The influence of institutional and individual characteristics on the perception of organizational change. VanWagoner, Randall Jay, Ph.D., University of Michigan, 2002. 214pp. ISBN: 0-493-73689-1. Chair: Richard Order Number DA3058069

This study examines the influence of institutional and individual characteristics on the perception of organizational change in Colorado community colleges. The capacity to successfully implement change is an increasingly critical element for the success of community colleges. However, the manner in which organizational change is perceived creates communication issues and conflict, which ultimately impede change from occurring. The conceptual framework that guides this study is grounded in organizational change theory, individual and group perception literature, and the general community college literature.

Predictor variables included individual characteristics, professional group membership, strategic understanding, institutional location, and actual change. Dependent variable constructs included respondent perceptions of the extent, source, process, and value of change. Each dependent variable was used to explore perceptions of change related to decision-making, instructional programs, student support services and resources.

Individual perceptions were collected from professional staff through a sample of 510 respondents on an original survey instrument. Actual change

data were collected from institutional reports submitted to the state community college system office in Denver, Colorado. Factor analysis was used to identify dependent variables as well as an additional independent variable, strategic understanding.

Findings suggest that individual characteristics are more influential than institutional characteristics on the perception of change. The strategic understanding of an individual, or the ability to put changes into a larger organizational context, was the most significant predictor of the perception of change identified in this study. As an independent variable, strategic understanding was highly significant in all 16 regression equations. Years of service was the second most powerful individual characteristic predictor. The longer individuals are employed at an institution, the less likely they are to embrace change and find value in organizational changes. The extent of actual change that occurred in a community college was the strongest institutional characteristic predictor. The more change an institution experienced, the more likely changes were perceived to be positive and valuable. Variables with limited predictive power included age, educational background, gender, professional group membership, and institutional location.