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What Does It Mean to Be a "Polytechnic" University? Cultural Discourse Analysis of Organizational Identity

Sunny Lie Owens, Maggie Boyraz, & Nell C. Huang-Horowitz

This study explicates discourse surrounding organizational identity negotiation among different stakeholders during organizational change in a polytechnic university. We bridge organizational identity approach and Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA) and demonstrate how an organizational identity is negotiated through cultural communicative practices active among student leaders, faculty, administrators, and staff. Five themes emerged from our analysis of 24 interviews with university stakeholders: 1) polytechnic as "STEM"; 2) polytechnic prioritizes certain disciplines over others; 3) polytechnic as "learn-by-doing"; 4) polytechnic as many arts; and 5) polytechnic as symbolic of tension among colleges.

Keywords: Cultural Communication; Cultural Discourse Analysis; Organizational Identification; Organizational Identity; University Stakeholders

A melodic bell is ringing across the green lush campus grounds of Valley Polytechnic, a polytechnic university in the U.S. It signals the arrival of noon time, which, for students that day, meant it was time to line up in designated areas across campus for free pizza and lemonade. They engage in cheerful chatter as they await their turn to access university-sponsored lunch in the form of cold pizza. Faculty and staff could be seen sitting in areas marked by signs indicating their

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respective departments. The purpose of this campus event is to encourage students to approach faculty and staff with questions regarding the transition from a trimester system to a semester one.

The current study examines identity negotiation during a period of organizational change. We look into stakeholders' definition and understanding of the term "polytechnic" and how they contribute to the organization's identity. At the time of the study, Valley Polytechnic was gearing up for trimester-to-semester transition, following the trends of other state-funded schools in the area. As with any major planned organizational change, certain groups objected to the change, while others were supportive of it. When the announcement was made regarding the imminent transition, the conversations became much heated and ubiquitous in stakeholders' everyday experiences at the organization.

Much of the discussion, and sometimes contentious arguments, focused on the potential negative effects on the university's identity as a polytechnic institution. As communication scholars, we saw this major and long-term planned change as an opportunity to gather real-time, contemporary data on stakeholders' perceptions of their organization's identities. Analyzing different stakeholders' perspectives in a complex change process is important because "periods of significant change tend to raise issues of values, priorities, belongingness, trust, and commitment" (Lewis & Sahay, 2017, p. 2). There are serious concerns of poor change management for all organizations. For example, Bordia, Restubog, Jimmieson, and Irmer (2011) found that poor change management history leads to low trust, decrease in employee job satisfaction, increased cynicism, and turnover intentions.

In order to explore how the organizational change may contribute to stakeholders' identity negotiation, we began asking key stakeholders – faculty, staff, and students – what the term "polytechnic" meant to them. We were interested in "what is getting done" (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 169) communicatively speaking when "polytechnic" becomes a "key cultural term" (p. 169) through which our organizational identity is contemplated, negotiated, and debated. As one could imagine, we found a variety of answers relating to our broad inquiry. This discussion surrounding the organizational identity of a polytechnic university constitutes the focal point of this analysis.

The purpose of this analysis is to unveil stakeholders' cultural communicative act (Carbaugh, 1991; Fitch, 2003; Hymes, 1972; Philipsen, 1987, 2002) of negotiating an organizational identity through discussions pertaining to the key cultural term "polytechnic." Although the study of organizational identity from multiple stakeholders' perspectives is not new (e.g. Feldner & Fyke, 2016), the exploration of identity negotiation among university stakeholders from a *cultural communicative* perspective, provides additional and novel insight to the organizational identity scholarship. We theorize organizational identity as both a *dimension* and *outcome* of certain communication practices (Carbaugh, 1996; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). We seek to "interpret [the] participants' meanings of their communicative practices … [and] to know how present concerns are significant and important to

them" (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 26). By focusing on their communicative practices, we highlight participants' systems of meanings. These systems of meanings contain within them deeply-seated and potent cultural understandings of who they are, what they are doing, how they are related with one another, how they are placed within certain settings, and last but not least, feelings (Carbaugh, 2007) and attachments concerning the polytechnic institution in question.

This analysis also further explicates the conflicting understandings of what should be included and/or emphasized in a polytechnic education that often result in a symbolic tension among stakeholders in this institution, as well as findings relating to what other universities experience when going through a major change. On the ground, the tensions between stakeholders translate into silos across the campus, where each side struggles for legitimacy for the sake of resource allocation from the central administration. This struggle, in turn, keeps them from focusing on overall student advancement, which all sides claim is their priority. The lack of agreement on what constitutes a polytechnic education also negatively impacts the university's identity as it makes strides to clarify its vision and mission.

Organizational Identity and Identification

One of the most common conceptualizations of organizational identity in the organizational communication literature is identity as what stakeholders find central and sustaining in an organization (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Scott et al., 1998). Stakeholders include those who are part of the organization, the insiders, as well as members of the general public, or outsiders, who form an external expression (Hatch & Schultz, 2002) of and might affect or are affected by the organization. More than just social collectives, organizations are collective social actors, which highlights the "functional and structural parallels between the identity of organizational actors and individual actors" (Whetten, 2006, p. 221). Organizational identity can also be viewed as a combination of cultural values held by insiders and the organization's reputation (Weber, Thomas, & Stevens, 2015), and as expressions of an organization's cultural values.

