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Dawn Norris

*Southern Methodist University*, [dfnorris@smu.edu](mailto:dfnorris@smu.edu)

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THE IMPACT OF INVOLVEMENT IN MEANINGFUL ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE ON  
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT FOR UNIVERSITY STAFF

This dissertation submitted by has been read and approved by the following faculty members of the Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development at Southern Methodist University. The final copy has been examined by the Dissertation Committee and the signatures which appear here verify the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given the final approval with reference to content, form and mechanical accuracy.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Advisor and Committee Chair: Dr. Ashley Tull  
Clinical Associate Professor & Program Director for Ed.D. in Higher Education  
Southern Methodist University

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member: Dr. Michael Harris  
Associate Professor and Director of Center for Teaching Excellence  
Southern Methodist University

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member: Dr. Lori S. White  
Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Professor of Practice of Education  
Washington University in St. Louis

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY  
SIMMONS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

THE IMPACT OF INVOLVEMENT IN MEANINGFUL ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE ON  
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT FOR UNIVERSITY STAFF

By  
Dawn F. Norris

An Applied Dissertation submitted to  
Department of Education Policy and Leadership  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

Degree Awarded:  
Spring, 2018

## ABSTRACT

American higher education faces increasing pressure to contain the cost of a college degree, forcing institutions to address both costs and the resulting meaningful organizational change. As a labor-intensive industry, the most effective strategies incorporate best practices related to maximizing human resources. Organizational commitment, an employees' connection to and affinity for their employer, offers valuable insights into organizational change programs. Employees with strong commitment to their organization demonstrate a greater propensity to endure the exertion required for success during times of significant change. This study investigated the research question, how does a university staff member's formal involvement in a cost containment initiative program affect their organizational commitment? To determine an answer, the organizational commitment of two groups of university staff employed throughout a cost containment program, those with and without a formal involvement role, was measured and compared utilizing the gold-standard Organizational Commitment Questionnaire. Results revealed that formal involvement in a meaningful organizational change led to higher organizational commitment. Study results inform practitioner development of cost containment programs specifically, and significant institutional change initiatives generally. Organizational commitment, as a significant influencer of organizational behavior, offers a key strategy for administrators planning large-scale institutional change. Recommendations for practice include maximizing individual employee strengths, department and division efforts, and suggestions for the institution and higher education industry. This research offers a powerful apparatus for capitalizing on higher education's most valuable and complex resource, its people.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
AASCU	American Association of State Colleges and Universities
CBO	Chief Business Officer
CFO	Chief Finance Officer
OC	Organizational Commitment
OCQ	Organizational Commitment Questionnaire
OE2C	Operational Excellence for the Second Century (phase one)
OpEx	Operational Excellence (phase two)
SMU	Southern Methodist University
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

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### **Problem of Practice**

American higher education institutions face a dynamic and immensely challenging financial environment. National market forces, an economy emerging from recession, negative publicity around rising tuition costs, institutional complexity, and dramatic reductions in state funding for public colleges and universities create a nearly universal, growing pressure on institutions to reduce and contain costs (Davis, 2012). The current environment increases the stress on fiscal operations for colleges and universities. Scholars widely recognize the phenomenon of this widespread economic pressure and its impact on the higher education financial environment (Adams, 2016; Adams & Shannon, 2006; Clotfelter, 2014; Frost, Hearn & Marine, 1997; Kurlaender & Grodsky, 2013; Reed, 1999).

The higher education industry is significant to the American economy in both scope and influence. More than 7,000 institutions in the United States employ almost three million full-time faculty and staff who spend close to half a trillion dollars annually in every congressional district in the nation (New American, 2016). In addition to its economic impact, a majority of the American public considers postsecondary education valuable. In the 2015 Gallup-Lumina Foundation survey of Americans' opinions on higher education, 70% saw postsecondary education, whether a degree or a professional certificate, as *very important*. This number is consistent with the results of the same survey from 2012, despite the increased national debate associated with the value of higher education. Americans also value postsecondary education as an experience. Sixty-six percent strongly agreed that taking courses is a good idea, regardless of degree attainment (Jones, 2016).

