turning over or reversing. Flipping may be understood in several manners. The changing of tides implies that power is moving and that certain members or groups within a social organization will always be experiencing increasing or decreasing relative power. Flipping would be a means to describe when one member’s or group’s relative power changes, that is, it either flips to increasing or flips to decreasing.

Flipping is not only a property of cycling behaviors that characterize changing tides in a system, but flipping is also a property of some of the tactics employed once the organization is unbalanced and realigning behaviors begin. This will be detailed in the next stage of the theory.

***Spinning.***

A final behavioral form of cycling is “spinning.” Spinning refers to rotating and turning, but has the additional property of bias. One type of spinning behavior is turning the description of an event around in order to bias the interpretation of the event. This is a circular logic process, intentional or not, and leads to bias. Journalists are often described as, and even accused of, intentionally spinning news stories to create a greater level of interest rather than providing a more objective recitation of the facts.

Spinning behaviors that occur in workplace organizations include this same type of interpretation bias which may be used to jockey for power and optimize assets. Additionally, spinning is observed in other tactics of realigning, such as flipping, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Spiraling.**

“Spiraling” is the second type of balancing/unbalancing movement that social organizations may experience during changing tides. While similar to cycling, spiraling is differentiated by behaviors that specifically take the system to a different endpoint.<sup>4</sup> While cycling may lead the organization back to the same point, spiraling never does. Spiraling has the additional property of a specific velocity characteristic. Spiraling behaviors increase in velocity, in other words, the speed of the behaviors increases.

Changing tides is the general concept of how social organizations are continually experiencing the dynamics of power movements, whereas spiraling is a more specific concept that explains how organizations may move to new power configurations. Spiraling may lead to an increasing rate of power loss or an increasing rate of power gain. These new power configurations may then result in a shift and a change in core values.

### ***Snowballing.***

“Snowballing” is the specific variation of spiraling where the curve, or the turning behavior, is constantly increasing only. Therefore, the object is actually getting farther and farther away from the starting point. An example of snowballing is when an individual who is perceived to be out of alignment with the organizational core values begins to react, but in each and every reaction the members of the organization with relatively more power deem the actions

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<sup>4</sup> This is conceptually akin to the mathematical understanding of what a spiral is, being defined as a curve that constantly increases or decreases in size, therefore no point on the curve is repeated.

to be increasingly in conflict with their core values. The individual eventually snowballs out of the organization, leaving or separating from the system completely.

### **Individual dynamics**

As discussed above, changing tides refers to the dynamics of value-based social organizations such as workplaces. All these various types of dynamic patterns are associated with power changes, as power movements are the most basic dynamic of changing tides. Thus, from the perspective of the organization as a whole, there are changing tides dynamics.

These movements also occur at the individual level. Conceptually, changing tides is akin to the type of repeating patterns at varying levels that the concept of fractals describes. Within social organizations, each organizational member will experience and behave in balancing/unbalancing manners. This individual-level dynamic is conceptualized as gathering power.

#### **Gathering power.**

“Gathering power” is behavior that influences the degree of one’s power within the social organization, intentionally or unintentionally. Gathering power behaviors will tend to be cyclical, or may spiral, and are a continuous characteristic of social organizations. Therefore, gathering power is a constant dynamic that feeds the constant changing of tides. All participants in this study discussed dynamic power issues of individuals and their relationship to the structure of the social organizations of workplaces.

Within higher education organizations, a frequent description of power distribution is that of distinguishing whether or not the workplace is faculty-run or administration-run. Faculty versus administration is a common us versus them division that employees within educational institutions observe and experience in their workplaces. This traditional division, with its

pejorative connotations – *going over to the dark side* when moving from faculty into administration versus *retreating* when moving into faculty ranks from administration – is also clearly identified with power components. Although the faculty members are almost always the greatest in number, the perception is almost always that the administration has more power.

There are multiple methods by which to gather power. Five common patterns of gathering power are “jockeying for power,” “accessing power,” “voting for a savior,” “having a protector,” and finally, “power shifting.” Power shifting behaviors include “changing the guard,” “shoring-up,” and “asset optimizing.” All participants discussed the means by which they attempted to gather power to support their own core values. Each of the five patterns of gathering power is described below, including the relationships between these behaviors.

#### ***Jockeying for power.***

In each of the variations of gathering power, there is always present a common element of “jockeying for power,” which is moving, doing, or shifting to continually try to increase one’s power. This is a variation of the constant dynamics of social organizations that have been discussed as changing tides and balancing/unbalancing. Jockeying for power is what the politically astute do consciously and continually. But even those members of the organization that are politically naïve demonstrate the same behaviors, albeit more unintentionally. All members of an organization are constantly seeking to protect and promote their values, leading to the shifting and sorting of jockeying for power behaviors.

#### ***Accessing power.***

“Accessing power” is the degree to which an individual is able to access those in the organization who have power to support that individual and his/her goals and values. For example, a faculty member has direct access to a dean, but generally not to the president of the



institution. Someone with direct access to higher authority will have the potential of gathering more power. Therefore, the greater one's access to power, the greater is the probability that one may influence those in power. Having greater influence may lead to creating perceptions that serve one's own specific interests and support one's own core values. Those with the most direct access to power are those who are more likely to gain support for their individual values at a larger organizational level and may be more able to trigger realignment when they feel others are not aligned with their values.

As in the example of the faculty member's direct access to a dean, there is a dimension of accessing power that is determined by an individual's location in the organization and what structural barriers may exist and increase or decrease access to power. Location and structure may have very important consequences. For example, California legislation provides a legal mandate for faculty participation in governance, known commonly as "AB 1725." Further, some local academic senates have interpreted this legislation as providing them direct access to the locally elected boards of trustees. Therefore, the location, being a faculty member, and the structure, legally mandated participation, allow faculty members the possibility of much greater access to power. This increases the potential power of the faculty itself within the governance structure of the organization.

An additional structural example may exist when organizational members are unionized. Within higher education, the largest numbers of organizational members are faculty members. This may allow the local unions to accumulate significant resources. If unions use these resources to influence those with more positional power in the organization, such as making significant campaign contributions to locally elected board members, then faculty members may enjoy enhanced access to power.

Some organizations follow a strict chain-of-command power structure. This ensures that those at the bottom of the chain will always be the furthest from power and the least able to influence the system. Those furthest from power tend to perceive themselves as powerless. Even if those furthest from power are the most numerous members in an organization, they still have the least power. In all educational systems, the largest number of members is usually students, yet they often are viewed as the least powerful. This is partially explained as students have direct access to instructors and if individual instructors do not wield significant power in the system, this structure impedes the students from having influences themselves. Further, students do not generally see themselves as having direct access to administrators, other than in exceptional circumstances, such as a grievance.

Other types of organizations such as military bodies provide an excellent example of the chain-of-command structure that blocks the individual private, at the bottom of the chain, from nearly any influence to the overall system. Therefore, the structure of the organization is a major determinant of the ability for any given individual to access power.

Regardless of the organizational structure, jockeying for power is observed within accessing power by trying to move to another location in the organization with more power. For example, a faculty member may try to become the department chair which may provide more power and influence. Or a member of the organization may try to become a member of a committee, such as the academic senate, so he/she will have more direct access to other members that he/she perceives to have more power and the ability to help support one's values. These movements to obtain greater access to power are often observable and occur continually.

***Voting for a savior.***

“Voting for a savior” is a variation of gathering power whereby organizational members work to bring into the system someone who is believed capable of influencing the organization and its values. This could be via a hiring process, elections, or other means. In this study’s higher education dataset, this strategy was described in terms of hiring administrators and electing board members as these positions tend to be associated with greater power in the structure of the organizations.

Voting for a savior has the added dimension of allowing appeals to the savior once the savior is effectively within the organization. For example, serving on an administrator’s hiring committee allows organizational members to influence what type of person will be employed. Committee members will try to move forward those candidates that best represent the individual member’s values.

Getting on the hiring committee and then trying to influence committee decisions would all be examples of how jockeying for power is present within the behavior of voting for a savior. The jockeying behavior may even become quite extreme as individuals engage in tug-of-war-type behaviors as they try to influence the decision of which candidates will be considered for final evaluation.

Once the administrator, or the potential savior, is in place, organizational members who feel their values align with the new administrator will then appeal to the administrator to maintain, protect, and defend those values. This may be particularly true of organizational members who served on the hiring committee. Therefore, voting for and appealing to a savior are another means of attempting to gather power to support one’s own core values.

***Having a protector.***

“Having a protector” is a concept that many participants described. This concept refers to an interpersonal relationship in which an individual in the organization is aligned with a colleague with more power and that colleague is seen as helping protect the individual who may be perceived as not sharing the organizational core values. Having an inner circle is a variation on having a protector and refers to a group of individuals in the organization who share common values and are seen to protect one another. Creating an inner circle is another example of jockeying for power as individuals move back and forth in their interpersonal alignments based on their perceptions of furthering their own goals.

Often, when a new member joins an organization, his/her protector is his /her direct supervisor who is generally viewed as the most influential person in hiring the new member. When the protector leaves the organization, the individual may become vulnerable to pressure to realign if the individual is perceived as not sharing the organizational core values. This same potential vulnerability is created if the inner circle is dismantled.

The loss of a protector or inner circle, and the ensuing vulnerability represents another opportunity where jockeying for power seems to appear. Individuals that were once protected are perceived to have less power. If an individual loses a protector or inner circle, then the individual will often feel abandoned and alone. One means of overcoming these feelings is to effectively jockey for power. These individuals may try to relocate themselves in the organization so as to increase power, an accessing power behavior. They may also try to create an inner circle to increase their power or try to vote for a savior if that opportunity exists.

***Power shifting.***

“Power shifting” is the actualization of a real or perceived change in power within the social organization. The most common means of shifting power is changing numbers. Increasing the number of people that support and share a common value increases the power of that group and the potential to perpetuate the common value. This is similar to the concept of having a protector and creating an inner circle. Losing people that support the same value has the opposite effect.

However, successfully increasing the number of people in the organization that share a common value as a means to shift power will also depend on the location of these people in the organization. For example, members of hiring committees will seek to hire someone that will share the department’s values and if these values are not well-understood and agreed to by the majority of the department members, there may ensue significant jockeying for power, both to get on the hiring committee and then once on, between the hiring committee members themselves. But, if the hiring committee members have less power due to their position within the organization, then the hiring of additional members to their department may not create a power shift unless the total number of new hires is so great that it becomes effective in creating change. Conversely, if the hiring committee members have more positional power per person relative to other organizational members and the new hire is for a position with significant power, such as a president, then the hiring of just one more system member may create a power shift. This implies a variation of power shifting behavior.

In fact, there are several distinct variations of power shifting. These are “changing of the guard,” “shoring-up,” and “asset optimizing.” Each of these variations will be presented below.

*Changing of the guard.*

“Changing of the guard” is the process of coming into the top slot of positional power. This is realized when an organization hires or elects a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), such as a president, a superintendent, or a chancellor, examples from the educational realm. Because of a CEO’s positional power, and depending on the structure of the system, a new CEO has the ability to influence and actually change core values. This could involve moving the organization back to previous core values or forward to new core values. A new CEO may also affect the boundaries of the organization.

This could happen in several manners. First, a new CEO usually has the final decision or participates in the final decision of hiring new employees – if not all employees, and generally those that are recognized to have significant positional power. Using this hiring authority, which includes veto ability, a new CEO can directly influence who comes into the organization, as well as the velocity and the quantity of hiring. These speed and quantity considerations will influence the ability to enter and exit the system as well as the size of the system, thereby influencing the boundaries of the organization.

Second, a new CEO may use his/her positional power and other sources of power to change the core values of the organization. Doing so may also shift the boundaries of the organization if the boundaries of acceptable behavior depend on the core value itself. For example, if a CEO works to change the workplace’s values so that they are of a more publically recognized moral nature, this would tend to bring boundaries in closer and individuals who were not out of bounds before the changing of the guard could find themselves outside the boundaries, creating an unbalance that would trigger realigning behaviors.

An example was described from a community college setting, where a participant realized that the new president did not support department uniqueness more than equity and fair distribution of resources. The participant who had enjoyed a unique resource allocation for a long period of time was suddenly found to be out of bounds and on the receiving end of realigning behaviors.

Changing of the guard, therefore, has significant potential to lead to power shifting. If power shifting occurs, there will most likely be a great deal of power jockeying among members when a CEO hiring committee is created and then among the members on that committee. If the CEO is appointed rather than hired via a participatory committee process, the jockeying may be more covert as those with the appointment authority are sought out and solicited to support various individual and group values. These behaviors tend to decrease in direct relation to the decrease in the positional power of the CEO and vice versa.

*Shoring-up.*

“Shoring-up” is a core variable from another grounded theory that has been used to explain the behaviors of those with positional power due to support groups, with the primary example being elected politicians (Patnode, 2004). The concept of shoring-up may be viewed as a specific variation of the concept of power shifting. Shoring-up has the unique purpose of protecting the power of those that have positional power within a social organization.

Shoring-up is a variation of power shifting as those with positional power are constantly employing tactics to maintain, and ideally increase, their power, while working to assure that opposite movements seeking to shift power away from them do not occur. Again, jockeying for power is at play as shoring-up is a continuous process that entails a constant back- and- forth movement of members in a system all trying to influence the power distribution.

According to Patnode's (2004, p. 39) theory of shoring-up, once there has been an effective changing of the guard, the new CEO will begin to employ shoring-up tactics should the three conditions of "tension," "disequilibrium," and "threat of derailment" arise. Within the context of the theory of realigning, these conditions will all be present once a member or a group of the organization hits or bypasses a core value boundary.

*Asset optimizing.*

"Asset optimizing" is another specific variation of power shifting. It is the behavior of using the power in an organization to optimize one's position, power, and values, one's professional assets. Individuals who are successful at asset optimizing tend to be more politically astute. They understand the organization, they understand the power structure, and they understand the changing of tides within the organization. These individuals generally place high value in self-advancement/enhancement as opposed to values that emphasize self-transcendence and the welfare of others. Asset optimizing behaviors intentionally aim to shift power, and when successful, they do shift power.

An example of asset optimizing was a faculty member's successful campaign to rally over fifty other faculty members to his own individual cause by broadening the stated purpose of the rally to an us versus them conflict between faculty members and members of the administration. The single faculty member's specific issue most likely would not have successfully served to rally others, but by understanding the changing tides of power between faculty and administration and using that tactic, the single faculty member was able to significantly increase his own position in the organization and successfully increase his power to save his own goal.



Jockeying for power is very similar to the concept of asset optimizing and is a dimension of it. Asset optimizing will always include the jockeying for power behaviors, but asset optimizing is more intentional. Jockeying for power is not always done with very clear goals and objectives in mind, but rather is a more generalized behavior that individuals will engage in, even unconsciously, as all members of the system have a basic human desire of belonging and will naturally move or jockey themselves toward others and into situations that support their individual values. Asset optimizing individuals jockey for power in a very conscious and intentional manner and not only look to belong but to dominate.