Contained within this definition is the notion that an organization's identity is "central, enduring, distinctive in character" (Gioia & Thomas, 1996, p. 372) and is communicatively constructed (Haseki, Scott, & Gailliard, 2020; Scott et al., 1998). It is worth noting, however, that these three features by no means imply that organizational identity is unidimensional, stable, and static; rather, it is complex and dynamic (Huang-Horowitz & Evans, 2020) and must remain adaptive (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000) and complicated. The central, enduring, and distinctive features of an organization – organizational identity claims – help define its uniqueness in terms of the social space it occupies and the commitments it undertakes (Whetten, 2006). These identity claims can often vary depending on the audience and the purpose of the claims but are equally valid expressions of an organization's identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985). An organization may have multiple identity claims that

are tied together with one common theme or identity claims based on multiple, diverse views about what its central, enduring, and distinctive features are. The former implies a flexible yet adaptive organizational identity (Gioia et al.), whereas the latter implies multiple (Illia, 2010) and heterogeneous (Pratt & Foreman, 2000), sometimes conflicting (Albert & Whetten), organizational identities. Multiple organizational identities may help an organization meet various stakeholder expectations and demands, but can also lead to conflict, inaction, and tension (Kreutzer & Jäger, 2011; Pratt & Foreman, 2000).

Discussions of organization identity often converge with the literature on organizational identification. Most organizations perceive identification with an organization as important; consequently, for-profit organizations often spend time, money, and human resources to invoke identification (Cheney, 1983). Traditionally speaking, not-for-profit organizations such as universities do not spend as much resources on building identification. An understanding of multiple stakeholders' identification with its organization's identity is just as important, and arguably more, for higher education institutions, especially during tumultuous and challenging times. Stakeholders' strong identification can have positive outcomes for the organizations, such as higher likelihood to remain affiliated with an organization (Scott & Stephens, 2009), support its goals (Scott & Lane, 2000), engage in favorable behaviors toward the organization (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008), as well as make sacrifices for the organization (Gibson & Papa, 2000).

More specifically, Myers, Davis, Schreuder, and Seibold's (2016) study in a higher education context found strong support for intended involvement as an outcome of students' identification with their university. They found strong relationships between organizational identification and intentions relating to making a financial contribution, attending alumni and campus events, and volunteering with the alumni association. These are some arguments for why it is essential to study identification of multiple stakeholders of a university with potentially multiple identity sources (as in "poly-technic"), especially in tumultuous times and limited resources. If universities are not mindful about resources and discursive strategies for building strong stakeholder identification, they may risk losing opportunities for obtaining financial and human resources and retaining and attracting key stakeholders including donors, students, staff, and faculty.

Inspired by Giddens (1984), Scott et al. (1998) introduced the idea of duality of structure in their conceptualization of identification: the process involving action and structure when building identification with organizations. Scott et. al explain that identification with an organization is expressed primarily through *interactions* between stakeholders and a certain organization, as well as among themselves. An organization might have a distinctive identity, but that feature exists because its stakeholders *communicate* in distinctive ways, which in turn shapes its identity. This premise corresponds to one of the main theoretical premises in Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA) (Carbaugh, 2007): communication constitutes and organizes social life. Organizations, from a CuDA perspective, are understood as a "result or outcome

of specific communication processes" (Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2017, p. 2). In this analysis, then, we explore the process of identity negotiation by multiple stakeholders of a polytechnic university through the CuDA lens.

Following this line of inquiry wherein an organization's identity is tied to daily social interactions among its stakeholders, we conceptualize organizational identity as a communicative accomplishment, which does not have a separate existence outside of everyday communication practices (Carbaugh, 1996). Organizational identity is inherently "grounded in language" (Taylor & Cooren, 1997, p. 422) and has "no existence other than in discourse, where [its] reality is created and sustained" (p. 422). We view it as a dynamic "outcome of communication practices in (…) particular scenes of social and cultural life" (Carbaugh, p. 112), in which "what we say and how we structure our communication says something about who we are, and who others are with whom we communicate" (p. 111). Thus, the fundamental unit of concern in this analysis is communicative practices of people who consider themselves to be part of the specific organizational context of a polytechnic university.

One key theoretical contribution of this paper is establishing a connection between organizational identity, identification, and cultural discourse literatures to explore how identification is negotiated through communicative practices among various stakeholders from the ground up. It is a departure from exploring identity through the lenses of an organization's culture, values, mission, and vision commonly found in organizational identity research. The use of CuDA as both a theoretical and methodological framework for exploring an organization's identity can be more inclusive of voices of multiple stakeholders and provides a more comprehensive understanding of organizational identity, a complicated and multifaceted construct.