Despite citizens' favorable opinion, higher education operates within a larger economy, experiencing a substantial decline in public funding for state colleges and universities, with the state of Louisiana among the hardest hit. For example, since the Great Recession, legislators slashed state funding of Louisiana's public institutions by 55%, from 60% of revenue in 2008 to less than 25% in 2016 (EAB Daily Briefing, March 3, 2016). Private four-year colleges and universities experienced similar impacts with undergraduate tuition growth outpacing inflation (Ehrenberg, 2012). As institutions consider how to approach their finances and the accompanying pressure to reduce expenses, containing costs emerged as a significant national issue for higher education.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) described cost containment practices as, "one of the most important public policy issues facing higher education" (AASCU, 2016, para 5). Whatever the language employed – cost containment, cutting, control, management, reductions, redistributions, or realigning expenses to priorities – limiting or eliminating expenses while expanding or developing new revenue streams to balance the budget remains the goal. The experience of determining, operationalizing, living, and working with cost containment measures goes far beyond the simple clinical description. For the purposes of this study, *cost containment* is used as an umbrella term to encompass efforts to reduce costs, contain growth in costs, and manage costs through realignment with changing institutional priorities (AASCU, 2016).

Cost containment efforts take a myriad of forms from purchasing consortiums to outsourcing services to changes in employee benefits to merging campuses. Regardless of the

method employed, cost containment based on best practices including thoughtful planning by a representative body of constituents, serious consideration of institutional mission and strategic priorities, and diverse utilization of strategies, can create a highly effectual tool to maximize the institution's budget. Colleges and universities operate in an increasingly complicated fiscal environment showing no signs of moving away from a focus on cost (Denneen & Dretler, 2012). Institutions prepared to meet these challenges with a successful fiscal strategy regarding cost containment are best positioned to thrive in the future.

Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) identified organizational change, such as cost containment programs, as one of the two major challenges facing any organization, and organizational commitment (OC) as one of the most significant paradigms affecting organizational behavior. The significant likelihood of undergoing organizational change characterizes the modern business environment, creating employee uncertainty. Organization level change affects every member of the organization differentiating it from change at the individual, team, or intergroup level (Anderson, 2016). Employees possess little reason to support such institutional changes unless a compelling reason, such as OC, encourages that support. Building higher levels of employee OC can provide an antidote to anxiety and encourage employee support for organizational change initiatives. Employees with a strong commitment to their organization demonstrate a greater propensity to endure the effort required for their employer to succeed during times of meaningful change and to endorse organizational mission and values (Nordin, 2012). Joo (2010) furthered this argument adding that both organizational culture and institutional leadership drive organizational commitment.

The theory of organizational commitment provides a useful theoretical framework to evaluate cost containment programs. OC describes the phenomenon of an employee's measurable connection to, loyalty or psychological devotedness towards, involvement in, and identification with their employer. This connection or attitude can manifest through affinity towards organization goals, employee willingness to put forth effort on behalf of the organization, and the desire to maintain employment with the organization (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974; Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). The work of Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) established the concept of organizational commitment as a measurable experience. Research by Meyer and Allen (1991) advanced the initial framework, further illuminating OC as a multidimensional construct through descriptions of three component parts, *affective*, *continuance*, and *normative* commitment.

Organizational commitment affects employees in higher education across institutional type and regardless of role with strong organizational commitment potentially resulting in positive outcomes for the employing college or university. Organizational change, when managed successfully, can increase employee commitment to the organization thereby maximizing those positive outcomes while simultaneously supporting the organizational change initiative. Through study of university staff involved in a meaningful organizational change initiative; a university-wide cost containment program, this research inquiry explored the impact of formal involvement in the change program on organizational commitment. Expanding the understanding of this phenomenon could benefit higher education industry leaders planning future organizational change initiatives.