### **Summary**

In summary, the first stage of the realigning process is the process of changing tides leading to changes in power in a social organization. Changes in power may then lead to changes and conflicts in one or some of the members' behavior in terms of their core values in relationship to the core values of those members with relatively more power. The values of the members with relatively more power will be or become the organizational core values. These behaviors are not simple, linear, or rational. Sometimes these behaviors are conscious, but not necessarily. Therefore, the conceptualization of changing tides includes the concepts of balancing, jockeying, gathering, shifting, cycling, and spiraling. All these concepts are similar as they connote a constant state of flux rather than the concept of steady-state equilibrium. Further, the changing tides phenomenon is a trigger. Once the tides have changed to create an unbalanced organization, meaning a core value boundary has been reached or breached, then specific behaviors of realignment will begin. This is the second stage in the theory of realigning.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Countering – The Second Stage of Realigning**

The second stage of realigning is countering. Countering is the use of specific behavioral strategies or tactics as a defensive reaction to behaviors of others that are perceived as a threat to the core values of those employing the strategies/tactics. This is an organizational response, but is carried out by individuals in the organization. However, the individuals performing the countering behaviors always see themselves as working to preserve or realign the organization. Those countering do not perceive their behaviors as being just about themselves individually or in isolation from the organization. A common statement from the participants of this study was how much they loved the university or college they worked at and that this affinity for the organization was the basis or justification for their behaviors.

The first step in the process of countering is “targeting.” The threat is identified. There are three necessary conditions that help identify the target/threat. These are “naivety,” “exceptionalism,” and “idealism.” The second step in the process of countering, after identifying the target, is employing realigning countermeasures. There are three variations of countermeasures. These tactics are “erosion” measures, “isolation” measures, and “separation” measures. Finally, there is a variation of countermeasures that is used to promote certain organization-stabilizing behaviors – not to realign behavior. Furthermore, these stabilizing measures are an outcome of the realigning countermeasures. Stabilizing measures represent a third step. These concepts are presented below.

#### **Step 1: Targeting**

For countering behaviors to begin, there must be identification of a threat toward which the realigning countermeasure will be directed. This is “targeting.” The target may be an individual or a group of individuals. For the purposes of this theoretical description the target

will generally be referred to as an individual, this being the most common pattern to emerge from the dataset.

### **Conditions of targeting.**

There are three necessary conditions for targeting to occur. The first of these is naivety. The second is exceptionalism. The third is idealism. Each of these conditions has particular properties and variations. While these conditions are necessary, they are not both necessary and sufficient. Sufficiency is achieved when the target actually reaches or breaches a core value boundary.

### ***Naivety.***

The first necessary condition of targeting is “naivety.” Naivety, as a condition of targeting, is being unaware of key characteristics of the social organization one is in. These key characteristics include the effective power structure and the true core values of others.

Naivety may occur because an individual is a relatively new member of the social organization and still learning the what, how, and whom of the organization, but naivety is not always coupled with newness. Therefore, newness may be a property of naivety but not necessarily. For example, several of the participants in this study were seen as naïve after having been in the same organization for a period of years. The common reason for this latent naivety was that these participants did not understand the true core values of others. They assumed that others’ values mirrored their own until they actually found themselves having been targeted.

When an individual is naïve with respect to others’ core values, in particular the core values of those who have the most power in the organization, then the individual can easily act in manners that are seen as reaching or breaching core value boundaries. The naïve individual often does not even know he/she has done this.

Another key characteristic of an organization is the effective power structure which may not be the same as the perceived power structure. Understanding the effective power structure means understanding who in the organization can actually influence the behavior of others. For example, a CEO has a title and position of power, but the structure of the organization may allow for others to have more effective power than the CEO. Specifically, in an institution of higher education, the faculty members can effectively have more power than the CEO if they form a cohesive group. Votes of no confidence by academic senates are an example of faculty members working in this way. A CEO that does not understand the potential of this effective power is naïve and may be targeted.

***Exceptionalism.***

The second condition of targeting is “exceptionalism.” This condition has both the properties of being outstanding and being unusual. Exceptionalism is, therefore, not always a positive characteristic, but it is always specialness. Because specialness is always present, exceptionalism has the property of attracting.

***Attracting.***

“Attracting” is the ability to draw someone’s attention, to be noticed. Specialness, whether positive or negative, has the property of attracting notice. This is one of the properties of being targeted, that is, the target has to be identified; they have to be noticed to then become targeted. A key property of attracting is being visible. Anything that allows for or creates more visibility may increase the level of attracting.

There are many characteristics that create attracting. Some of those common to higher educational institutions are being recognized as very intelligent, being very accomplished in

terms of professional attainment such as research, publications, renown, and/or doing common things in a distinctly different way.

One means of signaling attraction is being a “cosmopolitan” versus a “local.” These terms describe a distinction of employee loyalties<sup>5</sup>. Locals are those organizational members who are loyal to their institution first and foremost. Cosmopolitans are those organizational members who are loyal first and foremost to their field of specialization and tend to move among other institutions, other workplaces, as they pursue research and other specialization advancement opportunities with the best in the field, not necessarily with those who work at the same institution.

Cosmopolitans’ opportunities and opportunism may not mesh with local interests<sup>6</sup>. In other words, the core values of these two groups may be in conflict, and cosmopolitans tend to attract attention as they very publically pursue advancement and recognition within their field, which may include grants, internal and other resources<sup>7</sup>. The cosmopolitan versus local distinction may be readily observed among faculty members, primarily at universities that are heavily research-oriented. However, the concept is generalizable and the cosmopolitan distinction, which is a means to signal attraction, may occur in many other types of workplaces.

Within this study, three key variations of attracting emerged. They are position, being a loose cannon, and gender. Each of these variations create an attracting opportunity, and if coupled with any one or more of the characteristics discussed above, such as high intelligence, doing things differently, or being a cosmopolitan, will increase the degree to which an individual will become attractive and a potential target.

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<sup>5</sup> “Cosmopolitan” and “local” concepts were developed by both Merton (1957) and Gouldner (1957) with specific reference to university faculty members. Also, see Glaser’s (1993, pp. 466 - 483) use of these concepts.

<sup>6</sup> Twale and De Luca (2008) contend that this is the case, particularly among higher education faculty members.

<sup>7</sup> Another aspect of the cosmopolitan/local distinction is that cosmopolitans may become locals after they have achieved their goal of advancement and recognition. See Glaser (1964) for an in-depth study of these behaviors.

*Position.*

An individual's formal employment position may, in and of itself, create an opportunity for attracting. For example, positional power, as described earlier, refers to the recognized institutional power that is associated with particular employment titles, the CEO having the most positional power in most workplace organizations. Generally, the higher one's level administratively, the greater the level of potential power associated with that level and the fewer peers one will have. A common expression among CEOs is that "it's lonely at the top." More power, and fewer peers, tends to make an individual more visible, therefore more attractive.

An idiomatic expression that illustrates the attracting quality of position is "having a target on one's back." The implication is that only those in positions of power are targeted, and the target is visible. Of course, this expression takes targeting one step further and implies that people will shoot from behind, which is similar to the idea of backstabbing, a behavior that will be discussed below as a specific countering tactic.

Therefore, by the simple fact of what position an individual occupies in the organization, they may be more or less attractive. The higher the position administratively, the fewer the number of peers, the more the attracting potential. If an individual is one of many, for example one of many faculty members, there is less attracting potential. But if an individual faculty member moves to a leadership position, such as the academic senate presidency, he/she becomes much more visible, has positional power, fewer peers, and, again, is then more attractive.

*Being a loose cannon.*

Another variation of attracting is "being a loose cannon." The expression "loose cannon" is nautical in origin and literally refers to a cannon that breaks loose in a battle or storm and causes damage to the ship and its crew. By extension, the idiomatic expression of being a loose

cannon is an individual whose actions are unpredictable, uncontrollable, and causes damage to one's own faction, political party, or other defined group. Once the loose cannon behaviors become visible, the attracting property becomes present and the individual is more likely to be targeted.

The higher the positional power of the individual perceived as a loose cannon, the greater will be the level of concern expressed by organizational members. For example, a CEO of any higher education body such as a college or university, a faculty senate or union, who is viewed as acting unpredictably and uncontrollably, will tend to be very quickly targeted. This is because the potential damage the individual may cause to the organization is increased due to the positional power property that augments the loose cannon behaviors.

A complicating variation of being a loose cannon is when the individual is also naïve. Such individuals often do not think that their actions are unpredictable or uncontrollable. In several datasets of this study, individuals who were perceived by others as being loose cannons saw themselves as activists. Their self-image was one of taking a bold stand to defend the core values of the college or the university. They saw themselves as setting an example of how others should behave as well. This illustrates another value conflict as the same individual is perceived as a loose cannon by those who do not share that individual's core values, but as an activist by those who do.

#### *Gender.*

A third variation of attracting that emerged from this study was that of "gender." The issue of gender is a complex one, including any consensus as to exactly what the definition of gender is and accordingly how many specific gender distinctions exist.<sup>8</sup> Even with the most basic binary understanding of male versus female gender, gender is an important factor in

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<sup>8</sup> For an in-depth presentation of gender, particularly how gender is situated in systems, see Kramer (2011).

recognizing and describing attracting. In this study nearly all participants described their experiences with specific references to gender.

In some workplaces, there may be a type of gender imbalance. For example, one workplace studied had just hired the first female faculty member. This creates an obvious example of exceptionalism and visibility based on gender. Another less drastic imbalance is when there is a perceived power shift occurring from one gender to another, in most cases power moving from men to women. In this case, the women may become targets of men, as the power shift is something special and is a potential threat.

Stokes and Klein (2008) stated that the majority of faculty members who are targeted and become victims of workplace emotional assault are women. They also stated the majority of the perpetrators are women as well. The majority of participants to this study were women; however, all participants, men included, brought up gender issues related to their experiences in the workplace. Therefore, this study identifies gender as an issue, but cannot confirm that it is primarily a women's issue alone.

Gender may be related to positional power as well. If the majority of higher administrative positions are held by men, the introduction of a woman, particularly at the CEO level, increases the visibility and specialness properties of attracting with the implication that the CEO is now more vulnerable to being targeted.

Additionally, gender may be seen to be associated with the concept of having a protector. In the majority of cases from the dataset, the protector was a man. Female members of the social organization may come to associate men with power in the organization as potential protectors more readily than women, particularly when most positional power is held by men.



Another variation seen in the datasets was that of opposing gender. Men tended to target women more and men perceived they were targeted more by women. Women tended to target men more, women perceived they were targeted more by men, and women tended to have more men as protectors. Therefore, what appears to be happening is an oppositional behavior, a type of dichotomy between genders, but not a single gender discrimination issue where one gender is always the target.

***Idealism.***

“Idealism” is the third condition of targeting. Idealism is the aspiration to or living in accordance with high standards or principles.

Idealism is an important condition of targeting as it is the idealistic individual’s values that become unaligned with the core values of others in the organization. But idealists are far more likely to believe that their high standards are the best standards and will be less likely to change or compromise those standards. Coupled with naivety, idealists do not even understand that their values conflict with others’ values and the conflict will have the potential to deepen and intensify. Every individual in the study exhibited a high degree of idealism.

***Crusading.***

An important variation of idealism is the concept of “crusading.” According to Wang (2007), crusaders are actively trying to effect change based on what they hold to be high moral standards. “Those individuals who feel compelled by beliefs...to achieve certain goals have a strong desire to engage in *crusading*” (Wang, 2007, p. 24).

Crusaders are, perhaps, the ultimate idealists. They are compelled to act based on beliefs and will continue to crusade even when they cannot achieve their goals. One of the strategies used when crusading is overlooking or *ignoring* setbacks and failures. In fact, crusaders not only

overlook, they are naïve and do not even see some of their failures due to ignorance. Wang (2007) explains that crusaders simply toss aside setbacks because they want to continue their crusading. To ignore or toss aside setbacks is to disregard information generated in reaction to the behaviors of the crusader. This demonstrates that the crusader is naïve as defined in this study. The crusader does not understand the power distribution in the organization and is ignoring setbacks which are due to countering measures employed by others who do not share the core values of the crusader. Crusading idealists may be naively ignorant of understanding just where friend and foe lie.

To sum up, once the three conditions of naivety, exceptionalism, and idealism have been met targeting begins. Once the target has been identified, the countering measures to realign begin to be employed.

### **Step 2: Countering Tactics and Strategies: Creating Realigning**

Countermeasures include many behaviors that occur in response to the behaviors of a target that conflict with others' core values. These tactics and strategies all have the purpose of defending against the perceived threat of the targeted individual. These measures are not only defensive; they share the goal of working to bring the organization into alignment with the core values of those with the most power. Therefore, these measures seek to create realigning.

Given that values are affective, using emotional ploys is an often effective strategy when working to affect realigning to values. The countering tactics and strategies are experienced emotionally and generally experienced negatively. The effectiveness of emotional ploys is illustrated by the common pattern of fear that emerged from within the datasets. Fear is a very effective tactic to keep individuals aligned to the organizational core values as it may be used to

marginalize those who are perceived to be threatening those values. Essentially, the successful employment of fear will stymie and possibly completely stop an individual's behavior.

One example of this was the perception of a tenured faculty member that the department chair had literally "scared shitless" a colleague that the chair found to not be up to the desired standard of instruction, which was one of the chair's core values. The chair was able to employ fear via the power of being able to create and alter faculty members' teaching schedules. In this manner, the chair could reward and punish, which created the environment of fear. For the chair, this was a means to assure quality and uphold what the chair believed the common core value should be for the entire group. The chair did not perceive doing anything inappropriate or out of proportion because the chair's personal perception was that he was defending the core values.

Using rational, objective reasoning is often not as effective as emotional countering tactics. In many of the datasets, the participants described how they tried to use reason to resolve the conflict and in each instance the participant reported that this approach did not have the desired effect and the conflict remained.

Countering tactics and strategies may be sorted into three primary categories: erosion tactics, isolation tactics, and separation tactics. These countermeasures may be employed sequentially or simultaneously, but generally there will be a progression through erosion and isolation tactics before using separation tactics. Additionally, snowballing may occur as the use of countermeasures increases in scope and velocity. Each of these categories and their relationships is detailed below.

#### **Eroding tactics.**

"Eroding tactics" all aim to reduce or erode the power and influence of the target. In a sequential employment of tactics, eroding would generally be the first to be used. There are three

primary categories of eroding tactics. These are “asset flipping,” “playing dirty,” and “whittling away.” Each of these primary categories has further variations.

*Asset flipping.*

“Asset flipping” is a very common tactic and is the process and behavior by which previous strengths or assets are revalued and now become weaknesses; the assets are effectively flipped over to their opposite. This is a type of revaluing process that leads to devaluing. The behaviors of the target, once devalued, or flipped, are now seen as problematic as they are not in line with others’ core values.

One participant’s experience revealed, “At first, I found Kathy’s [pseudonym] management style effective and clever,..., However, I later found out that another element of [her] plan including Kathy using me as the “fall guy.” This clearly demonstrates the manner in which the target’s (Kathy’s) assets were revalued and then devalued, or flipped from asset to liability.