Cultural Discourse Analysis and Organizational Identity

Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA) (Carbaugh, 2007) is a theory, method, and philosophy that can be used to investigate communicative practices. It follows the intellectual tradition of ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1972; Philipsen & Carbaugh, 1986) and stands at the juncture of theories of cultural communication (Philipsen, 1987, 2002) and communication codes (Philipsen, 1997; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005). It explicates that underneath seemingly routine and mundane social interactions lies a meta-cultural commentary of 1) who we are (identity); 2) how we relate to one another (relations); 3) what our actions and 4) emotions mean to us (acting and feeling); and 5) how we are placed in certain settings (dwelling) (Carbaugh, 2007; Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2017). In other words, the framework renders explicit taken-for-granted cultural understandings about identity, relations, actions, emotions, and dwelling within a certain speech community (Milburn, 2004). The ability to understand and interpret these cultural commentaries helps an analyst "penetrate the surface of meanings, to the deeper (cultural)

significance and importance" (Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2017, p. 6–7) of their communication practice.

When conducting a cultural discourse analysis, an analyst could start by identifying a key term/symbol that is potent, deep in meaning, and often repeated in a particular communicative practice (e.g., "polytechnic"). The analyst might fix this term/symbol as a *hub* of meaning, then explore other terms/symbols as radiating from it. This analytical step demonstrates how as one talks through an identity term, one might reveal deeper beliefs about relationships, feelings, and actions, as well as a sense of belonging in certain spaces. A hub usually has at least two or more *radiants* (e.g., meaning of feeling and action) emerging from it and could potentially contain all five radiants of meaning.

Taking into consideration the five cultural meanings in CuDA and the communicative constructed nature of organizational identity, the two theoretical frameworks seem to fit seamlessly with one another. The identity, relations, feeling/emotion, action, and dwelling meanings together provide various texts with which stakeholders can express their organization's identity as well as their identification with their organization. For example, college students' expressions of a university's identity can begin with a discussion of its polytechnic nature (identity), followed by comments on their close relationships with professors in their small classes (relations), a sense of pride (feeling/emotion) of being part of the institution, an appreciation of hands-on learning experiences (action), as well as opportunities to contribute to surrounding local communities (dwelling). Highlighting these various expressions allow us, as analysts, to unveil a layered and multifaceted organizational identity as understood and experienced by its stakeholders.

Surprisingly, only a handful of studies have integrated the two theoretical frameworks. In the few studies of organizational identity and CuDA, the framework has been utilized in cross-cultural settings including: workers in a television station in Northeast U.S. (Carbaugh, 1996), a Chinese Indonesian Evangelical church (Lie, 2015, 2017, 2018), and the online networking platform LinkedIn (Hart & Milburn, 2019). Similar to Scott et al.'s (1998) claim that organizational identity cannot be separated from its stakeholders' daily social interactions, these CuDA-based studies conceptualize an organization as consisting of an "expressive system of symbols, symbolic forms, and meanings" (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 63), which, when utilized by its stakeholders on a daily basis, contributes to the negotiation of their identities as they relate to others' identities.

In this paper, we aim to "discover and interpret … [the] expressive system" (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 63) surrounding the key term "polytechnic" and how it shapes the identity of Valley Polytechnic university, the institution forming the focal point of our analysis. Given that the university defines itself through the use of the term "polytechnic," our analysis centers around how this key term serves as a symbol through which the organization's identity is negotiated by its stakeholders from the ground up. As such, our research question is as follows: *how does stakeholders'*

definition and understanding of the term " polytechnic" contribute to the negotiation of Valley Polytechnic's organizational identity?

Historically, the term "polytechnic" referred to agricultural, mechanical, or engineering schools, i.e., institutions with a strong educational philosophy of training students in applied skills in the abovementioned fields. For example, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary online (2020), polytechnic is defined as "relating to or devoted to instruction in many technical arts or applied sciences." As we shall see in this analysis, however, there exists a variety of interpretations of the term among stakeholders in this institution. In fact, differing interpretations become a point of contention, as academic fields that are not traditionally understood as being part of a polytechnic education struggle to gain legitimacy for the sake of access to limited resources.

Method

Data Collection

In the introduction of this paper, we mentioned that the university of interest was going through a change from a trimester to a semester system. With any major organizational change, it is not unusual, and even expected, for certain groups to object to the change while others support it. As communication scholars, we saw this major and long-term planned change as an opportunity to gather real-time, contemporary data on stakeholders' identity negotiation and decided to conduct interviews with members of key stakeholder groups.

Participants

Participants were recruited via e-mail using purposive and snowball sampling. Initial recruitment e-mails were sent to Valley Polytechnic administrators, university leaders, faculty, and staff who played key roles in the change process as well as with university student leaders who were participating on committees involved in the transition or in leadership organizations assisting with the transition, such as those in the student government. More specifically, our recruitment began with administrators who were heavily involved in the change process, student leaders on campus and part of the student government, staff who held communication roles within the colleges and the university, and faculty leaders who were chairs of their department or were part of the faculty senate. Although they count as different types of stakeholders, they shared similar concerns when it came to the issue of being a polytechnic institution. For students and faculty, we only reached out to those in leadership positions, since we reasoned that they would feel more involved with the change process. Students and faculty in leadership positions, relatively speaking, are more familiar with the university's mission, vision and identity. In addition, we conducted a survey (results are not reported here) shared with all faculty, staff, and students. Snowball sampling was also used to find interview study participants; some

of the initial participants recommended others who were able to also provide important insights into the topic of our research. If deemed appropriate, the referral was followed up on. Of the 24 participants, five were student leaders (e.g., president of student council, president of key student club on campus), seven were staff (e.g., head of divisions on campus or those who held communication positions), five were faculty who held non-administrative leadership positions, and seven were university administrators.