## Introduction

Barr and McClellan (2001) identified five motivations for institutional budget cuts. *First* on the list is the challenge of decreasing enrollments. At smaller institutions, even a slight dip in enrollment can make or break the budget. Additionally, many public institutions rely on state formula funding based significantly or entirely on enrollment. The *second* motivation is the profound budget shortfalls created by near-universal reductions in state funding to institutions. In addition to impacting institutional budgets, aid provided by colleges and universities to students has decreased as a result. *Third*, fundraising is deeply affected by the economy writ large. Failure to meet annual fundraising goals directly affects the institutional bottom line. *Fourth*, natural disasters, hefty legal settlements, and significant world events can unexpectedly require funds be spent on unplanned purposes, creating budget shortfalls. *Finally*, at some point, most campuses consider a general review of spending and realign the budget with institutional priorities (Barr & McClellan, 2001). Any of these reasons individually, or in various combinations may drive institutional leadership to consider cost containment activities. While many colleges and universities are considering or engaged in cost containment programs (Davis, 2012), higher education is not renowned for its prowess with these efforts. Organizational change at a slower pace, particularly as compared to the corporate world, characterizes higher education. Higher education is historically more comfortable with this incremental organizational change (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Finding a way to best utilize human resources in the planning and execution of cost containment efforts would be of broad value across institution type and could be influential in planning successful future initiatives.

In designing cost containment programs, institutional leaders often consider and develop formal roles for campus stakeholders integral to the success of the process, whether included for their subject matter expertise, or as a representative of a particular institutional unit. Participation in leadership teams, committees, focus groups, and as survey respondents represent typical involvement opportunities. In Western cultures, such as the United States, involvement in decision-making processes creates legitimacy for the participant. Their sense of being heard or consulted combined with the opportunity to share their opinion generates the feeling that the resulting decisions respond to their concerns (March, 1994). Thus, involvement in an organizational change has the potential to serve as a key factor driving an employee's commitment. Of particular interest to the researcher is determining the impact of formally assigned leadership roles within cost containment initiative committees on organizational commitment. *Organizational commitment* is defined as an employee's measureable connection to, loyalty, or psychological devotedness towards, involvement in, and identification with their employer (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974). Better understanding this potential correlation can improve cost containment program development specifically, and significant institutional change initiatives in general, particularly as it relates to organizational commitment.

The work of Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) established the concept of OC as measureable, with research by Meyer and Allen (1991) advancing this initial framework, further illuminating OC as a multidimensional construct through descriptions of three component parts, affective, continuance, and normative commitment. These three components combine to form an employee's commitment to their employer. This connection or attitude can manifest through affinity towards organization goals, employee willingness to put forth effort on behalf of the

organization, and the desire to maintain employment with the organization (Porter, et al., 1974; Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005).

Organizational commitment offers opportunities to support employees through meaningful organizational change and either sustain or encourage their commitment to the organization during a time characterized by both broad uncertainty and significant changes to their daily work. Anxiety presents in the form of fears regarding job loss or significant reorganization, as well as smaller daily changes to everyday work tasks such as printing and office supplies. Successful organizational change requires employees to make short-term sacrifices in the name of the change initiative. Employees who believe that the change is useful, and will improve the status quo, are more likely to make those sacrifices (Kotter, 2012). Organizational commitment encourages positive relationships between employees and their employers, and those positive feelings support an employee's self-worth. As a result, employers may enjoy increased performance and reduced absenteeism from employees (Mowday, 1999) during a time when committed employees scaffold work-altering change initiatives.

This study will explore the nearly universal use of cost containment as a fiscal strategy in higher education, and the differential impact on staff organizational commitment between having a formal role and not having a formal role within cost containment programs, an organization level change. While of interest to those involved in leadership with cost containment planning, this inquiry could prove relevant to broader considerations of employee organizational commitment in the higher education context beyond cost containment. Study results would interest any institutional leader planning a major campus initiative, such as a senior level search or curriculum review, who desires to leverage formal participation to maintain or positively impact organizational commitment.