Asset flipping may be a very common realigning tactic because it appeals to the values of system members, or their affective understanding, as well as to their more intellectual understanding. This is due to the probability that when the target was hired, the individual was perceived as having value, being worthy of being added to the organization, and assumed to be in alignment with the most important core values of the organization. In order for this to change, the organizational members’ affective and intellectual opinions need to change. Asset flipping allows this. Even though targets were initially viewed as having at least some assets at the time of hire, and may have gone through a multi-level, thorough hiring process, which helped ensure that their assets were known and considered of value, something changed. These individuals

may be viewed as requiring asset flipping so that more members see them as a threat and understand why they have been targeted.

If an individual does not go through a rigorous hiring process that involves a group of organizational members in the process, the newly hired individual is in a much more vulnerable position and may have to prove to the group that he/she has valuable assets and will strengthen the organizational core values and will not unbalance the organization. If these individuals were never perceived as possessing valuable assets before they were targeted, asset flipping may not be necessary.

Asset flipping is also one example of the cyclical nature of behaviors within the realigning process. This is a simple cycle with only two phases: first, assets are of value, particularly when one is first brought into an organization; second, when the unaligned behaviors become apparent and conditions lead to targeting, the assets are flipped to liabilities. In this study, the cycle generally stopped at the end of the second phase, the flip.

Some behavioral properties of asset flipping include “insulting,” “being shot down,” and “being condemned.” These behavioral properties may be overt or covert. Each of these properties may be viewed as the same behavior but at differing levels of intensity or degree. Therefore, not all behavioral properties are necessarily employed. A single member using these behaviors of asset flipping will generally use them in a sequential manner, but there is no specific temporal process across a group of organizational members. These behavioral properties may be employed simultaneously or sequentially by a group of organizational members engaged in asset flipping.

*Insulting.*

“Insulting,” which is the act of being offensive or showing contempt for the target, is extremely common. This is the property with the lowest degree of intensity. It may be viewed as a relatively mild form of asset flipping. Those members that are insulting to the target do not perceive their own behavior as being inappropriate or unprofessional. Instead, they see the target as deserving insults. The target does not behave in alignment with the others’ core values. Therefore, the target is less significant than others, deserving of insults, and of being put down as they are already “down” in terms of perceived values.

*Being shot down.*

“Being shot down” is very similar to insulting but is a variation on insulting in which the behavior is more aggressive and at a higher degree of intensity. A single member using asset flipping may move from insulting to shooting down the target if the member sees that the insulting act had little effect on the target. The act of being shot down goes a step further than an offensive comment. Shooting down employs more emotionally laden language, and remarks about the target tend to be angry and extremely sharp with the purpose of reducing any positive image of the target.

*Being condemned.*

The most intense means of insulting is to “condemn” the target. A target is being condemned when other organizational members find the target to be guilty, unacceptable, to blame, and worthy of being banned. When being condemned, the target is subjected to extremely emotional attacks. One of the participants in this study was said to be “ungodly,” lapsing into ungodly behaviors. Ungodly, or not revering God, means to behave in a manner that violates moral strictures, behaving wickedly. This was an extreme insult, akin to being

condemned, because the target was employed in a religious seminary where ungodliness was the highest level of insult.

*Playing dirty.*

Another type of erosion tactic is “playing dirty.” Playing dirty behaviors are those that are perceived by the target as deceptive. These actions violate acceptable standards of professional behavior according to the understanding of the target. However, those employing these tactics do not perceive their behavior as unacceptable.

Again, just as in asset flipping, the “perpetrators,” those employing erosion strategies, see themselves as defending the system’s core values and therefore absolutely doing what they must do to keep their professional realm morally intact. These perpetrators, or self-perceived activists, may acknowledge that they have resorted to extreme measures compared to the typical everyday workplace behaviors, but they may feel that the normal processes used to deal with a threat are not working. One participant stated that “the system was broken” and therefore he was compelled to use more drastic means to try to correct the threat of the unaligned target.

*Being set up.*

Two variations of playing dirty are “being set up” and “backstabbing.” When the target is placed in a compromising position, with the goal of being caught and blamed, the target has been set up. The target sees the setup as being done deceptively. Thus, others are playing dirty. The target may also feel that being set up has become extreme. Everything the target does is under severe scrutiny. In effect, there is a feeling of being spied upon. Others are continually trying to find any behavior that will allow them to set up and blame the target. In this situation, targets will feel they are being held to a different, higher standard than others and that there is

nothing they can do that will be perceived as acceptable. Individuals subjected to being set up become angry, resentful, and wary.

*Backstabbing.*

Backstabbing is a variation of being set up. Backstabbing is the act of betraying someone by doing something harmful to that person after having pretended to be a friend, ally, or supporter of the person. Backstabbing moves being set up to a higher degree of deception as perceived by the targeted individual. Now targets do not even know who their friends are, with whom they share the same core values. Backstabbing performed by someone the target previously held in high esteem is often very emotionally harmful to the target. Backstabbing may severely erode the target's perceived public power as well as the target's personally perceived individual value. A very effective, highly emotionally harmful practice of backstabbing may lead targets to self-isolate in an attempt to protect themselves from other acts of deception.

*Whittling away.*

The third type of erosion tactics are those of "whittling away." This a slow, continuous, process of using behaviors that are intended to erode, or chip away, the power and influence of targets, to slowly and progressively emotionally harm targets, with the goal of marginalizing targets so that they become irrelevant, or so that the targets see they themselves must change.

Whittling away is a temporal concept as it happens gradually over time and may occur for years. The velocity of these behaviors is not necessarily linear. Whittling away can take on a cycling speed, sometimes faster or slower, or it can move increasingly faster or slower. The velocity depends on different characteristics of the system and the target.



However, if targets have the ability to stay in the organization as long as they like, and there is an assumption that they will stay for a long time, then whittling away is a common strategy used as it can be easily employed in a covert manner and for a very long time. In higher educational institutions, tenured faculty members may maintain their employment with little risk of termination except for the most egregious behaviors such as those that are blatantly illegal. Unionization further protects the tenured faculty members' employment rights, which creates a situation where whittling away tactics may be seen as the best way to create a quasi-permanent state of unease for the target.

There are three types of whittling away tactics. The first is "pretending participation," which includes a variation of "going through the motions." The second is "stunting," and the third is "stonewalling." Each of these tactics may be used independently or simultaneously. There is no linear progression in their employment. Additionally, these tactics may be employed unintentionally by a large number of system members who just go along with others. These behaviors will be described below.

*Pretending participation.*

"Pretending participation" is the act of taking time to participate in organizational activities without actually operationalizing anything, even though decisions may have been made in the course of these activities. There is a conscious decision by at least one organizational member to prevent decisions from being executed, but the method of prevention is generally to just not do anything. Apathy, rather than actively blocking implementation is the preferred course of inaction.

For example, a common pretending participation activity is committee meetings. Decisions may be made, but nothing really gets done. At each meeting, the same conversation

takes place over and over again. Targeted individuals may want to push for a decision to do something that would support their values, and the committee may actually vote in favor of such activity, but nothing seems to happen. The de facto lack of implementation is a signal that the decision of the committee is not in alignment with the core values of those that have the power to actually operationalize the decision.

Pretending participation tactics may go on for years. An effective use of pretending participation is seen when committee participation naturally erodes to the point that no one is attending meetings and ultimately the committee, or other participation vehicle, ceases to even exist.

A variation of pretending participation is “going through the motions.” Going through the motions takes the apathy of pretending participation to a higher degree of intensity. With pretending participation, there actually are decisions made but they are not acted upon. They are apathetically ignored. Going through the motion tactics have the characteristic of no intent to even make a decision. Apathetic nonaction is greater and does not even allow the group to reach any sort of decision.

If the vehicle for going through the motions is a committee, the committee will discuss, debate, and consider, but in the end, no decision is reached and the most the committee members can say is that at least there was dialogue. Therefore, members may say there was participatory governance in evidence, but in fact, it was only participatory in going through the motions, as no decision allows for no implementation. Therefore, there is no real governance other than to maintain the status quo, which is the goal of those who are using this whittling away tactic against a target pushing for change that is inconsistent with others’ core values.

Pretending participation and going through the motions may lead to increasing frustration or apathy on the part of the target. The target may be a crusader, tending to be stubborn in maintaining hope that their crusading efforts will be successful, but these whittling away tactics will be effective if the target is continually thwarted. Being thwarted in their crusading efforts, may lead to disengaging by the target (Wang, 2007).

*Stunting.*

The second type of whittling away is “stunting.” Stunting tactics are defined here as those acts that restrict growth and change. They are acts employed to stymie, or hinder progress of the target. These thwarting tactics aim to restrict, but not necessarily block. Therefore the stunting is not a complete block, but a step in-between.

A common value of targets is growth, which implies change. If the core values of the system are conformity and security, the concept of growth is a threat. Change agents are generally not welcome. Within the concept of change agents there is a structural complication. Individuals that are hired into colleges and universities are routinely asked during the interview process what new ideas, methods, and changes they will bring to the organization. The new hire assumes that one of the main reasons he/she was hired was to enact some sort of positive change. However, once the individual enters the organization, the new hire may find that every attempt to grow or change is met with blocking behaviors that keep stunting the growth.

The stunting tactics are employed when the changes that the target is pushing to implement are not aligned with the system’s core values. The target, being naïve, may keep pushing, only to meet continual resistance. This resistance may continue as stunting acts, or it may accelerate into stonewalling.

Common stunting acts were described by participants as not being allowed to grow programs, being stymied via the complicated processes of trying to obtain resources to grow, ultimately not being able to secure as much funding as desired, and trying to effect change but feeling as though one would never be able to rise to a desired position to do so.

*Stonewalling.*

“Stonewalling” is a third type of whittling way. Stonewalling is intentionally engaging in delaying or stalling tactics. Stonewalling is related to pretending participation and going through the motions as these tactics also delay action. However, stonewalling is perceived as being more direct, more deliberate, a more obvious act to stall, and may be more overt. Stonewalling is also similar to stunting but is more extreme as the goal of stonewalling is to completely block, not just restrict, the basic goal of stunting.

Stonewalling may take the form of refusing to answer questions or provide information. It may take the form of refusing to cooperate in enacting or implementing decisions or requests. In all cases, the purpose of stonewalling is to block and delay.

A common core value of targeted individuals was their own perception of wanting to be collaborative. As such, stonewalling, which blocks cooperation, tends to lead to great frustration on the part of the target. Stonewalling is effective if the target’s power can be effectively eroded away. Otherwise, it may fail.

For example, a participant in this study stated, “One of my missions was to bring [a change] into the center which had been completely stonewalled before.” As this participant worked to enact the change, she described the reaction: “and that really, really, really infuriated my staff.” Since the target did not initially understand the staff was infuriated that the target was attempting to force a change, and that the previous tactic of stonewalling was intentional to block

change, the target kept pushing with greater and greater personal frustration, but also with greater and greater personal resolve. However, the target in this particular situation, had more positional power than the staff, had a protector, and was a crusader. The final outcome was that the change was enacted and the stonewalling tactic did not succeed.

Another experience of stonewalling is feeling “like I was banging my head against a brick wall.” Literally, the target has met the wall and is experiencing blocking that may effectively paralyze actions. This is effective stonewalling, creating a full block of action. Completely blocking an individual may cause that individual to feel that he/she has been isolated from the normal professional action of his/her workplace. This leads to the next type of countering measures, those of isolating.

#### **Isolating tactics.**

“Isolating tactics” all aim to set the target apart from others. When erosion tactics do not seem to be effectively realigning the target, isolation tactics may be the next level of strategies employed. Isolating is a type of separation, but differs from separation tactics in that isolation tactics set the target apart within the organization, while separation tactics aim to move the target out of the organization entirely. There are two means of isolation: physical isolation, being kept apart from others in the organization; and access isolation, being kept away from access to power in the organization.

Three different variations of isolating emerged in this study. Within these three categories there are additional dimensions and variations or subbehaviors. The three categories are “closing ranks,” “walling off,” and the process of “launching the attack.” Attacking behaviors include “bullying” and a variation of bullying, “mobbing.”

***Closing ranks.***

“Closing ranks” is a very common means of isolating an individual targeted as a threat. Closing ranks is the act of coalescing, bringing together, those that are in agreement to exclude another. The excluded individual is that person out of alignment. The objective is to exclude the target from access to those in the ranks. Additionally, closing ranks has the goal of excluding the target from accessing power, if those with power are in the ranks.

For example, targets are not invited to meetings where decisions are made that may have a direct impact on the target’s working environment. One participant described this behavior as repeated attempts to hire new instructors to grow a specific program, but once new instructors were hired, they effectively decided to teach outside of the program, thereby excluding the participant while joining the ranks of the others.

Closing ranks is readily perceived by the individuals who are targeted and is a very effective tactic, creating emotional harm to those excluded. The reason for such effectiveness is based on the common core human value of belonging. Closing ranks uses exclusion to deny belonging, which is why it may be so harmful to targets. Additionally, since most targets in this study shared a value of collaboration, being excluded is in direct conflict with the targets’ core values.

***Walling off.***

“Walling off” is the second type of isolation. Walling off is acting to isolate and contain a threat. It is a more specific act than closing ranks because there is an intentional goal of creating a barrier around a target. This concept is the same as “boxing in” which also connotes the idea of putting up walls, or barriers, around an unaligned threat to the organization.

The concept of walling off is rather common and is readily observed within living organisms when a foreign body is introduced. The foreign body may be rejected or walled off. When it is walled off a cyst is created around the foreign body, thereby protecting the rest of the organism.

Social organizations use this same type of protective isolation maneuver. Just as in closing ranks, all isolation tactics may be very effective to the degree to which they decrease the target's sense of belonging and create conflict with the target's own core values, such as collaboration. Walling off, by creating a barrier, may actually be experienced as a form of torture, such as being in solitary confinement, an extreme form of walling off.

Walling off is also related to stonewalling, particularly when participants literally felt a wall, such as the example of hitting one's head against a brick wall. However, walling off is more extreme in that not only are targets blocked, but they are contained, and they are isolated/alone.

### ***Launching the attack.***

Closing ranks and walling off are both isolation tactics that are more defensive in nature. However, isolation may become aggressive. The process of "launching the attack" is an aggressive strategy that has a series of stages. The first stage is the launch and the second is the attack. The attack may take several forms. Of these, bullying behavior that leads to mobbing is one of the tactics that emerged in this study.

Launching is beginning the campaign. If an individual in the organization is perceived to be a significant threat, there may ensue a very deliberate, aggressive plan to attack and isolate the targeted individual. Launching behaviors include planning, investigating, and weighing options. During the planning phase, those organizational members that perceive a threat from an

identified target will lay out or outline the tactics they may use. Planning leads to a full launch if, after the initial outlining of tactics, the organizational members move to investigate more closely the tactics and the consequences under consideration. This investigation may then lead to weighing the options of the various plans. Finally, the whole process, if plans are made, investigated, and options are weighed on the basis of the investigation, may then culminate in the decision to actually launch the attack. A target, by virtue of the condition of naivety, will often not be aware of the launching behaviors until they result in the actual attack.

Attacking behaviors seek to harm and isolate the target. Additionally, attacking has the goal of winning. Those that attack feel they are in the right, and they not only want to minimize (at least), or eliminate (at most) the target, but they also want to affirm that they are right, that their values are the most important ones for the system, and thereby win.