Interviewing

Our study employed the semi-structured interviewing method. The interviews were broken into three main sections: the first section focused on getting an understanding of the participant's background and involvement in the transition; the second section asked questions about the participant's view of Valley Polytechnic's identity; the last section included questions relating to how the participant feels about the transition in relation to the university's identity.

We conducted a total of 24 in-person, semi-structured interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission of the participants, with the exception of one (the participant requested one of the authors to take notes by hand rather than use audio-recording). While we had begun to see some repetition in the data after 18 interviews, additional interviews were conducted to ensure saturation. Interviews averaged approximately 45 minutes, with a range of 30 minutes to a little over three hours. The interviews were subsequently transcribed for analysis. Transcripts range from 7 to 20 pages single-spaced, totaling approximately 360 pages. Interviews were conducted between January and July 2016, and were part of a larger, IRB approved, longitudinal study on organizational identity amidst transition and change. In an attempt to protect participants' privacy, all participants featured in this analysis were assigned pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

Cultural discourse analysis (Carbaugh, 2007) addresses questions relating to functional accomplishment, structure, and specific sequences pertaining to a particular practice. Two of the analytical modes Carbaugh (2007) suggests, descriptive and interpretive, pertain to our research question. We began with descriptive analysis to establish "an anchoring toe hold" (Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2017, p. 4) in the social reality of our participants. From there, we proceeded with interpretive analysis to create "a portal into the world of meanings being activated in the discourse" (p. 5) on the term "polytechnic" as delineated by our participants.

Interpretive analysis can be further elaborated with the concepts of *discursive hub* and *radiants of meanings*. The discursive hub, "polytechnic," is a key term for Valley Polytechnic's organizational identity, which contains within it radiants of meaning active for stakeholders in this institution. Both the hub and radiants are conceptualized based on the premise that as we communicate, we engage in a meta-cultural

commentary about: 1) who we are, 2) how we are related to one another, 3) what we are doing, 4) how we feel, and 5) how we are placed in certain locations (Carbaugh, 2007).

For the descriptive analysis, we extracted main themes from participants' discussion of the term "polytechnic" during the interviews. Themes were extracted based on line-by-line analysis of interview transcripts. We looked for recurring and co-occurring themes whenever "polytechnic" was mentioned.

For the interpretive analysis, we started by identifying the key term "polytechnic" as a hub of meaning of being/identity. We then explored other meanings radiating from it. Of the five meanings, acting and feeling (Carbaugh, 2007) emerged as two of the most prominent radiants. Next, we combined key cultural terms to formulate *cultural propositions* using participants' own words when describing and interpreting their own communicative behavior (Carbaugh). Lastly, we formulated *cultural premises* that highlighted participants' beliefs about what exists, and what is proper or valued.

Findings

Descriptive Analysis

Five themes emerged from our descriptive analysis of the interview transcripts: 1) polytechnic as engineering, agriculture, and science (moving forward in this analysis, we alternate between using the terms "engineering, agriculture, and science and "STEM" to indicate the fields of science, technology, engineering and math); 2) polytechnic identity prioritizes certain disciplines over others; 3) polytechnic as learn-by-doing;" 4) polytechnic as many arts; and 5) polytechnic as symbolic of tension among colleges. This section details each of these themes and provides evidence from our interviews.

Polytechnic as Engineering, Agriculture and Science

One of the first questions we asked participants in our study was "what does a polytechnic identity mean to you?" After several interviews, it was clear the term "polytechnic" meant many things to many people. As Amanda, a faculty member remarked, "I do not feel that there is a clear definition, or (that) everybody is at the same equal footing about the definition of polytechnic" (interview, January 21, 2016). Some participants opted to answer the question by sharing comments they heard from those outside of the university walls, "people would think that polytechnic means that we're strong in the technical fields … I think they think polytechnic means that we are a technical school or we have expertise in the technical or technology type fields" (Elizabeth, staff, March 9, 2016). As someone in a communications position at one of the colleges, Elizabeth was highly aware of perceptions the surrounding community had of the university.

The external image of the university as primarily an engineering or agricultural school is a recurring theme in our discussion with participants. As Brandon, a dean at one of the colleges, explained "polytechnic institutions in America, (of) which there are very few, tend to be focused on science and engineering and more technical disciplines like architecture or those kinds of things as opposed to say, liberal arts or humanities" (interview, February 29, 2016). As we will further observe in the analysis, tension between the two broad categories of disciplines, technical and liberal arts/humanities, is another binding theme in our inquiry into how the term "polytechnic" reflects participants' view of the university's organizational identity.