## **Background**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of organizational commitment provided the framework guiding this study into higher education staff during a time of meaningful organizational change, specifically a cost containment program. Research by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) established the concept of organizational commitment as measurable and provided the research instrument, the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), utilized in this study. Research by Meyer and Allen (1991) advanced this initial framework further illuminating organizational commitment as a multidimensional construct through descriptions of three component parts, affective, continuance, and normative. Organizational commitment describes the phenomenon of employee's measurable connection to, loyalty or psychological devotedness towards, involvement in, and identification with their employer. This connection or attitude can manifest through affinity towards organization goals, employee willingness to put forth effort on behalf of the organization, and the desire to maintain employment with the organization (Porter, et al., 1974; Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). This inquiry compares the organizational commitment of two groups of staff employees, those with a formal role (team members) who served as members of an initiative team during the Southern Methodist University (SMU) Operational Excellence for the Second Century (OE2C) cost containment program, and those with no formal role (non-team members) who were employed throughout the program.

OE2C leadership chose team members to represent their various department or division and formally assigned them to an initiative team (one that operated as a typical university committee), designed to address a range of institutional spending areas from travel to contracts to facilities. Each initiative team received a charge to identify potential areas for efficiency creation while simultaneously securing a designated amount of annual cost savings. For example, the Procurement Team was expected to find eight – 12 million dollars in annual savings to return to the university (Julie Wiksten, personal communication, February 8, 2018). Teams met regularly, typically weekly, providing frequent progress reports to OE2C organizers. Team members were expected to commit up to 30% of their work time to the project over a period of 12 – 18 months. Non-team members may have interacted with team members and their work through participation in focus groups, responding to surveys, or other ad hoc opportunities to contribute. These activities were optional, not formalized for non-team members, and organizers did not track the participation of individual employees (Julie Wiksten, personal communication, February 8, 2018).

### **Research Question**

This study sought to answer the research question, how does a staff member's formal involvement in a cost containment initiative team affect their organizational commitment?

### **Hypotheses**

Four hypotheses provided the foundation for this research project:

1. Formal involvement in a meaningful organizational change such as the cost containment program OE2C would have an impact on employee organizational commitment;
2. That impact could be measured via the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire;
3. Results gathered via the OCQ instrument would reveal differing levels of organizational commitment for the two groups (team and non-team members) to facilitate comparison;
4. The involved group (team members) would demonstrate higher levels of organizational commitment than the uninvolved group (non-team members).

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, *cost containment* was used as an umbrella term to encompass efforts to reduce costs, contain growth in costs, and manage costs through realignment with changing institutional priorities (AASCU, 2016).

*Organizational change* occurs at the organizational level, rather than individual or unit, through the utilization of new systems, techniques, or approaches to the work of the organization that impact every employee in the organization (Anderson, 2016).

*Organizational commitment* was defined as an employee's measureable connection to, loyalty or psychological devotedness towards, involvement in, and identification with their employer (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974).

*Employees* were full-time, benefits-eligible staff continuously employed at Southern Methodist University (SMU) throughout the Operational Excellence for the Second Century (OE2C) cost containment program from October 1, 2014 – March 13, 2017, the time of data collection. This study excluded those classified as faculty, part-time, or temporary employees.

## **Review of Literature**

This research study builds on a foundation provided by research in higher education financial markets, cost containment programs, and the theory of organizational commitment. Two major themes structure the literature review: the theory of organizational commitment and higher education's experience with organizational change, specifically cost containment programs. A study of the theory of organizational commitment begins with an outline of the theory's application in the higher education context. The connection between organizational commitment and cost containment further develops this line of inquiry providing insight into the usefulness of organizational commitment in planning and executing meaningful organizational change such as cost containment initiatives. Critical analysis of organizational commitment concludes this theme. The second major theme presents the higher education financial market laying the groundwork for the inquiry, followed by a review of cost containment efforts in higher education. An overview of the challenges colleges and universities face when attempting cost containment activities concludes the review of literature.