*Bullying and mobbing.*

“Bullying” for the purposes of this study is aggressive, emotional, verbal, and physical behaviors that attempt to create and exert power over a target perceived as a threat. Bullying behaviors are generally the acts of one individual against another. Once these behaviors become group behaviors, bullying becomes “mobbing” which is discussed below. Bullying may be an overt or covert act. Bullying is rationalized by the bully as appropriate behavior since the target is perceived as being out of alignment and needs to be treated in a more aggressive manner to bring about realignment. The bully believes he/she is in the right. In fact, in this study every participant that was accused of bullying actually perceived themselves as having been targeted and rationalized their bullying behaviors as necessary to protect themselves and their values.



Bullying is a form of abuse. Individuals who have experienced workplace bullying describe the experience in terms very similar to victims of spousal or sexual abuse. Physical acts of bullying are rarely used in the workplace: Emotional and verbal attacks are the norm.

“Mobbing” is bullying that becomes a group behavior, a ganging up rather than a one-on-one aggression. Mobbing has an additional property of being a highly emotional and seemingly irrational behavior. Members of mobs may state that they felt compelled to act, join the mob, and persecute the target, but they could not articulate why objectively. They feel what they did, but have trouble voicing those feelings in anything but very emotional language.

Westhues (2007) stated that mobbing is a primal type of behavior that is observed to occur among many species of animals, and as such believed that mobbing is instinctual and genetically inclined. What the theory of realigning discovers is that the instinctual component is value based. Human behavior is motivated by values. When a core value is threatened, individuals may quickly create/join a mob because there is an instinctual, a gut-level reaction, to the value transgression. The genetic inclination may be as basic as the human value to eat. Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of human needs provides a value list and sorting that would indicate that the fundamental and basic needs would be those that, if threatened, would illicit the most aggressive and defensive behaviors, and would therefore be the most prone to bullying and mobbing behaviors.

All these various forms of isolation tactics seek to set the target apart, but the target still remains in the social organization. Actually moving the target out of the organization is the act of separating.

**Separating tactics.**

As defined above, “separating tactics” go beyond isolation within the organization and have the goal of separating the target, moving them physically out of the organization.

Separation is usually not the first type of countermeasure employed. Generally, when erosion and isolation tactics do not work, there is the perception that an impasse has been reached and there is no way to make progress. The only way to resolve this stalemate is to remove one side of the conflict.

This study found three categories of separating tactics. These are being “pushed out,” “culling,” and “purging.” Each of these categories is related and may be conceptually understood as being variations of one another. Figure 3 illustrates these concepts.

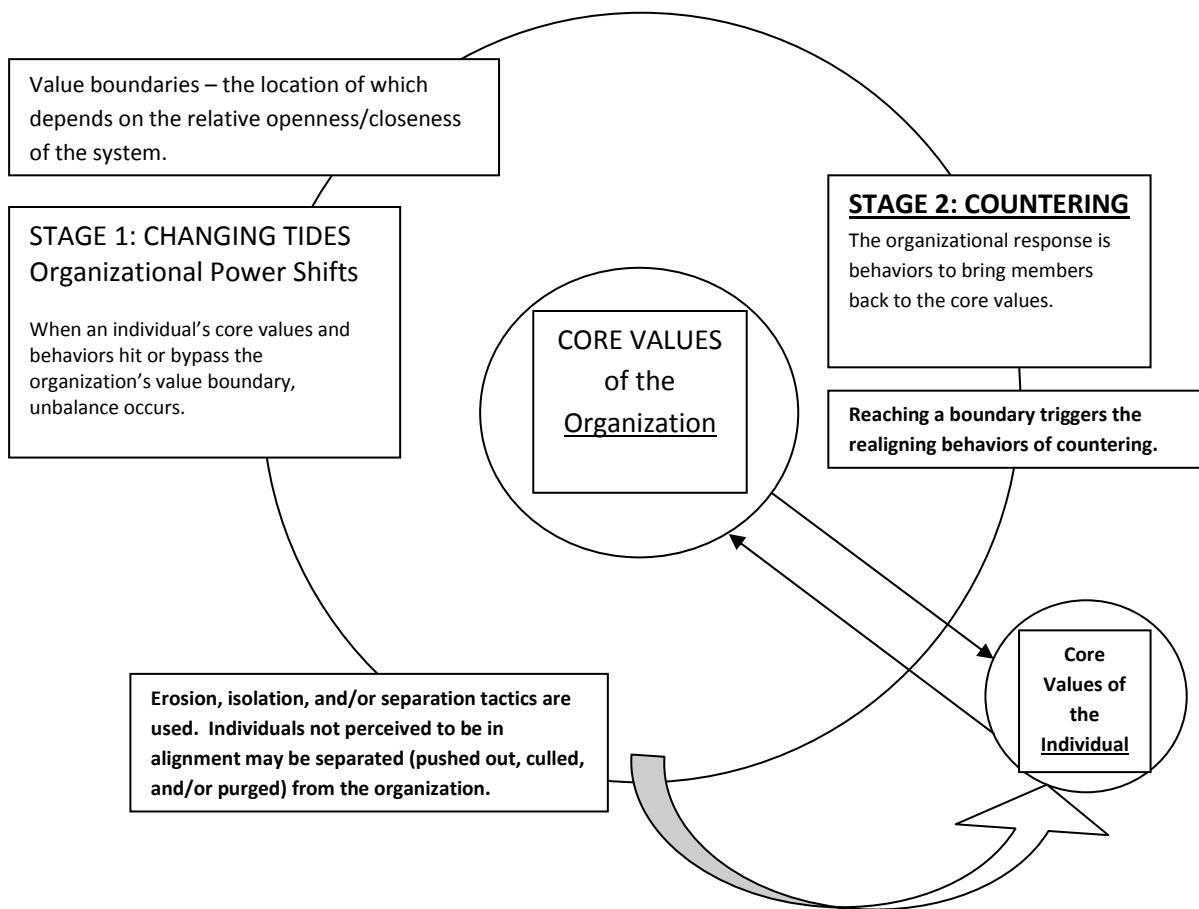


Figure 3. The countering stage may include tactics of separation.

***Being pushed out.***

“Being pushed out” is the process by which individuals are encouraged to separate of their own accord. The encouraging is the pushing action, which may begin as a gentle nudging and progress to more forceful pushing. The pressure of being pushed out may be exerted by members of the organization who perceive the realigning behaviors and the emotional stress that the target is undergoing. These members see themselves as empathetic to the target, helping the target by pushing the target to leave the organization.

Since targets are naïve and idealistic, they usually do not react to being pushed out. This is particularly true of crusaders who tend to overlook any setback to pursuing their own cause. Targets that are more likely to take pushing out actions to heart are those who are becoming less naïve, those who have other options. They feel they have acceptable employment options elsewhere, or those that were looking to leave the organization of their own accord anyway, such as a member that was nearing retirement.

When pushing out is ineffective, more aggressive separation strategies may be used. These are culling and purging.

***Culling.***

“Culling” is the second variation of separation tactics. It is the act of selectively removing something deemed to be inferior. The concept of cutting one out of the pack is the same as that of culling. Culling is more aggressive than pushing out, since pushing out attempts to encourage the target to initiate the separation did not work. Culling is more intentional and the target is not asked or encouraged to leave; the target is now forced into an extreme separation within the organization and told that he/she must leave.

Culling may be accomplished via a terminal contract. Or a target may receive a very poor performance evaluation and be informed, based on the evaluation, that his/her contract will not be renewed. A target may be told he or she is not a good fit and that he/she needs to find employment elsewhere as soon as possible.

Culling is difficult, depending on the target's employment rights. Tenured faculty members who enjoy union job security protection may be so well protected that culling is not an effective strategy. Faculty members who are not yet tenured, or where there is no tenure process, will be more susceptible to this behavior of separation.

Culling is perceived by the target as discrimination. This perception is correct in that those rejecting, shunning, and spurning the target are very conscious that they are employing a discriminatory behavior. They feel the target's behaviors are so out of synch with the group's values, that discriminatory action is justified. In one college where culling behaviors were employed, the individual being rejected was informed by her direct supervisor that "she was lost" and there was nothing that could be done. In effect, even the supervisor, having hired and previously defended the target, was now joining the pack and participating in culling.

***Purging.***

"Purging" is the third type of separation tactic. Purging is very similar to culling as the goal is to remove something undesirable from the organization. Purging differs from culling in that purging is defined here as removal by more aggressive, even violent, means than culling. Therefore, purging is a variation of culling. It is of a higher intensity than culling and is more rapid temporally than culling.

Purges are familiar in terms of political ousting such as that which occurred in the former Soviet Union under Stalin during the 1930s. Stalin imprisoned and executed citizens who were accused of plotting against communism.

The same rationale is applied in the workplace when an individual is purged. The individual is accused of plotting against the foundational values of the system. For example, a higher educational organization that has a strong value of faculty-led decision-making may seek to purge a new CEO who behaves in a manner completely inconsistent with the old value of faculty-led decisions and instead is seen as imposing a new management-led value. Of course, if the CEO has successfully shifted power to the management, the purge may not work. But if the faculty members actually have relatively more power than the CEO, they may effectively rid the organization of the CEO. Votes of no confidence are a step in the purging process, and when these votes yield no separation, the reason is that the CEO's positional power has allowed the CEO to resist the attack.

### **Snowballing.**

“Snowballing” has been discussed in the previous section and is a spiraling type of behavior where the scope and the velocity of the behavior are increasing. Snowballing deserves mention here as well since the interplay of countering measures may lead to snowballing. In other words, *how* snowballing occurs, may be explained by how countering measures interact with one another.

For example, members of an organization may start out with relatively mild eroding countermeasures, but given the naivety of a target, and/or coupled with a strong degree of power, the members may feel they have to increase the countering. This may lead to isolation measures, and if these do not work, to separation measures.

The more equal the two sides to the conflict are in power, and the more fundamental the value conflict, the more likely countermeasures will take on a snowballing behavior. One participant stated how sad it was to see something that was initially an isolated event spread so quickly across the campus: The reduction from professional to personal was so rapid. This is a typical reflection of having experienced a snowballing behavior.

In summary, the countering tactics that create realigning all aim to correct the target, with varying degrees of intensity. There are a myriad of individual-level tactics that may be used independently or in conjunction with other tactics. The level of aggression will depend on the depth and degree of the value conflict that has created the targeting, as well as the success of less severe tactics. Speed and velocity may increase, to the extent of creating snowballing, if the conflict concerns the very most important core values and /or the power distribution between the two sides of the conflict is more symmetrical.

### **Step 3: Stabilizing Tactics and Strategies: Outcomes of Realigning**

Just as there are measures whose purpose is to create realigning, there are measures that are employed as an *outcome* of realigning processes. Not everyone in an organization is a target. This study is written in terms of the individual target, but the target may be a group. However, not everyone is in the target group. There may be members of the organization that are tangentially affiliated with one or both sides of the conflict. These individuals are generally the majority, in terms of numbers, of the members in the organization. Although they are not prime targets, nor major perpetrators or defenders, they are not immune to the realigning countermeasures. The outcome of the countering produces behaviors that are stabilizing for this middle ground group and are referred to as “stabilizing tactics.”

There are four categories of stabilizing tactics that occur as an outcome of realigning behaviors. These are “falling in line,” “weathering the storm,” “proper-lining,” and finally, “defusing the situation.”

**Falling in line.**

“Falling in line” is conforming to the prevailing norm. Falling in line is conceptually nearly identical to the idea of toeing the party line. The party line is the prevailing norm. The slight difference is in whether one is seen as moving into conformity (falling in line), or maintaining conformity (toeing the line). In either regard, the “line” is where the organizational members are – they have conformed their behavior so that they are perceived by others in the organization to be aligned.

Sometimes falling in line is a very deliberative act. This happens when members see countermeasures of realigning taking place and they consciously do not want to be seen on the side of the target as they do not want to be subjected to the same countermeasures. Seen sometimes as an act of cowardice, this may also be an act of self-preservation.

However, falling in line is not always deliberate and may be less of a conscious act and more of an automatic, innate type of behavior. This would happen when the members’ own core values tend to be closely enough aligned with the prevailing norms of the organization that the members do not perceive as consciously toeing the party line or falling into line; they simply are in line. However, the target may perceive that these behaviors of conformity are intentional and even contrived. This is because the target, being naïve, cannot believe that others in the organization do not share the target’s values.

Whether intentional or not, falling in line is what those with relative power in the organization desire. This is a sign that the core values are those of the majority and actions of

the majority continue to support and perpetuate the same shared norms. Those in power may enjoy an increase in power and more members falling in line, if a target has been successfully realigned via countermeasures.

### **Weathering the storm.**

“Weathering the storm”<sup>9</sup> is being able to survive basically intact during a difficult period. The difficult period is the time during which countermeasures that create realignment are being employed. As stated previously, most members are not personally subjected to the countermeasures, but they feel the conflict and stress, and they are affected. This stress is the “storm.”

Weathering the storm is a conscious reaction to the countermeasures. People ride it out or hunker down. All of these concepts imply the same idea, which is to take shelter or hide out – to basically keep low or beneath the radar screen of the attack. Sheltering is the notion of refuge and protection. Hiding is similar in that it conveys the idea of taking or keeping cover.

Individuals in the organization, who have little to lose, have little positional power, have no real stake in the conflict of values, and who tend to share the predominant values of those with more power, will weather the storm with more ease. Individuals who have more at stake will find it more difficult to keep down. They will tend to engage if they see the storm affecting their own values.

As in the aftermath of a natural storm, at the end of a countermeasure storm, the organization may not look the same. Successful countermeasures will have moved the target to a position of very little power or may have completely separated the target out of the organization.

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of “weathering the storm” as defined and used here is similar to Raffanti’s (2005) concept of “hiding out” which is an avoidance strategy associated with his core variable “weathering change.”



The power shifts that triggered the countermeasures may not actually be recognized by members of the organization until the storm has passed.

The longer the countermeasure storm, the more difficult weathering it out is. This is similar to whittling away in that the longer the countering behaviors that create realignment occur the more emotional damage is possible.

Members who have experienced these types of storms before will generally try to actively seek to stop this from happening again or will much more quickly and deeply hide from view when they sense another storm approaching. This is why, from an organizational perspective, it is preferable to succeed quickly with relatively low intensity countermeasures than to have to employ more aggressive and extreme behaviors. This is also why members may urge a pushing out early on, so as to avoid launching the attack.

### **Proper-lining.**

“Proper-lining” is defined as paying lip service to the party line. In other words, the person who is proper-lining is assumed to not really believe the party line, but he or she mouths it in public, without necessarily putting the party line into practice. He/she is seen as disingenuous. Raffanti (2005) has referred to this as “illusioning” which is a behavior that includes an overt act of pretense to create the illusion that one is complying. Proper-lining differs from falling into line or towing the party line because in the case of the latter two concepts, individuals do put the party line into practice.

However, proper-lining is a perception of others. It is not always real. The target often makes the assumption that others in the system are just proper-lining, that they cannot really believe the party line, which is why they are just mouthing it and not putting it into practice. But, those that are assumed to be proper-lining may well be putting into practice the beliefs they

mouth. It may be that the target's naivety blocks the target from understanding that others really do have different core values and really are practicing what they preach.