Polytechnic as Prioritizing Certain Disciplines over Others

Another prominent theme in participants' discussion of "polytechnic" seems to be the prioritization of certain disciplines over others. While many participants perceived the university as primarily an engineering or agricultural institution, some shared their skepticism of this view since it excludes certain fields of knowledge in the definition. Don, who held an administrative position, commented, "this idea that we're a professional school, that we're an engineering school … is a *caricature* of this campus (italics added). Our engineering program, engineering college, (is) the largest. (It is) well respected, but it does not represent the whole campus" (interview, January 20, 2016). Connor, also a communications personnel like Elizabeth, but at a different college, shared his concern about how this image of the university being a technical college drives certain types of people away: "everybody is going to have different ideas of what it (polytechnic) is. I think it scares off some people … it's often thought of as a vocational school" (interview, April 28, 2016). When asked to elaborate on who is being "scared off" due to the perception of the university as a technical school, Connor explained that he was specifically thinking of high-achieving students who are neither interested in engineering nor agriculture but who might be considering the university as an option where they could further their education."

Polytechnic as "Learn-By-Doing"

Another common theme we unveiled is the association of the term "polytechnic" with a practical, hands-on approach to higher education, otherwise known in this campus community as "learn-by-doing." The phrase is what most student-participants considered as synonymous with "polytechnic." When asked whether he was familiar with the university's mission, vision, and/or values, David, the president of one college's student council, remarked,

> "I have to be very honest with you, I don't know the school values. The one thing I know is just the learn-by-doing principle. We strive to have our students learn by doing and by that, they mean like actually applying the skills I learned in the classroom to the real world or actual situations that will benefit them when they go on to their future careers."

He then elaborated on how being a chemistry major, he and his cohort spent approximately 30–40% more time in laboratory settings than any other university in the nation (interview, March 14, 2016). "As a chemist, that's very beneficial because that's 30–40% more experience you have than everybody else." Rosanne, a senior in the Department of Education who aspires to be a math and science teacher, echoed David's assessment that the learn-by-doing principle is what makes the university polytechnic, "poly tech means learn-by-doing … we have hands-on learning in our major, and with that, we get early experience in the classrooms" (interview, May 31, 2016). She continued that having the experience of being in a classroom early on in their education provided her and her friends the opportunity to experience firsthand what it is like to be a teacher and helped them decide whether it is something they would like to pursue as a future career:

> I was able to get early experience in the classroom and it gives you an idea if this is something that you want to do because for me, I was a freshman, I was 18 and I was already taking lesson plans into the classroom and I was thinking "I love this. This is for sure what I want to do." But a friend of mine who was taking the same classes as me had the same experience and she was like "I can't do this, this is not for me." She got to realize early on that it wasn't for her, so she could make those changes earlier on instead of just waiting, graduating, and then getting into the field and think "I hate this."

Getting an early experience in the classroom helped strengthen her motivation and interest in becoming a teacher, and deterred her friend from entering a field that might not be right for her. David and Rosanne's views are in-line with the view shared by Don, a faculty member who stated "polytechnic means … a practical education that's already a detour (towards) … certain professions … (and) … certain work opportunities" (interview, January 20, 2016).

Whereas some participants consider the learn-by-doing approach a unique feature of the institution that makes it polytechnic, some faculty and administrative participants see it as something less than distinctive. One faculty, Vanessa, does not believe that being polytechnic is enough of a "differentiating factor" (interview, May 5, 2016) between this particular higher education institution and others like it in the surrounding areas. "I think what would distinguish us from other institutions is our agricultural heritage. They (other schools) do not have that." Vanessa went on to elaborate on how institutions which have "their roots in historical agriculture and mechanical colleges … (which are) … (based on) a land grant system" technically count as polytechnic, even though they might not necessarily include the term in their official institutional name.

> So these agriculture and mechanical universities were there to train people in the practical arts of agriculture and engineering. If anything contributes to a polytechnic identity, it's the historical issue … I think any old agriculture and mechanical college would have a polytechnic identity the same as us.

Brandon, a dean in one of the colleges, shared Vanessa's sentiment that being polytechnic "does not mean a tremendous amount" (interview, February 29, 2016).

Instead, he emphasized that the institution is a comprehensive university, one that believes in the importance of educating its students in liberal arts and humanities in addition to the "practical arts." He continued, "someone asked me once what do I see the role of liberal arts and humanity have in a comprehensive institution, and I answered then what I still believe now is that they're essentially important even if you're training engineers you want them to be comprehensively educated and not merely technicians."

Sally, also a dean at a college, agrees with Brandon on the importance of a comprehensive education. She shared how in times when the institution's polytechnic identity is discussed, the discussion "often skates so close to … (the institution) being a professional school or a trade tech school" (interview, August 12, 2016). Sally explained that this borderline technical school identity comes early on in the institution's decision to apply what's known as an "upside down" curriculum, wherein "the first two years is when you did your major … the second two years you did GE (General Education)." Sally further explained that the idea behind the upside-down curriculum was, "GEs … (are) you know, fluff on top. That's the frosting on the cake. If you got time to stick around for it, it's cool, but at least we've trained you for the world." Training a student for the world means he/she is professionally prepared and ready to perform a job. As Sally remarked, "nowadays, a job outcome is required for every class." Yet, she questioned the effectiveness of this practical goal when it comes to ensuring students' advancements in their future careers, "we think that … (our) students are ready to work but they're not ready to be managers and they probably won't ever be managers. So, you're training worker bees here but you're not training managers and leaders."