### **Organizational Commitment**

#### **Organizational Commitment in the Higher Education Context**

As a labor-intensive and labor-rich industry, leveraging this vast and unique asset could uniquely position colleges and universities in the competitive marketplace. Any institution would be wise to consider the best possible use of literal brain power available on their campus. Organizational commitment (OC) presents one way to capitalize on that strength. As defined in this study, OC represents the active relationship between an employee and their organization, in the case of this inquiry, a staff member and their higher education institution. Organizational commitment measures the comparative strength of the employee's identification with their institution as characterized by three behaviors. The employee: (1) meaningfully believes in the institution's goals and values; (2) voluntarily works for the good of the institution; and (3) is committed to sustaining institutional employment. This identity connection between the employee and employer manifests in commitment-related behaviors, beyond mere words. Understanding an employee's organizational commitment provides important insight into understanding their behavior at work and potentially leveraging that behavior to the benefit of the organization (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979).

Considering cost containment programs through the theoretical framework of organizational commitment provides a tool for individuals planning these types of activities. Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) formalized the concept of OC as discernable from other forms of commitment and measureable. Researchers further developed organizational commitment through explanations of three component parts: affective, continuance, and normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Organizational commitment represents an employee's measureable connection to their employer as manifested through affinity towards organization goals, willingness to put forth effort on behalf of the organization, and the desire to maintain employment with the organization (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974; Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Employees with low levels of OC tend to work fewer hours than their more committed colleagues, who are more likely to remain at work, an organization-serving behavior (Goulet & Frank, 2002).

Researchers describe organizational commitment in a number of ways, including as an exchange commodity where employees develop commitment to an employer when they believe their employer returns that same commitment (Fuller, Barnett, Hester & Relyea, 2003). Organizational commitment also represents the overall feelings an employee holds about their employer, the psychological bond between the two (Joo, 2010), and as the nature of individual attachments of an employee to their employer (Ketchand & Strawser, 2001). Rather than a feeling, Hall, Schneider and Nygren (1970) defined organizational commitment as the process of employee and employer goals growing ever more integrated or congruent.

One can reasonably confuse organizational commitment with a similarly measurable aspect of work, *job satisfaction*. This separate phenomenon characterizes an employee's response to their individual job rather than their entire employer organization (Buck & Watson, 2002). For example, an employee's feeling about their role as an accountant versus their feelings towards their employing institution illuminates the difference between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Organizational commitment also manifests through citizenship behavior or efforts that further the general function of the university such as taking on voluntary and unpaid tasks, support for major campus initiatives and leaders, and active participation in decision-making activities (Lawrence, Ott & Bell, 2012). Employees routinely perform precisely this type of citizenship behavior during cost containment programs through service as committee members, participation in focus groups and surveys, and general cooperation with program decisions that impact their daily work.

The three components of organizational commitment – *affective*, *continuance*, and *normative* – create a fully developed picture of an employee's connection to their employing institution. The affective component of OC represents an employee's partisan and emotional attachment to their employing organization. The ways in which employees identify as higher education professionals, explicitly through their connection to and involvement with an institution, demonstrate aspects of their affective commitment (Ketchand & Strawser, 2001; Nordin, 2012). The stronger the affective commitment, the more likely an employee will continue working for their employer out of desire rather than obligation or need (Joo & Park, 2009). A variety of positive workplace experiences, such as relationships with colleagues, opportunities for new tasks, etc., can continue to support and nurture that desire (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