Whether proper-lining is real or not, what is observed is that others mouth the predominant core values of the system and this is a desired outcome from countering by those in power. Whether only lip service or not, if the majority of committee members, for example, mouth the norms of those in power, then those in power will use that committee as evidence that the prevailing norms are those of the majority and are indeed those of the organization.

### **Defusing the situation.**

“Defusing the situation” is the fifth and final type of stabilizing tactic employed as an outcome of the countermeasures used to create realigning. Defusing is the attempt to ease a difficult situation. Specifically, it is the attempt to ease the countering and to try to normalize the organization, ending the value conflict. Defusing aims to reduce the emotional level of the countering behaviors.

Defusing is a common stabilizing measure. Defusing behaviors include physical avoidance, not going to certain places at certain times to avoid members of the system who may be perpetrating countermeasures. Another defusing tactic is calling a meeting to try to work through the differences of opinion. Often these tactics are only defusing attempts and are not seen as successful. Generally, the value conflict is deep and not just a difference of opinion. Given the fundamental conflict, agreeing to disagree produces nothing but an impasse, which leads to more drastic countering measures of separation.

Two other types of defusing may be observed. One is a movement of activity. Rather than avoiding a place, there is an avoidance of certain activities. The second is avoidance of exposure. What is happening is not exposed to others. For example, a victim may not tell

anyone what types of countering measures were being acted against him or her, particularly if these activities have been covert.

Thus, in most cases defusing is a type of informal, low-level attempt to avoid and reduce the emotion of the countering acts. In one case, it was an overt attempt at reconciliation that this study did not find to be effective.

To sum up, there are a variety of special stabilizing measures that are defensive, reactive behaviors, to the process of realigning. They are outcomes of the countering, realigning behaviors. These outcome-based stabilizing behaviors may reinforce the predominant norms, such as falling in line. Or, they may be avoidance mechanisms such as weathering the storm. Finally, they may be a combination of avoidance and mediation attempts such as those acts of defusing the situation.

### **Summary**

The second stage of the process of realigning is that of countering. Countering begins with targeting when three basic conditions of naivety, exceptionalism, and idealism, create the context in which the target is identified. Once the target is identified, countering tactics begin. These tactics seek to erode, isolate, and/or separate the target from the organization.

Additionally, another type of stabilizing behavior occurs in reaction to the eroding, isolating, and separating strategies. Stabilizing behaviors do not create realigning; they are an outcome of realigning. Stabilizing behaviors are generally avoidance tactics that aim to reduce the negative impact of realigning.

Once the countering process has begun, it will trigger the next stage of the realigning process, which is an individually focused process of “justifying.”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **Justifying: The Third Stage of Realigning**

When people are subjected to the countermeasures of realigning, the countermeasures are invariably perceived as negative, hurtful, unwarranted, and unethical. This causes an emotional injury that triggers individual reactive behaviors. These reactive behaviors are defensive in nature, but they have the added dimension of being the target's first steps of trying to understand why this is happening. Therefore, this third stage is a complicated and multi-layered stage with several things happening at the same time. The target is reacting to what he or she perceives as a completely unwarranted attack, but at the same time, he/she starts to behave in ways that demonstrate the target's initial desire to understand why this is happening to him/her.

Many behaviors occur during this reactive, groping to understand, stage. Justifying is the process of rationalizing, explaining, and legitimizing realignment actions. Additionally, those that justify their acts are seeking to free themselves from blame. People naturally try to defend their actions or inactions. There appears to be an intrinsic behavior of human beings to repudiate personal blame in a situation of conflict, at least initially. All participants in this study described this behavior.

Everyone experiencing realigning appears to go through the justification process trying to explain or justify their own behaviors. This includes both those who feel they are targets, and those who the targets feel are the perpetrators of unwarranted countermeasures against them. These perpetrators do not see themselves as attackers or bullies. Most perpetrators believe that they were attacked, or at least threatened, by the target. Indeed, perpetrators often feel they are the target.

Additionally, those members of the system who do not see themselves as direct targets, but who have experienced the effects of realigning behaviors and have reacted in one or some of the outcome-based stabilizing behaviors will also justify their actions. Therefore, nearly every member of the organization goes through the process of justifying. The exception is those members whose involvement in the organization is so tangential that they did not perceive realigning to be occurring at all. For instance, even though there are more students than any other single type of member in a higher education organization, very few students tend to experience the realigning behaviors, particularly if the students are only members for a short period of time, such as those at two-year colleges. However, students will experience realigning if the actions that are being directed toward a faculty member and/or an administrator have a direct effect on the student, such as cancelling the program the student is pursuing.

A property common to all justifying behaviors is that of “deservedness.” To deserve is to merit or warrant. Therefore, when members of an organization are justifying their actions, and considering the impact of their actions on others, they believe that others deserve to be treated the way they were treated. Members of the organization act to uphold their own core values. When acting within one’s own value system, one is free of blame, and others deserve the consequences of those actions. Because countering measures to create realignment are intentional, it is understood that there will be an impact on the target and that the target deserves this impact as he or she is out of alignment and a threat to the organization.

A key variation to deservedness is that all members who feel they have been targeted also feel that the behaviors they have been subjected to were not deserved, that in fact, this treatment is unwarranted. Therefore, the reactive behaviors of targets are justified, and the impact on

others is deserved, since the target is trying to right the wrong that he or she undeservedly experienced.

There are four common categories of justifying behaviors. These are “blame flipping,” “digging in,” “appealing,” and “cherry picking.” Each of these behaviors has multiple variations. However, members of the organization do not necessarily use all of these behaviors, nor is there any particular order in which these may be employed. The number of these behaviors used will directly relate to how severe the target perceives the countermeasures of realigning the target has been subjected to.

Justifying also has a temporal aspect. The period in which an individual engages in justifying seems to start very soon after countermeasures have begun. Justifying will continue through the entire period of countering and may continue long afterward, even years later. At some point, individuals may move into the final stage of realigning, resolving, but some individuals may be perpetually stuck in justifying.

Each of the four categories, their variations, and relations are presented below.

### **Blame flipping**

“Blame flipping” is placing the blame on someone else – moving the blame away from one’s self. Targets who are subjected to countermeasures of realigning are being blamed for acting out of alignment with the values of others. Targets see this blame as unwarranted since targets perceive themselves as being in alignment with their own values, which they personally hold to be the right values. As long as a target persists with this perception of acting in accordance with the right values and is naïve to the nature of the value conflict, the target will engage in blame flipping.

Blame flipping is similar to asset flipping in that there is the same type of cyclical behavior with two phases. First, is the target's perception that he/she has been blamed. Second, is the process by which the target rationalizes that the blame is someone else's and then flips the blame to that person. Therefore, the target justifies his or her own actions to be blameless.

When blame has been flipped to someone else, that someone may be seen as the fall guy. Some victims may never leave this stage of the process and may cling stubbornly to blaming the fall guy. This is an indication of the general finding that no victim initially, while in the stage of justification, feels that he/she is to blame, that he/she is at fault, or that he/she deserves to be the target of the realigning countermeasures.

There are three variations of blame flipping. These are "holding one to one's values" and its own variation of "moral hypocrisy." Additionally, there is the concept of "morality flipping." There is a progression to these variations that is related to the severity of the value conflict that has created the countering and the subsequent perception of blame.

**Holding one to one's values.**

"Holding one to one's values" is a common means of rationalizing a blame flip. Since blame flipping is moving blame, moving the act of impugning to someone else, there is a value base that comes into play. This is to say, the person that is moving the blame is protecting the integrity of his or her own value base, by moving the blame to someone else. When people impugn, they are criticizing and casting doubt on the reliability of someone/thing else. The target feels that his/her character has been falsely impugned. The target feels that his/her values have been called into question, but the target believes that he/she has acted completely in line with his/her values. Therefore, to make the flip, it must be the others who are not acting in accordance with their own values. Furthermore, the flip is a means of justifying, so in

rationalizing that others did not act according to their own values, it justifies the flip. This is the process of holding one to one's values.

What is curious about this type of blame flipping is the perception of what value base is in play. There is a value conflict. The target does not see that the values of the perpetrator are different from the target's own values at this stage of realigning. In fact, targets believe that everyone has the same values as themselves, and that these are the organizational values to which all members should be held accountable.

For example, a participant who went public to save face had been a member of a seminary, where clearly there is public recognition of moral values. The participant stated, "discipline is one of the marks of a true church. As difficult as it may be, a church must hold its members accountable and must stand against wrong-doing." The participant clearly delineates the core value: discipline. Next, the participant holds the members of the seminary to that value by stating that though difficult, members must be accountable as a demonstration of discipline and therefore stand against wrong-doing. For the participant, standing against wrong-doing meant breaking the code of silence by going public.

However, the participant may have failed to understand that the members of the seminary may have viewed discipline as maintaining the code of silence, while going public may have been seen as one form of wrong-doing. The participant was attempting to hold the members to her own values and to accuse them of not acting in accordance with their values, but the members saw just the opposite. They perceived themselves as disciplined; they did maintain the code of silence, it was the participant who was undisciplined and broke the code. Even though both sides have discipline as a value, they do not interpret that value in the same manner. It is, in effect, two different values, and which one it is depends on which side of the conflict one sits.



Historians and students of the American Civil Rights Movement cite Dr. Martin Luther King as using holding one to one's values as part of his arsenal of non-violent strategies for change. "Americans were converted to civil rights through creative tension, through planned confrontations that *made it impossible for Americans to avoid the consequences of their own wrongs and deeds* [emphasis added]" (Rockwell, 2005, para.18). This statement illustrates King's "compassionate indignation," demonstrated in his strategy of noncooperation with an evil system. He publically held up the values of equality, with which he assumed that all human beings agreed. Then, using the tactics of boycotts, demonstrations, and marches (all of which were completely legal), he attempted to make it impossible for American's to deny their wrongdoing, based on their own values.

However, the King example fails to recognize that it was not holding one to one's values that created the conflict that led to change. King perceived that he and members of his race had been targeted. He reacted and rather than moving only into the stage of justifying, he started using countermeasures himself. It was the effects of these countermeasures, the boycotts' economic effects, which influenced the power distribution in the organization. This may be the reason there was, ultimately, a core value shift by the majority of members in the organization.

Less extreme examples come from this study of academic workplaces. In one instance, a participant was accused of bias while serving on a hiring committee. This participant was indignant at the accusation and the ensuing attack because the participant's own view was that she had been the least biased member of the committee. Both sides are claiming nonbias to be their values, but both sides are interpreting what that means in a different manner.

***Moral hypocrisy.***

“Moral hypocrisy” is a variation of holding one to one’s values. Moral hypocrisy is the act being conscious of acting falsely, feigning high principles, and pretending to have the same core values. The target sees the perpetrator as being a moral hypocrite; therefore, the blame really should be flipped from the target to the perpetrator. However, it is important to note that targets perceive this, but generally no one admits that he or she is conscious of moral hypocrisy, quite the opposite.

The distinction between holding one to one’s values and moral hypocrisy is the notion of intentional feigning, particularly when the pretending is done publically. For example, many of the participants claimed that no one cared more about their college/university than they did. But targets viewed perpetrators who stated the same as pretending. The targets could not conceptualize that the perpetrator was speaking the truth since the value conflict between the two of them precluded that they could really have the same values.

***Morality flipping.***

“Morality flipping” is a second variation on blame flipping. Morality flipping is the act of calling into question the target’s moral values to justify why he or she is a target. Targets tend to perceive this as bending values to justify immoral acts.

Morality flipping differs from holding one to one’s values. In holding one to one’s values there is the general assumption that everyone shares the same values. Morality flipping makes the clear distinction that the target’s values are different and inferior to other members’ values. Not only are the target’s values inferior, they are generally considered to be wrong and bad. Therefore, they should not be of true value.

Morality flipping is conceptually a more egregious flip than blame flipping as the target's very moral basis is called into question, so the justification is based on a deeper value conflict. Targets do not see themselves as immoral. In fact, they see the perpetrators using this behavior of flipping as immoral.

An example of severe morality flipping is that employed by Adolph Hitler to justify acts against Jews during World War II. Hitler did not perceive himself as performing and ordering immoral acts. He justified his acts based on his values and he flipped the Jews' morality by espousing that Jewish values were wrong and immoral. From this perspective, it became easier to justify killing Jews because they were not even moral persons with any redeeming value. Therefore, it actually benefited society to eliminate them and preserve the core values of the majority. Similarly, many justifications of intentional killing may be based on the concept of morality flipping.

A less extreme example from the dataset was a participant calling into question the perpetrator's value of confidentiality. The participant flips the value of confidentiality into a morally indefensible stance if the perpetrator also claims to value standing up and fighting wrong-doing.

### **Digging in**

“Digging in” is a second type of justification and also an outcome of justification. Digging in or digging in one's heels, is holding stubbornly to a position. This is one of the variations of the definition of hunkering down, “as the administration hunkered down to their no-hire position, the faculty union started to waiver.”

Individuals will dig in and stubbornly refuse to change their position because they believe themselves to be right. From their perspective, they have justified their behavior. But in a

process of circular logic, the digging in reinforces the individual's rationale of doing the right thing. This is illustrated by how many of the participants refused to give up the process of justifying their actions, even years later. To really believe that one is justified in what one is doing is to keep doing it. The longer one keeps doing the same behavior, the more one feels justified that it is the right behavior. Crusaders will tend to behave in this manner and dig in as they go through the process of justifying. This is enhanced by their firm hope that they will succeed in their crusade (Wang, 2007, pp. 24 - 25).

Digging in is not only a means of justifying and an outcome of justifying. There is also the hope that digging in will result in a change on the part of the perpetrator. However, this does not happen unless the individual/group digging in has more power than the others in the organization. However, some targets, particularly crusaders, will naively ignore the power asymmetry against them, and continue the digging in behavior. Because the value the target is stubbornly holding onto is of such basic self-identity importance, the individual feels compelled to continue despite the odds. Examples of this reoccurred in this study's dataset. In one instance, a faculty member was still pursuing the same justification behaviors nearly two years later, despite the fact that one of two perceived perpetrators had retired. Another faculty member continued to publically justify using a personal website and blog despite having left the workplace where the realigning occurred more than four years ago.

### **Appealing**

“Appealing” is another means of justifying. In this study, appealing is specifically “appealing to a higher authority,” with the variation of “appealing to the highest authority” also present. Appealing is to make an earnest, urgent request to someone with more power in the organization. This request asks the authority, the person with more power, to support and justify

the acts of the individual making the request. Every participant in this study appealed to a higher authority, some to the highest.

Appealing to a higher authority is successful when the authority shares the values of the requestor and lends support to them. Appealing will not work at all when the authority does not share the requestor's values. Requestors may fail when appealing, asking help of someone with different values because of naivety. The requestor, a target, naively believes that everyone of authority must have the same core values as the target. The appeal is made in terms of those values.

For example, one participant appealed to the higher authority on the basis of the power of the law. Legality was a primary value of the participant and therefore the appeal to a higher authority was based on the belief that the authority shared this value and would support the participant's acts.

Appealing to the highest authority is a variation on appealing to a higher authority. The highest authority is that person or body understood to have the highest positional power in the organization. This may be the CEO, a board of trustees/governors, or someone with another title specific to the type of organization. In some instances, there is even an appeal to God, which may be seen as the very highest authority in religious organizations.