Polytechnic as Many Arts

The question of whether the institution emphasizes a "practical arts" over "liberal arts" identity reflects an underlying perception many interviewees had of the university's dual identity: a combination of a polytechnic and comprehensive higher education institution. This framing, however, might negatively impact some students' identity or even how marketable they are to future employers if a certain identity is considered more important than another. For example, Patricia, an Engineering professor, highlighted these seemingly contrasting identities:

> I think that what we have now is an attempt to **put some glue between a very classical definition of liberal arts education and a tradition of science, engineering, and agriculture**, that is very applied and practical, and (about) getting things done. (bolded words indicate emphasis from authors).

This attempt to unify liberal arts and science, engineering, and agriculture by the "act of putting some glue" between them is reflected in an interpretation of the term "polytechnic" by faculty as "many arts" or "multidisciplinary." As another faculty participant, Vanessa, explained, "polytechnic literally of course means many arts … I think the world in general, the nation in general, has intended to say that's

engineering and science and agriculture. It has not generally taken into account the liberal arts and humanities" (interview, May 5, 2016). Vanessa continued that those in the liberal arts and humanities often feel overlooked by university leadership, even though they play an integral part in creating the "many arts" aspect of the institution's identity:

> **liberal arts and humanities are kind of … waving 'Hey! What about us? We're over here**. Over here! Polytechnic means many arts … well, here's an art!' I think we have to pay attention on how polytechnic has always been (perceived as) engineering and science, but we also need to recognize that there are, in fact, many arts (interview, May 5, 2016).

Reverting back to Sally's comment on the university being built on an "upside down" curriculum, where practical, job-specific training is emphasized over the study of liberal arts and humanities, students, faculty, and staff participants from liberal arts and humanities shared their struggle in asserting a sense of legitimacy in this institution. This struggle for legitimacy amid organizational change is viewed as pivotal in securing resources for those who are not part of the three programs – engineering, agriculture, and science – that define the university's polytechnic identity. Our findings suggest that these "hard" sciences are considered more salient in contributing to the overall university's identity and are perceived this way mainly by participants representing social sciences and liberal arts/humanities.

Related to the view of "polytechnic" as "many arts" is the perception of the term as symbolic of the institution's ability to expose students to a variety of subjects. As Steven, a faculty member in Science, explained, "I actually think polytechnic identity means the opportunity to expose our students to more topics than is generally available in other institutions" (interview, April 4, 2016). Steven added that some faculty considered the trimester system (which would be replaced by the semester system) as reflective of the institution's polytechnic identity:

> Some faculty members actually relate polytechnic to the fact that we have a quarter system. On the quarter system I think a student will take four to five classes per quarter, which could add up to 12-15 classes per academic year in total. On a semester system, a student could only take up to 10 classes max(imum).

Steven clarified that being polytechnic does not necessarily depend upon the academic calendar one is on; rather, it depends on "the question (of) how we design our programs to expose our students to a variety of topics." Rosanne, an Education student, agrees with the institution's polytechnic identity as multidisciplinary: "our college focuses on learning about all … topics … learning on bringing all the topics together, and being a well-rounded educated person and also just being lifelong learners" (interview, May 31, 2016).

Polytechnic as Symbolic of Tension among University Colleges

The vision Rosanne shared of students being well-rounded, educated persons who are also lifelong learners is indeed reflective of the "poly" aspect of "polytechnic."

That being said, faculty participants, whether they are in liberal arts/humanities or other disciplines, often shared perceived discrepancies between how certain colleges had been prioritized by university administration compared to others. The goal of creating well-rounded, lifelong learners through college education might be shared across campus, but exactly how the institution should achieve it proved to be controversial. "I think you have a tension between a tradition that looks back to the purpose of higher education as to serve men who are being trained for the law and the church … and a view of an institution that's to train the workforce … in agriculture, engineering, and science" (Amanda, faculty, interview, January 21, 2016). Amanda further illustrated this tension between what the identity used to be and how it should be managed in the current curriculum: "the faculty here at the College of Engineering felt like we are in a disadvantage when it comes to the curriculum … for example, we felt like GE is overly liberal arts … there is not enough of the 'tech poly' to the technical component." This particular quote highlights the fact that STEM majors might prefer more technical subjects in lieu of liberal arts courses that STEM students are required to take.

From the other non-Engineering colleges' perspective, what is viewed as a disadvantage by Amanda and other Engineering faculty in terms of the university's curriculum not being "technical enough" is more than compensated by the resources it has over other colleges, "there's a lot of focus on engineering … and a lot of students feel that at Valley Polytechnic, you're just pushed aside … students think there's not a lot of resources within our college, that they see … other colleges have more resources like professors" (Rosanne, student, interview, May 31, 2016). Sally saw this discrepancy of resources between colleges as a continuing trend. When asked where she thought the president of the university was going to focus spending in the future, Sally answered,

> on very practical things. Anything that can then be said 'we have trained this many people for these jobs in this world.' So that would be engineering, that would be in STEM … I don't think it will be in humanities. Maybe some of the social sciences, but only if you can say because we're conducting a study that will do something that's clearly very practical (interview, August 12, 2016).