There are several dimensions to this type of behavior. First, there is a dimension of stages in the appeal process. Appealing to the highest authority may happen after appealing to a higher authority if the first appeal does not work. Appealing to a higher authority before the highest authority demonstrates a chain of command structure and a recognized process in which one works progressively within the organization to resolve conflict. However, if a requester does not believe that this process works, usually due to the perception that the higher authority does

not share the requestor's values, then the requestor may choose to go all the way to the top, to the highest authority.

For example, several participants appealed directly to the next highest authority, which was the dean. These participants explained the process and reaffirmed that they followed it. But, one participant publically acknowledged that he had worked outside of the institutional processes because those processes were broken. This requestor went directly to the highest authority with his appeal.

Another dimension of appealing to the highest authority is that of manipulation. Others in the organization who observe the appeal to the highest authority may see the appeal as a means to manipulate by falsifying the facts and improperly controlling others' understanding of a situation. This dimension was stated by a participant as "Claiming God as an ally in decision-making, particularly when other people are involved, can be manipulative and tantamount to spiritual abuse if the person claiming God's sanction is in a position of spiritual authority."

This dimension of manipulation is associated more with appealing to the highest authority than appealing to a higher authority since the highest authority has more positional power than any other person or body and has the most potential to influence others. If this influence is perceived as intentionally falsifying, then the dimension of manipulation becomes relevant.

### **Cherry picking**

"Cherry picking" is the fourth set of justifying behaviors. Cherry picking refers to choosing only certain items of evidence to support one's argument. It is based on the property of intentionally not including all the facts, but only those that best justify one's acts.

Cherry picking may be an individual behavior in which the target undergoes a personal process of justifying why he/she is not to blame and selectively chooses and emphasizes certain events and actions to make the rationalization work. Cherry picking may also be used more publically when targets justify their behavior to others in the organization, or when appealing to higher authority or going public.

Targets do not think that their cherry picking is in any way deceptive since individuals automatically emphasize what is most important to them. Cherry picking is not the same as lying or falsification. It is selective and exclusionary, and may also exaggerate certain actions. Cherry picking is seen as deceptive by others in the organization, and specifically by others who do not share the same experience as the individual who has cherry picked, due to a value difference.

One example of cherry picking came from a participant who discussed a performance evaluation. According to the participant, the evaluator focused on negative comments from only two individuals, ignoring the positive comments of 15 others. Another example came from a participant who experienced a verbal attack from a peer based on a comment made to a student reporter. This comment was published as part of the article, but was just one small part of the entire journalistic piece. However, from the perspective of the evaluator in the first example and the peer in the second, even though these were small in number, these comments were of such high value that they needed to be emphasized. The participants felt that their attackers cherry picked and exaggerated the facts. However, the attackers felt that they were in fact attacked by the comments of the participants and that they had correctly emphasized their importance.

**Saving face/coming clean.**

Cherry picking includes the variation of “saving face” and its conceptual complement “coming clean.” Saving face are the behaviors related to demonstrating publically that your own core values are still intact and that you are right. Targets may do this by going public with their side of the story. Telling “my side of the story” is an act of cherry picking.

Saving face is closely related to the complementary concept of coming clean. Coming clean is also demonstrated publically, but rather than proving that one was right, it is admitting that one did something wrong or hid something. Coming clean allows for saving face.

For example, the target feels he/she was subjected to countermeasures that were not warranted. If one or some of those who perpetrated the countermeasures publically apologizes, or comes clean, this exonerates the target, and the target now saves face.

When targets go public with their side of the story, they generally hope the other side will come clean, but this is rare. In fact, in none of the participants’ experience of realigning was the target vindicated by the other side coming clean. Regardless, saving face is a type of justifying behavior. Furthermore, when developing the saving face story, the victim tends to cherry pick those events that emphasize one’s blamelessness.

Saving face is generally not a desired reactive behavior as perceived by those in the organization opposing the target. When the target goes public he or she may take the conflict beyond the normal boundaries of the organization and expose the organization to external pressures. One participant of this study stated that she was explicitly asked to not go public with her issues. Other participants stated that they wanted to save face but they saw it as impossible because they knew the other side would never come clean.



**Co-opting the narrative.**

Another variation of cherry picking is “co-opting the narrative.” Co-opting goes a step further than the selection and exaggeration process of cherry picking. To co-opt the narrative is to appropriate, or take ownership, of someone else’s narrative/explanation, and twist it to one’s own purposes as an act of justifying one’s actions.

Co-opting the narrative may be observed in justifying when it goes public. One of the means by which the victim tries to rally support while maintaining that he or she is looking at both sides is via co-opting the narrative. The victim is using the perpetrator’s explanation, but in such a way to prove that the victim has been attacked. For example, one victim, in going public to the highest authority, to the board of trustees, used the narrative of an administrator, twisting the administrator’s narrative to reveal a plot to pit faculty against faculty.

Another example from this study was a faculty member who cited an administrative memo stating that appealing to the board would harm the faculty member and his/her cause. The faculty member then twisted the message of the memo to support his claim that the process of appeals was flawed, despite having followed the advice of the memo.

Co-opting the narrative is a relatively familiar concept in the field of politics. One example is the notion of “co-opting dissent.” For example, Camejo (2004) explained that real change in the United States comes from third parties and independent movements. However, the historical role of the Democratic Party has been to co-opt this dissent and render it harmless.

The fifth gradient of warfare (5GW) theory takes co-opting dissent even further and posits a war may be won without fighting by neutralizing a target’s ability to accurately observe (Abbott, 2010). Once a target does not accurately observe, the target cannot orient, decide, and act. The theory reasons that the target is now immobilized. One method of neutralizing

observation is through the use of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Keller (2010) applied this to elections and wrote,

The dedication to spin, especially in more important elections, means multiple mouthpieces for the “message.” To co-op the “message” is to co-opt all the mouthpieces. As social media increasingly becomes the mouthpiece of the campaign the opportunity for a 5GW effector to subtly and seamlessly co-opt the “message” becomes more possible because of its ubiquity. (“The campaign and election process,” para.1)

Co-opting the narrative is a strategy that is generally observed in some sort of written form and is often used when going public. While this strategy appears to some as manipulative, the person using this strategy feels entirely justified that he/she is accurately interpreting events since the act of co-opting the narrative supports their core values.

***Co-opting the narrative to make a happy ending.***

Co-opting the narrative has an additional variation when the purpose of the co-opting is to make a happy ending. Persons who perceived themselves as victims of realigning behaviors may wish to create a story where the end is seen as generally positive, for everyone involved, including those who were perceived as attacking. This is very similar to saving face, and may be seen as a variation of it, but this variation includes the specific use of the narrative of the other side, twisted not only to support the victim’s purpose, but to create a happy ending for everyone.

Co-opting the narrative to make a happy ending will appeal to a victim whose core values include cooperation and collaboration, focusing on socially oriented goals compared to individual advancement goals. One participant to this study, despite describing an abusive and hostile working environment over a period of time, used the exact accusations leveled against him/her to neutralize the attack and then reasoned that the entire situation had actually been very good for everyone, and had ended well for everyone. The victim felt she had saved face, that the

attacker had come clean, that the narrative was not abusive, and that everyone was happy at the end of the day.

Both forms of co-opting the narrative are generally conscious and deliberate actions. They both serve to justify the victim's actions and provide a means of saving face, particularly when they are used in going public.

### **Summary**

In summary, justifying behaviors are observed as the third stage in the process of realigning. Those people in the organization who see themselves as victims will use various methods to justify their actions and values.

All the forms of justifying are reactive behaviors. In psychological terms, justifying is rationalizing. Rationalization is a defense mechanism to logically explain behaviors that are not understood as "good." But the psychological definition goes further to explain that rationalization is an avoidance tactic in which the true explanation is hidden by the logical explanation. Furthermore, the psychological understanding of rationalization is that this behavior is unconscious and not recognized by the individual. Participants in this study consciously understood they were justifying, but they did not understand justifying behaviors to be avoidance tactics. However, as time passes and victims continue to process the realigning events, they will usually reach a final stage in the process going beyond reacting and moving into a different mode of reasoning and understanding in which they re-orient, decide, and act. This fourth stage is described as "resolving."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **Resolving: The Fourth Stage of Realigning**

The fourth and final stage of realigning is “resolving.” This is the stage when individuals who have been subjected to realigning behaviors move past justifying and into a deeper level of understanding, which then leads to conscious decision-making<sup>10</sup>.

Not all people will reach the stage of resolving. Individuals may be stuck in justifying. This means those people will remain in an emotionally reactive state, even if they do take an action that may resolve the situation. For example, some participants in this study left their workplaces while in the justifying stage. They did not become conscious of their behaviors at a deeper level and their decision-making was emotionally based. Therefore, these individuals usually left angrily and resentfully. Despite being out of the organization where the conflict occurred, for these individuals to better cope and gain understanding, they need to begin the resolving stage. Resolving may take place while still in the organization or outside.

Resolving is a process that is not usually linear but tends to be a more recursive, back-and-forth, process for individuals. This is another example of the cyclical types of behavioral movements that characterize the realigning theory. However, for clarity, the common steps that occur are described here in a linear manner. Generally, resolving will begin with giving voice to or expressing externally what is happening or has happened. Venting is an important stage of giving voice to the conflict and allows the victim to become more conscious.

Being conscious allows the individual to orient oneself, whereas being purely reactive is generally associated with being stuck in the same place without being aware of it. Being conscious, and then orienting, allows the individual to consider options of how to proceed.

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<sup>10</sup> The resolving stage and process described here are individual behaviors triggered by realigning and therefore differ from the resolving concept introduced by Toscano (2008) where resolving is a system response to maintain order rather than an individual response to become conscious.

There are two primary options. The first is to remain in or move back into the organization and the second is to separate. Both options involve loss and loss assessment.

### **Having voice**

“Having voice,” broadly defined, is being able to articulate or define a concept, an event, a goal, or a value. When the definition of having voice is narrowed to defining values, then having voice becomes a means by which to define one’s own identity. If individuals feel that their values are under attack, they may feel compelled to begin to voice those values as a means of defending their self-identity and worth. However, having voice can move beyond self-defense, where it would be more akin to justifying behaviors, when it becomes an articulation process of becoming aware and not simply a reactionary behavior. Therefore, for the purposes of the theory of realigning, having voice is the process of articulating one’s values in a way that leads to more conscious awareness of the individual’s values in the context of the organization. For example, as a victim begins to articulate what is important to him/her and why, he/she will also begin to articulate how values are defined and observed. The victim’s voicing leads him/her to greater consciousness when the process of defining beings to compare one’s individual values to the values of others in the organization. This comparison is what places the individual values in the context of the organizations. Therefore, how one articulates in a way that creates greater consciousness is by contextualizing.

Having voice is important because it is a first step in allowing for the potential of change or of modifying one’s behavior. Without awareness of behaviors and their motivations, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a person to begin self-initiated change. The process of resolving cannot happen if victims do not articulate their values and understand how these values compare to those in organization (contextualize). When individuals are operating on an

emotional or gut-reaction basis alone, they generally cannot articulate or reach a conscious level of understanding. Therefore, trying to resolve the conflict they are experiencing is extremely difficult. This is one of the reasons why victims often describe conditions of stalemate, being against a brick wall, or being blocked when they talk about their experiences when the realigning behaviors begin. They are in a reactionary stage at this point.

Having voice is a concept that is often associated with disenfranchised groups. “Voice of the oppressed” is a common term that is found in economic, racial, religious, and/or gender-based studies of people who have been dominated and repressed. In the study of oppression, one means of generating awareness of repressions is to give voice to those who are experiencing the oppression. The use of the concept having voice in this context is to generate an articulation, assure being heard, and create awareness as a basis for potential action.

Having voice is related to the concept of “naming.” Naming theories are part of the study of philosophy and are used in the consideration of the nature of identity. How we name objects, events, individuals, concepts, in turn reflects and determines how we understand those things to exist.

Naming may become having voice when victims define concepts, particularly their core values. For example, a participant to this study described herself as a “Cassandra figure.” This is a specific example of giving a name, potent with meaning, to oneself. According to Greek mythology, Cassandra was given the gift of prophecy, but by angering Apollo, the gift became conditional so that no one believed Cassandra’s predictions, although they all did come true. “The tragedy of having been right all along” was how the participant named, articulated, and voiced her situation. This helped the participant understand what was happening and why.

**Venting.**

“Venting” is a variation of having voice. Venting is giving free expression to intense emotion. Free expression means that the conveyance of thoughts and feelings can be an uninterrupted flow akin to a stream of consciousness. Venting is not a simple rant or random flow of thought. In free expression there also is a search for understanding. This is generally not seen as a rational, logical expression, but rather as questions that arise in the venting.

For example, one participant in this study was asked to stop verbal venting and write down everything that was going through the participant’s mind. At this particular point during the verbal venting, the participant felt publically attacked again and was very angry. But what the participant articulated in writing was not only a volatile rant, but was also filled with questions asking “why?” The venting is thus seen as one of the steps that victims experience as they try to understand. Whether verbal, written, or expressed in some other manner, venting articulates feeling. This feeling includes the desire to understand and goes beyond reaction only.

Venting may have a temporal element as well. As time passes, the venting becomes increasingly reflective, with more and more questions and possible answers flowing through the expressive act. However, time does not necessarily decrease the emotional level of venting. The greater the emotional conflict of the value attack experienced, the more likely that residual memories will exist and may resurface very quickly if a similar situation is encountered.

The most common form of venting is verbal and expressed one-on-one. When verbal, in-person venting occurs there is an attempt to gain sympathy and empathy from the person to whom the venting is being directed. In order to sympathize, or share another’s feelings, there must be some level of common understanding, or empathy. Understanding and sharing feelings may lead the vent into a conversation of “why,” and therefore, to a more conscious level.

**Being conscious**

“Being conscious” is the next stage in the process of resolving. Having voice tends to start the becoming more aware or more conscious state. Being conscious is when the individual not only articulates, but increasingly acquires, knowledge of not only his/her own behavior and values, but understanding and consideration of those of others in the organization. Being conscious allows an individual to see beyond the self. It allows an increasing understanding of the organization in which he/she is a member. This organizational understanding allows the individual to have a greater understanding of one’s orientation or position in the organization.

There are two related behaviors as an individual becomes conscious. These are “losing naivety” and “losing one’s religion.” Naivety, as discussed before, is one of the conditions that creates the opportunity for targeting. The target does not understand that his/her own core values are in conflict with others’. Losing naivety reverses this; the target becomes aware of others’ values.

Losing one’s religion is a more extreme process of reversal. This occurs when an individual, no longer naïve, moves beyond understanding and actually considers abandoning his/her own values.

**Losing naivety.**

An individual who has been targeted and has experienced realigning behaviors will generally begin the process of coming to grips with the experiences and trying to understand it. In trying to understand, as the victim is voicing and asking “why,” there often is an opportunity for the actions of others to be scrutinized. At first, a naïve individual will only view the behaviors of others through his/her own value-lens, in a very personally biased manner.



However, this may change as the individual begins to try to view others' behaviors from the standpoint of others themselves.

Losing naivety may be a long process, and it does not imply that individuals will lose or change their own values or see their values as substandard to others'. However, once one is able to see things from multiple points of view, there may be a decrease in the emotional level of conflict.

All the participants in this study attempted to understand why realigning behaviors had been directed toward them, but not all participants lost their naivety. Perhaps this is a question of time and eventually losing naivety will occur. Perhaps there are certain individuals who are so firmly rooted in their own beliefs and values that they cannot see actions from another point of view as it would threaten their own self-identity. This may be true of individuals who are crusaders, who by definition never give up hope of changing situations to support their own values.

As an example, several participants in this study never moved beyond justifying. They showed no movement toward viewing events from any other stance than their own personal value perspective despite the realigning experiences of several years' duration. Other participants demonstrated they had moved into resolving but were stuck in the having voice and venting phase.

However, in multiple other datasets, participants demonstrated a type of personal groping toward understanding that involved a cycling back and forth between trying to understand from their own point of view and then trying to understand from another's. A faculty member stated, "Maybe it was my personality, maybe it was me. I don't think so. I don't really think it was a

personal thing.” This demonstrates the back and forth, the attempt to see things from a different point of view, and the process of losing naivety.

**Losing one’s religion.**

Losing one’s religion is the act of abandoning one’s own core values. This concept was introduced in the first stage of the process of realigning with the discussion of belonging and consequences of the threat of not belonging. The discussion here is not intended to change the concept, but rather to explain when and how this may occur.

Losing one’s religion is beyond losing naivety as not only does one become aware of one’s own and others’ core values, but one now contemplates and perhaps chooses to abandon one’s own values. Losing naivety is a necessary condition for losing one’s religion, as individuals cannot abandon values they do not even recognize possessing. Awareness may be at a relatively primary level, but some awareness must be present.

As an individual becomes aware of the values of others, there may be the recognition that the individual’s values are not shared by the majority or by those in power. In losing naivety, the individual may also become aware that continuing to maintain and protect their own values will create deepening conflict with no resolution perceived to exist other than not belonging to the organization anymore. Losing membership in the organization may conflict so severely with a person’s own value of belonging that the person must make a decision about which values are the most important – those that are in conflict with others or the value of belonging. If the values that are in conflict are more important than belonging, the individual will often leave the organization. If belonging is the most important value, then the individual may stay but may have to abandon other values to do so.

Therefore, being conscious allows individuals to orient, or position themselves. They begin to see how they fit, or do not fit, into the organization. They begin to understand themselves in context of others, and in the context of the organization. This understanding may then lead to considering options.

### **Considering options and deciding**

“Considering options” is the third step in the process of resolving, the last stage of realigning. Considering options is the process of taking stock of one’s position or orientation in the organization and then using this information to decide on the next course of action.

There are two types of action to consider. One is staying in the organization, which may include moving back in. The second type of action is separating. In both cases, the individual assesses what he/she is doing and why. Additionally, in both cases, the individual perceives a loss which enters into the assessment.

The sense of loss begins in some part during the previous stage of being conscious as an individual loses naivety. However, losing naivety may not necessarily imply a sense of loss in feeling sad. Once an individual has reached the stage of considering and deciding, the sense of loss that occurs generally does include a feeling of sadness.

As an individual becomes conscious, he/she tends to become aware and understand that a change needs to occur. No one wishes to be subject to unending realigning behaviors as these are experienced as unwanted and negative. The natural inclination is to end realigning. As the individual understands how his/her behaviors and values are related to and causing realigning, the individual begins to consider what to do, but regardless of the choices, the change signals a loss.

An individual who is aware may no longer be naïve and blithely believe that everyone shares the same values and opinions. Realizing that one's core values, what is held dear emotionally, are not shared may trigger a process very similar to the Kubler-Ross (1969) stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. As related to the theory of realigning, denial is the condition of naivety; anger is the initial reaction to being subjected to the unwanted and unwarranted realigning tactics; bargaining is the stage of justifying; and depression is the sense of loss that accompanies the assessment undertaken while considering courses of action. Acceptance would be represented by the actual decision made after considering.

As discussed earlier, if an action is taken before reaching the stage of resolving, the individual will often remain in an emotional state that usually is quite negative and characterized by anger and resentment. A common example is a person leaving an organization while in the justifying stage. Using the Kubler-Ross analogy, this person has not reached the acceptance state.

### **Assessing.**

“Assessing” is the process of reviewing and evaluating that individuals will work through as they try to gain a greater understanding of the realigning experience. When individuals see themselves as victims of realigning tactics and have moved through the stages of justifying and becoming conscious, they are beginning to understand how their core values compare to others in the organization and they are becoming aware of the reason for conflict.

For example, one participant became aware that her own values were collaboration and working with other disciplines in the organization but that the values of the person perceived as the perpetrator were self-advancement and independence. This participant then consciously took

stock of the options available to her in terms of staying within the department or not. If the participant had also shared a value of independence, she may have been able to elevate the importance of that desire over collaboration and more readily considered staying where she was.

In the higher education workplace, tenured faculty members, who have risen through the ranks and achieved the rank of professor, who have longevity in the organization, and do not see separating as a viable option because they do not think they will find employment elsewhere, or that they will not find comparable employment elsewhere, or for other economic reasons such as retirement and other benefits do not see leaving as possible, will generally assess their situation as one where it is best to stay.

Financial impact is not the only basis for assessment. Tenured professors often feel that they have given their professional life to the institution and that they deserve to stay. They have built a reputation, or a program, or a following, or some other valued professional outcome that they feel would be difficult, if not impossible, to replicate elsewhere.

This process of assessing may be described as having three steps. The first is “prioritizing.” The second is a type of “fall-back assessment.” The third is a “moral reckoning” in which the individual assesses his or her self-respect threshold<sup>11</sup>.

***Prioritizing.***

“Prioritizing” is one of the phases of personal assessment that an individual works through in the process of resolving. In the assessing examples given above, there is a stage in which one compares values and decides which values are the most important. This is done consciously and deliberately, but does not necessarily happen just once. An individual may go through cycles of considering, reconsidering, voicing, and comparing. The individual may come back to the same core values or may start to change core values.

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<sup>11</sup> “Self-respect threshold” is a term developed and employed first in the study of alcoholism. (See Bigus, 1974).

One of the main reasons for value conflict is the nature of basic human values themselves. As discussed above, some human values emphasize the individual and personal advancement and some emphasize a social focus, transcending beyond the individual. According to Schwartz (2009), individuals in all countries and cultures share a set of 10 common basic values that include both individual and socially focused values. What distinguishes one culture from another is not the basic 10 values, but the degree to which each culture prioritizes these. This premise of collective behavior may be applied to individual behavior as well. Therefore, each individual in the organization may have the same set of core values but the degree and manner in which one prioritizes these will vary.

If members of an organization feel that they are in alignment and they do not perceive a value conflict or realigning behaviors directed toward them, they may never actually become conscious of how they prioritize their values. They may never be forced or otherwise given the opportunity to have voice or articulate these values, which would help lead them toward the conscious act of prioritizing.

However, individuals who become conscious of value conflicts and reach the stage of considering will not be naïve. They will prioritize and use their priorities as a foundation for decision-making and action.

***Fall-back assessing.***

“Fall-back assessing” is the stage in considering when the individual, having prioritized, looks at the worst case scenarios and tries to think through possible courses of action. For example, one of the administrative participants in this study assessed available personal courses of action as being threefold: staying where she was and adopting behaviors to lessen/stop the conflict; separating from the organization by finding a new position in a different organization;

or a combination of staying and separating –staying in the same organization but in a different position such as retreating to a faculty position. Each of these scenarios was played through. Assessment of financial outcomes as well as personal values was considered.

Fall-back assessing is one more indication of becoming aware of the organization, the nature of the value conflict, and the options that may or may not exist.

***Moral reckoning: The self-respect threshold.***

“Moral reckoning” is the third stage of assessing. Moral reckoning is the act of determining a moral stance or position. It is a type of calculation or accounting based on moral principles. Moral reckoning occurs when there is a perceived conflict between behavior and beliefs.

In the academic workplace, the victim, now coming to understand the conflict in values and the position held within the organization, will include the moral implications when considering and assessing actions. Each course of action will be reviewed in terms of the impact on the individual’s core values.

Self-respect is built on core values and is the feeling that one is good and should be well-treated by others in accordance with those values. To deny one’s values leads to denying self-respect and therefore not expecting respect from others as well. Thus, a self-respect threshold is the level beyond which one loses self-respect. Each individual will assess where that level, or threshold, is and acts to not bypass it. Courses of action that are under the threshold are viable options. Those that go beyond the threshold lead to too much damage to the person’s identity in terms of morals and values and are not considered appropriate courses to take.

The common use of the term “moral reckoning” is the process of trying to account for behaviors that are in direct opposition to moral beliefs. Moral reckoning has popularly come to

be associated with the Roman Catholic Church's role in the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup> For example, the Catholic Church is accused of anti-Semitism, having caused harm, and creating hatred, all actions opposed to the Catholic Church's purported values of love and goodness. Non-coincidentally, moral reckoning emerged as a core variable explaining moral distress amongst nurses.<sup>13</sup> The core variable explains a behavior that results from nurses who are confronted with social norms that directly conflict with their personal core beliefs.

Based on the process of assessing with prioritizing, fall-back assessing, and moral reckoning, the victim considers courses of action and then decides which actions to pursue. Generally, there are two options: stay or leave.

**Staying/moving back in.**

“Staying,” or “moving back in” if one has been figuratively or literally pushed out, is considered with the understanding that in order for this course of action to be successful, the individual has to de-emphasize the values that have led to conflict and choose to demonstrate values that more closely align with the values of those with relatively more power. If the value conflict was not severe, or the victim can find common values to emphasize, then staying may be the decision chosen.

However, if the value conflict is deep and/or if there are no common core values, staying becomes a difficult course of action to consciously adopt. The most extreme case is losing one's religion, discussed earlier. Again, this is the case in which the value of belonging is so strong that the victim foregoes other core values to maintain belonging. To consider this course of action and then adopt it will generally require specific conditions to be present. These conditions are related to the degree to which the organization is closed.

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<sup>12</sup> This association was popularized with Goldhagen's (2003) non-fiction publication of “A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair.”

<sup>13</sup> See Nathaniel's (2003) dissertation, *A Grounded Theory of Moral Reckoning in Nursing*.



If an organization is very difficult to enter and leave, the individual is more likely to consider carefully the consequences of separating or leaving as there may be the perception that one cannot ever achieve the same professional position elsewhere. Additionally, the longer the individual has been in the organization, the more he/she may be vested into that particular organization, and potentially the more power the individual may have, and again, the more difficult the decision to leave may be.

Finally, an organization with publically recognized moral values may place some sort of public stigma on those who leave, or leave under certain circumstances. An example would be a dishonorable discharge from a branch of the military. In summary, the more closed the organization, the greater the perceived loss of separating may be and the more likely it will be that the individual will look for personally acceptable ways to stay.

### **Separating.**

“Separating” is the action by which the individual either moves to a different part of the organization to reduce the value conflict or completely leaves the organization. Separating is the most common course of action employed by participants in this study.

Separating allows both the organization and individual the possibility of realigning in the most direct manner. The individual leaves with personal core values intact and does not feel a need to compromise or reprioritize to remain in the organization since remaining would have forced the individual to realign to the organizational values instead of personal/individual values. From the organization perspective, the threat has definitively been removed and an effective signal has been sent to other organizational members that separating is a potential consequence to conflictual behaviors. In many ways, this is a win-win situation. Both sides of the conflict may be seen as winning.

The more open the organization, the more likely separating will be a viable course of action. Just as staying is directly related to the degree to which the organization is closed, separating is directly related to the degree to which the organization is open. The more open the organization, the easier entry and exit are, and the more readily individuals perceive they may obtain equal, or even better, employment elsewhere.

The lack of tenure and unionized benefits creates a more open organization, which makes separating a more viable option for administrators, who are generally not tenured nor covered under collective bargaining units. The opposite is true for faculty members who much more frequently have tenure and/or unionized benefits.

Two variations of separating were observed in this dataset. The first is that of “branching out” which may allow an organization member to stay in the same organization but in a different position. Thus, it is a modified combination of staying and leaving. The second is “moving on” and is the more commonly understood act of separating, when an individual completely leaves an organization.

***Branching out.***

One of the methods of separating is “branching out.” Branching out is gradually moving into other activities that allow one to move into a different position in the organization, reducing the value conflict and the realigning behaviors.

An example of branching out would be moving from a particular academic department or program to something different. The most commonly observed movement of this type in the dataset under analysis was moving from a teaching assignment to a reassigned position of coordinating a project. If the value conflict is centered in the smaller subsystem of the department, branching out may effectively reduce the conflict.

Branching out is a more tentative, less permanent type of action and allows more opportunity for movement back into the original position. Branching out may lead to moving on and completely separating if the gradual positional shifting is experienced as positive.

***Moving on.***

“Moving on” is the commonly understood act of separating completely from an organization. Professionally, this is accomplished by voluntarily resigning or retiring. There is also the involuntary separation of dismissal for cause or nonrenewal of contract. However, involuntary separation is not an example of moving on. To move on is to voluntarily and consciously decide to leave the organization.

As an example of the opposite, or involuntary, separation, one participant fought vigorously to have the employment contract renewed and to be offered tenure. Administrators in this organization refused and stood by a decision to terminate employment at the end of the contract. The participant co-opted the narrative of the administrators and left the organization. However, this was not truly moving on, because the participant separated but had not reached the stage of resolving and being conscious in making the decision to separate.

Moving on generally comes with some degree of remorse. As described earlier, the process of resolving involves assessment and loss at each stage. Even though the voluntary, conscious act of moving on may be a win-win for both the organization and the individual, the individual will often feel that there is a loss in leaving. This loss is based on the degree and extent to which the individual felt aligned with the organization, prior to the value conflict occurring. The greater affinity a person felt for the organization and the longer the person experienced this, the greater would be the perception of loss.

The actual act of moving on and separating is akin to the action of coping as described by Cummings (2010). According to Cummings, the sense of remorse would best be understood as mourning, and the actual separation, or moving on, is an example of coping.

Moving on is also related to hiring and employment assumptions. For example, a higher education organization that is hiring a new employee will often look at frequent changes of employment in a resume as suspect and will question why the person appears to be job jumping so frequently. This is based on the higher educational value of stability, conformity, and longevity of employment in one organization, which may be directly opposed to industries where the ability to move and progressively take positions of greater responsibility is valued, such as in private, for-profit marketing and sales positions.

Therefore, in the hiring process, higher education institutions often look for someone who is less likely to leave, and more likely to vest in the organization, thereby making it all the more difficult to leave. This is one of the ways to try to ensure good fit when hiring. However, this type of good fit has the potential of backfiring if the individual eventually is seen out of alignment because it reduces the ability of the individual to move on.

Figure 4 illustrates the third and fourth stages of realigning, justifying, and resolving, respectively, as individual behaviors, which may ultimately lead to self-motivated and conscious separation to a new organization.