These opinions shared by several non-STEM participants delineate tensions between two opposing views of the university's identity as associated with the term "polytechnic." On one hand, there is a view that the university is a practical, hands-on institution, with a comprehensive general education requirement, which some deem unnecessary. On the other hand, the term "polytechnic" is interpreted as "many arts," inclusive of all arts, both "practical" and "liberal." Our analysis indicates how both views have their adherents, manifested in distinct identities, which in turn, makes the creation and maintenance of a unified university identity a challenging process. As Rosanne aptly explained, "I would say Valley Polytechnic has an identity as Valley Polytechnic, but then each college has their own identity, and (each) has … its own specialties … there are certain things that other colleges do that create their own identity and things that they stand for" (interview, May 31, 2016).

Interpretive Analysis

Next, we move on to an interpretive analysis where, following the CuDA framework, we extract cultural propositions (formed using participants' own words) and cultural premises (statements consisting what exists and what is valued) to unveil deeply seated cultural beliefs surrounding Valley Polytechnic's organizational identity as shared by participants in our study. Table 1 contains cultural propositions, whereas Table 2 contains the premises. We have also included in Table 2 the delineation of polytechnic as a discursive hub of being, with the radiants of meanings of acting, feeling, dwelling, and combinations of these meanings radiating from the main hub as they are manifested in each premise.

Discussion

Our analysis indicates the existence of two contrasting beliefs of what a polytechnic education should constitute. One is the more classical understanding of polytechnic identity associated with STEM, another is the broader understanding of polytechnic as many arts, which includes the liberal arts and humanities disciplines. These two identities embody vacillating forms of identity symbols in which "two sets of contrastive … symbols—and their meanings—are being played with, or against, each other" (Carbaugh, 1996, pp. 125–139). As mentioned at the beginning of this analysis, the symbolic tension between these two differing notions of what counts as "proper" polytechnic education manifests itself in the form of silos across campus, where one side of the campus believes that the other side is privileged by the university administration in terms of resource allocation, including faculty hiring.

What seems to bind participants together is the valuing of a practical, hands-on approach to learning, which is embodied in the university's motto, "learn-by-doing." It was clear during our interviews with faculty and staff that they genuinely care for students and are concerned about how to provide the best educational experience for students. Some participants favored the trimester system, in which students were able to take more classes compared to a semester system. Participants also appreciated the practical, hands-on element of students' education, which is emblematic of a polytechnic institution. Participants agreed that some fields lend themselves better than others to this "learn-by-doing" approach. Yet, the valuing of this hands-on approach is prevalent in participants' talk surrounding the term "polytechnic" regardless of academic or philosophical differences.

By applying the CuDA framework to researching how university stakeholders construct a polytechnic identity, we extend the understanding of organizational identity as a multidimensional construct deeply rooted in implicit yet potent cultural logics regarding self, actions, emotions, and placement or dwelling (Carbaugh, 2007). The efficacy of applying CuDA to our study of organizational identity negotiation lies in the following: 1. We gave voice to multiple stakeholders on the ground; 2. we highlighted meanings of acting, feeling, relating, and placement as they relate to stakeholders' discussion of the organizational identity term "polytechnic"; and 3. as

Table 1 Cultural Propositions: In Participants' Own Words

Polytechnic as indicator of certain technical fields

- "Polytechnic" means we're a "technical" "school" or we have "expertise" in the "technical" or "technology type fields."
- "Polytechnic institutions" tend to focus on "science," "engineering," and most "technical disciplines" like "architecture."
- "Polytechnic" means we're an "engineering school," an "agricultural school."
- There's a "public perception" that the "university" is just "engineering" and "agriculture."
- "Polytechnic" tends to *not* refer to "liberal arts" or "humanities."
- There is not enough "tech poly" in the "technical" component.

Polytechnic as practical and hands-on learning

- "Poly tech" means "learn by doing" and "hands on learning."
- "Polytechnic" refers to a "practical education" that is a "detour" toward "certain professions" and "certain work opportunities."
- "Polytechnic" often "skates close" to being a "professional school" or a "trade tech school."

Polytechnic as many arts

- "Polytechnic" means "many arts" or "multidisciplinary."
- "Polytechnic" means the "opportunity" to "expose" "our students" to "more topics" than is "generally available" in other "institutions."
- "Polytechnic" focuses on learning about "all topics," bringing "all topics together."

Polytechnic education creates well-rounded individuals

- Polytechnic is about creating a "well-rounded" "educated" person and "life-long learners."

Tension between different meanings of the term "polytechnic"

- There exists "tension" between a "tradition" that "leads back" to the "purpose of higher education" as to "serve men" who are "being trained" for the "law" and the "church" and "a view" of "an institution" that is to "train" the "workforce" in "agriculture," "engineering," and "science."

University's attempt to consolidate different understandings of the term "polytechnic"

- There exists an "attempt" on the "university's end" to "put some glue" between a "very classical definition of liberal arts education" and "a tradition of science, engineering, and agriculture" that is very "applied" and "practical."

The existence of distinct college identities within the university

- [University] has an "identity" as [University] but "each college" has "their own identity" and each has "its own specialties."

Cultural propositions are statements we compiled and paraphrased using participants' own words when describing and interpreting the key organizational identity term "polytechnic." Following the CuDA format for cultural analysis, we used quotation marks to indicate participants' own words.

Table 2 Cultural Premises - What Exists and What Is Valued

Polytechnic: discursive hub of being

What exists:

- an understanding of polytechnic as consisting of technical disciplines such as science, engineering, and architecture (being and acting);
- an understanding of polytechnic as many arts or multidisciplinary (being and acting);
- public perception that the university is an engineering and agricultural school (being and relating);
- tension between a tradition that leads back to the purpose of higher education as to serve men who are being trained for the law and the church and a view of an institution that is to train the workforce in agriculture, engineering, and science (feeling and being); and
- an attempt on the university's end to put some glue between a very classical definition of liberal arts education and a tradition of science, engineering, and agriculture that is very applied and practical (acting).

What is valued:

- the ability to expose students to more topics in a certain period of time compared to other institutions (acting);
- the ability to create a well-rounded, educated person who is a life-long learner (being and acting);
- a learn by doing, practical approach to education (acting);
- a comprehensive education, which includes liberal arts and humanities (being and acting); and
- unique individual identity of each college (being).

Cultural premises are statements we created regarding what exists and what is valued for our participants in their discussion of the term "polytechnic." The premises are based on cultural propositions that are listed in Table 1.

a result of our analysis of these various meanings, we unveiled a layered and multi-faceted organizational identity that goes beyond its stated values, mission, and vision, commonly used lens in previous studies of organizational identity.

At the time of the writing of this analysis, the university unveiled an academic master plan, which included what is referred to as an "evolving" definition of an "inclusive" polytechnic university. Elements of this definition include diverse and multi-disciplinary perspectives, critical thinking and problem solving, as well as community and global engagement. The plan suggests a small step forward in acknowledging that at least at the administrative level, non-STEM disciplines are recognized as necessary to achieve strategic goals of the university.

How this vision would be operationalized on the ground level remains to be seen. Based on our analysis, we believe it is beneficial for university administration to both acknowledge the unique identity of each college, while also highlight the commonality faculty and staff campus-wide share when it comes to their care and concern for students' overall education. This "unity in diversity" approach has the potential to reduce perceived struggle and divisiveness that resonate in the organization at the time this study was conducted.

Lastly, we believe that findings from this study have important practical implications for managing change by organizations. First, organizations should establish effective two-way channels of communication with individuals at all levels of the organization (as suggested by Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006). Second, organizations should monitor identity tensions and concerns from all internal and major external stakeholder levels when implementing the change. As Gioia et al. (1996) state, organizational change and identity are interconnected. They argue that substantive strategic change demands reconsideration of an organization's identity and image. CuDA can serve as a tool to help leaders of organizations undergoing a planned change monitor the identity tensions and concerns of stakeholders. Consequently, decision-makers should address the negative sentiments and feelings. When possible, these tensions should be identified before the change is implemented and subsequently monitored during the change process.

In the case of Valley Polytechnic, our findings indicate the existence of strong subgroup identities within the university. These identities are strong enough to have created silos of unsatisfied stakeholders across campus who struggle with gaining legitimacy and access to resources. If change in the university is not managed well, stakeholders may continue to feel imprisoned in the silos, which in turn, may prevent them from focusing on overall student advancement.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. The site of the study was a single university as the subject. It is worth noting, however, that the goal of a CuDA analysis is not necessarily generalizability, but rather, validity of *localized* means of expression, which in turn, are utilized in the process of meaning-making within a specific community (Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2017). Tracy (2010) offers the concept of resonance to assess the studies' potential to be valuable across a variety of contexts or situations and ours is a study providing such resonance. Good qualitative research provides readers with "vicarious experience" and allow them to "make choices based on their own intuitive understanding of the scene" (p. 845).

The authors acknowledge that while we are able to make interpretations of the findings, these findings may not be representative of how all stakeholders of Valley Polytechnic feel about its identity. It is commonly understood that those who volunteer to participate in interviews are often those who feel strongly about the subject matter (in this case, the transition from trimester to semester). In addition, the identities of the same stakeholders might have changed over time, which is outside the design and scope of this study.

Future research could utilize a multitude of research methods (including quantitative approaches) to examine multifaceted organizational identities and utilize probability sampling to ensure the generalizability of study results. In addition, studies could look at multitude "layers" of stakeholders separately (e.g., students, staff, faculty) and compare how they negotiate identities over time when facing

organizational changes since some stakeholder groups might be disenfranchised during large-scale changes. Lastly, we suggest further research to be conducted on existing tensions across different segments of the university. With anticipated budget cuts fueled by the current COVID-19 pandemic, tensions would likely continue to arise as resource allocation in the university becomes increasingly precarious in the years following the pandemic.

According to Bok (2013), in the U.S. there are more than seven hundred comprehensive universities, many of which, such as the institution forming the focal point of our analysis, evolved from technical colleges. Now that these institutions have "grown in size and have mounted a wide variety of vocationally oriented degree programs" (p. 10), they often find themselves struggling to "define their distinctive mission" (p. 10). For Valley Polytechnic university, the move to offer a more holistic and well-rounded polytechnic education may prove to be beneficial as it addresses challenges brought on by constant political, economic, and social changes, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting budgetary challenges due to, among other factors, decreased student enrollment. We believe it is important to continue researching the area of identity negotiation among stakeholders, especially in uncertain and tumultuous times.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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