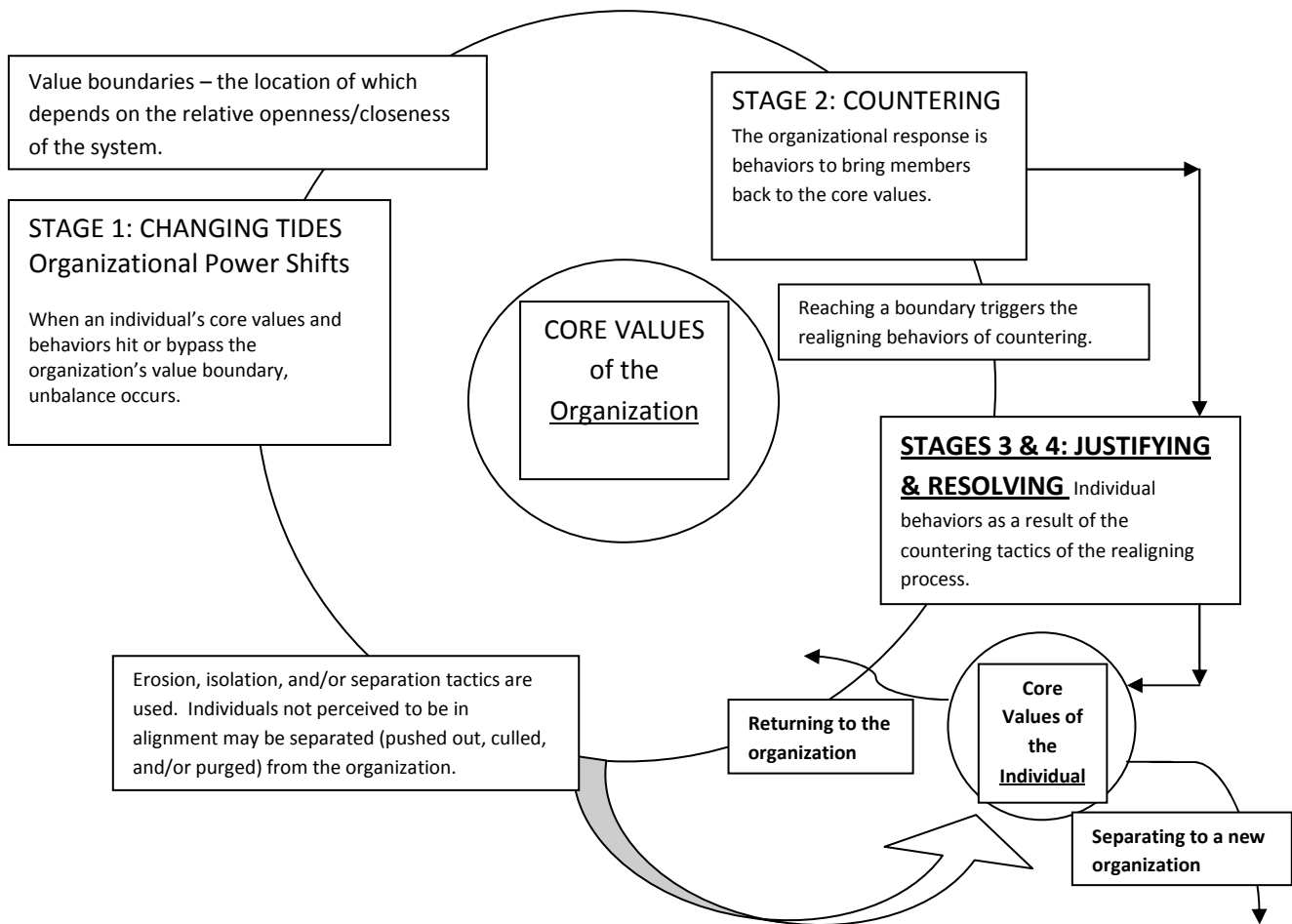


Figure 4. Stages 3 and 4 of realigning are individual processes resulting from countering tactics. Individuals tend to justify but not all move into or completely through resolving.

**Summary**

In summary, the fourth and final stage of realigning is resolving. The organization and the individual are both working to realign and reduce the value conflict. The individual who is able to move from justifying, which is more reactive, to resolving, which is reflective and consciousness-building, will work to articulate the issues, understand differing points of view and the nature of the conflict. Next, the individual will consider options, and through an iterative

process of assessing, will weigh courses of action, and finally decide on the best option to pursue.

Most participants in this study chose to separate, both through branching out and moving on. Moving on has the potential of being the most direct means to realign and of being a win-win outcome for both the individual and the organization. But regardless of the final outcome in resolving the realigning process, there is usually the perception of loss, and an experience of remorse, associated with the resolution.

## CHAPTER NINE

### Conclusion

The theory of realigning seeks to explain workplace conflict and presents a variety of implications for future research and action plans. The theory is summarized, conclusions are drawn, and finally future implications are discussed in this final section.

#### Summary of the Theory

The theory of realigning is a rich and multivariate explanation of how and why academic workplace conflict occurs. The theory explains the consequences of conflict and the natural manner in which conflict may be resolved.

There is a situational context for realigning and there are four primary stages that comprise the theory of realigning. The situational context is the conditions in which conflict may occur. The context or environmental area is conceptualized as having core values. It is in the context of value conflict that workplace conflictual behaviors may arise.

The first stage of realigning is conceptualized as changing tides. This stage refers to the natural, cyclical dynamics of all social organizations, including workplaces, where power shifts are continually occurring. These shifts in power lead to value conflicts which then lead to behaviors of realigning.

The second stage is the period in which realigning behaviors are taking place and is conceptualized as counter measuring. This stage begins with targeting the individual or group that is demonstrating acts out of alignment with the values of those with relatively more power. Realigning tactics and strategies are all countermeasures which may be presented as a taxonomy with three categories: tactics that erode, isolate, and separate the target.

The third stage of realigning is that of justifying. Justifying is an individual behavior that all participants experienced. It occurs in a reactionary phase when individuals who perceive

themselves as targets seek to exonerate themselves of guilt. Victims frequently believe that the realigning behaviors they have experienced are unwanted and unwarranted. Justifying acts seek to preserve the target's sense of value and self-worth.

The fourth and final stage of realigning is resolving. Resolving is the concept of becoming aware of the nature of the conflict, the organization, the values of others and then consciously gaining an understanding. Based on this understanding the individual may consider courses of action and then decide what to do next. Not all victims will reach the stage of resolving. For those who do, separating is often the course of action chosen.

### **Conclusions of the Theory**

Several conclusions may be drawn from the theory of realigning. First, conflict is situated in an organization, and to better understand why conflict arises, the organization itself must be seen as the starting point of analysis. Most workplace conflict studies start at the individual level and focus on describing individual behaviors, but fail to understand how the organization and organizational core values are related to the individual. The concept of boundaries that limit the acceptable behaviors as related to organizational core values is not one that has appeared in previous studies. However, understanding what value boundaries are, and how the degree of organizational openness determines the location of these boundaries is important for understanding individuals. It is when an individual reaches or breaches a boundary that realigning begins. In other words, without the organizational perspective, the researcher does not understand *why* workplace behaviors of conflict begin.

Additionally, the core value basis of organizations helps explain why workplace conflict is highly emotional. Understanding that value conflict is the foundation for workplace conflict, and understanding the affective nature of values, allows the researcher and the organization



member to look beyond the emotional acts and words, to look at the underlying values and why there is perceived conflict. This takes the analysis beyond the individual versus individual level and yet respects that all individuals have core values at play in relationship to other members' values in the organization.

Second, the concept of power changes within social organizations is not new. However, the changing tides stage of realigning creates a conceptual framework that allows greater understanding of how organizations are continually cycling through power shifts and that these shifts are what cause individuals to hit boundaries, triggering realigning measures, which are the acts perceived as workplace conflict. Incorporating the understanding of movement, the continual changing of tides, also is the framework for a better understanding of why and how power is changing.

Third, once the organization-level analysis is in place and power movements are understood, then the individual acts of conflict, such as bullying take on a new meaning. First, those who commit acts perceived as conflictual, such as bullying, do not bully for bullying's sake. Rather, the acts are deemed as deserved because they are being undertaken to preserve core values. Additionally, those accused of starting conflict feel that they themselves were subjected to conflictual behaviors and are trying to address this threat. This gives us a view of the perpetrator's perspective which has been missing from the literature.

Fourth, the escalating conflictual behaviors that are often observed at workplaces, termed "snowballing" here, may be explained. The theory of realigning allows an understanding of how spiraling behaviors as countering measures move from erosion to isolation to separation, and further how value conflict degree and victim naivety work to create this acceleration. Although

other studies have observed snowballing, there has been little theoretical understanding of why or how it occurs.

Fifth, an important conclusion is the development and differentiation of the two concepts of justifying and resolving. Generally, all organizational members who perceive themselves as being targeted or victims of realigning measures will react with justifying behaviors. However, some of these individuals will never move beyond justifying and will never fully become conscious of how they as individuals relate to others in the organization in terms of values. These individuals are perpetually in an idiosyncratically individual mode of perception. Understanding this, one may better come to know why only some individuals move into the resolving stage, and may not move fully through the resolving stage. Justifying is the reactionary phase that is generally observed. Resolving is the becoming conscious phase that is sometimes observed. Therefore, individuals who end up leaving an organization while in the justifying phase will tend to be very angry and defensive. Those who leave as a movement through the resolving phase will do so consciously and willingly.

These are some of the most important conclusions that may be drawn from the theory of realigning. There are potentially a multitude of additional conclusions, since the theory is highly generalizable. All of these conclusions may lead to implications for future work.

### **Implications of the Theory**

There are two general implications to the theory of realigning. The first are implications for future research. The second are implications for future action.

#### **Future research.**

In terms of research, there is the potential of testing the generalizability of the theory of realigning to other organizations. It seems quite straightforward that the theory would easily

generalize to other workplaces. What is not so obvious is if the theory would generalize to even larger social organizations such as nation-states or to much smaller organizations such as the family unit.

Essentially, the theory of realigning, which is substantive grounded theory, that is, it explains the substantive area of workplace conflict, could be considered for extension to a formal grounded theory. Glaser (2007) has proposed that substantive grounded theories may be broadened and generalized into formal theory. It has been suggested that this is possible and would be an interesting study in the usefulness of the theory. If the theory of realigning could be formalized, the generalizability at all levels of analysis must work. Given the high degree of generalizability of the theory of realigning, moving toward a formal theory would be a logical next research step.

Other research-related implications include extending the stages of the theory. This may be seen as reductionist, but there may well be value in a deeper understanding of any one of the theoretical components of realigning. For example, further study could work to provide an understanding of why not all targets move beyond justifying and why those who enter resolving may never completely reach a fully conscious resolution.

Furthermore, the entire theory of realigning or any component could be studied to see if the theory predicts behavior beyond social organizations. For example, the stage of changing tides could be extended theoretically and tested on a variety of organizations, including organic and nonorganic. In this sense, changing tides could be compared to other theoretical concepts such as the field of fractals.

Finally, there is the potential of extending the theory of realigning with the consideration of quantitative data. Glaser (2008) has defended the validity of quantitative grounded theory

which uses the grounded theory discovery method to generate theory from quantitative data. Quantitative work is being done in the study of global terrorism<sup>14</sup>, which naturally begs the question of whether or not the theory of realigning, which also looks at conflict, could assist in a grounded theory approach to terrorism using quantitative data.

**Future action.**

In terms of future action, several areas seem immediately apparent. The theory of realignment can be used as a foundation for creating an action plan<sup>15</sup> to address issues associated with workplace conflict. The action plan may seek to reduce the severity of workplace behaviors that are perceived as intensely negative and harmful. Understanding the organizational core values and how individual values relate would allow the action planners to better create structures and processes to effectively address conflict.

For example, it has been suggested in bullying literature that administrators need to immediately try to put a stop to bullying among faculty once it is observed. There will be no putting to a stop if organization members do not become aware of the underlying core values that are perceived to be in conflict. Simply telling someone to stop insulting someone else, for example, will probably have no effect, and may even lead to more intense realigning countermeasures. Why? The theory of realigning suggests that insulting is being used by the perpetrator to protect core values. Telling the perpetrator to stop may lead the perpetrator to understand that there is an even deeper threat to one's core values, provoking even more tactics of realigning to be employed.

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Clauset and Wiegel's (2010) terrorism research is based on universal patterns focused entirely on terrorism outcomes, that is, the violence committed. Clauset contends that these outcomes follow laws that govern complex systems, such as the mathematical concept of the power law and that empirical data could potentially be used to test an extension of realigning to the global level. (See Haederle, 2010.)

<sup>15</sup> Simmons and Gregory (2003) articulated the concept of grounded action which predicts more sustainable change as the plan is based on a theory which has emerged from the participants themselves rather than being imposed by the researcher/action planner.

Therefore, action plans need to be developed that are grounded in a conceptual framework of what is really happening and why, which is the purpose of the theory of realigning. Action plans based on this theory would be the ultimate test as to the viability of the realigning conceptual framework.

Additionally, action implications of the theory may be found in less formal applications. For example, as of this writing, there is an attempt in the California Community College (CCC) system to establish student success as a core, unifying, value. However, this transcendent value may not become a core value of each college if a majority of the college's members value self-enhancement as more important than student success. CCC system members at any given college could first work to understand the core values of the college. They could then see how closely the student success value aligns. If it does not align closely, then system members could try to influence the power structure in the system to allow student success to better align. Barring this, there may be a conscious decision that student success will have no success at becoming a core value. Or, alternatively, if student success is closely aligned with existing core values, then there should be every indication that student success will readily be adopted into the college's core value set.

These action implications suggest that the theory of realigning could be useful in understanding how and when change may be successful within the social organizations of workplaces. Since organizational change and the concept of change-agents have received such significance in recent literature, realigning could be a very powerful analytic tool. Realigning may also help explain why so many change-agents meet with defeat. Their failure to effect

change, or at least long-term, meaningful change, may be based on the lack of value-based understanding of the organization, and further identifying those core values.<sup>16</sup>

### **Summary**

In summary, the theory of realigning provides a holistic, organization's approach framework to understand conflict in the academic workplace. The value-based environmental context of conflict is the center of the theory. The stages of the realigning process are understood as changing tides, countering, justifying, and resolving.

There are several important conclusions to draw from the theory of realigning. These include the development of the concept of core values and the boundaries that limit behavior around these values. Additionally, the cycling movements of power may now be better understood, as well as how these movements relate to, and have the potential to change organizational core values. How conflict may escalate is theoretically explained via the concept of snowballing. And, finally, there are important behavioral consequences of conflict, such as justifying and resolving.

Understanding the nature of workplace conflict via the theory of realigning also addresses why the literature is relatively poor in explaining the perspective of the bully or the perpetrator of conflict. These individuals do not perceive of themselves as bullies, but rather see themselves in a situation where one or more core values are being threatened, and therefore the behavioral tactics they employ are to safeguard values, first and foremost.

Finally, the theory of realigning offers rich opportunities for both future research and future action. The development of a formal theory is particularly interesting. The development and employment of an action plan targeted at changing workplace conflict would be the ultimate proof of the value of the theory.

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<sup>16</sup> Authors Heath and Heath (2010) explore this idea based on a heart versus mind distinction.

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