In contemplating alternative employers, individuals consider the costs of leaving their current employer as well as the rewards for staying. Awareness of these costs and rewards generates continuance commitment, the second component of organizational commitment (Nordin, 2012). This type of commitment grows with any event or circumstance that increases the perceived costs of leaving or rewards for staying, assuming an employee recognizes those costs or rewards (Bakan, Büyükbeşe, & Erşahan, 2011; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Employees consider the costs of leaving their employer regardless of any emotional attachments. For example, the longer an employee works for an employer, the more they invest in the relationship, and the more benefits they accumulate by staying (Ketchand & Strawser, 2001). Employers may encourage these feelings through length of service-based benefits such as increased leave time or a vesting schedule for retirement programs. This cost-benefit analysis proves unique to each employee (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

The third component of organizational commitment – normative – describes the sensation employees experience through feelings of moral obligation to continue working for their employer (Nordin, 2012). The desire to remain loyal to an employer may originate in familial or cultural norms, with organization socialization activities further nurturing the sentiment (Wiener, 1982). Organizational investments in employees, such as higher education institutions' tuition benefits or retirement plans, may also contribute to normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). These three commitment components contribute to an employee's overall organizational commitment.

**affective commitment** manifests as *wanting to stay or belong*;

**continuance commitment** as *needing to stay or belong*;

**normative commitment** as feeling *obligated to stay or belong*.

While not mutually exclusive, one employee can experience all three components simultaneously and to varying levels, all of which may influence their individual behavior and decision-making (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

### **Organizational Commitment and Cost Containment in Higher Education**

Maximizing human resources can create a myriad of positive outcomes for a labor-intensive industry like higher education, such as increased efficiency and cost containment (Adams & Shannon, 2006; Barr & McClellan, 2011), both goals of typical cost containment programs. Prudence drives institutions to consider the best possible use of the cognitive power available on their campus. Organizational commitment presents one way to capitalize on that strength through the active relationship between a staff member and their employing organization. Organizational commitment measures the comparative strength of the employee's identification with their institution. As organizational commitment increases, so should employee commitment to organizational values (Valentine, Godkin, & Lucero, 2002).

Organizational commitment provides one opportunity to realize these potentially positive gains. Institutions often fail to invest the time it takes to understand employee organizational commitment and how to leverage that commitment during times of meaningful change, such as cost containment activities (Nordin, 2012). Organizational commitment provides a framework for anticipating employee reactions to powerful change programs. Employees with high OC tend to give leadership the benefit of the doubt regarding their motivations for cost containment activities. Leaders can anticipate more optimistic attitudes from these employees and a general willingness to accept, rather than fight against, the changes suggested by the cost containment activities. Leaders could encourage and highlight these change champions as success stories within the program. In contrast, leaders can expect those employees with low levels of OC to challenge the process more often and to question motivations, processes, and goals. These employees demonstrate less interest in expending extra effort to support the program, and some will take the first opportunity to leave the institution and find another employer (Joo, 2010). When anticipated, transparent communication about the most challenging tasks and procedures can mitigate this lack of acceptance. Limited by their perception of reality, employees perceive organizational change through the lens of their organizational commitment to the university. Both knowledge and previous experiences shape employees' perception, defined as the way they understand the world around them (Ferguson & Bargh, 2004).

Institutions with employees experiencing high levels of organizational commitment enjoy several positive outcomes that potentially lead to higher levels of attendance (Ketchand & Strawser, 2001; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), fewer incidents of lateness (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) improved employee performance (Bakan, Büyükbeşe, & Erşahan, 2011; Joo & Park, 2010; Ketchand & Strawser, 2001; Mowday, 1999), superior general success, and a competitive advantage (Bakan, Büyükbeşe, & Erşahan, 2011; Joo & Park, 2010). Additionally, employees with strong OC tend to demonstrate higher levels of emotional intelligence (Nikolaou & Tsaousis, 2002), and increased willingness to contribute their talents beyond expectations in terms of innovation or creativity (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Research also associates organizational commitment with a decrease in employee turnover intention as well as actual turnover (Ketchand & Strawser, 2001; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), and impacts both individual employee performance and the effectiveness of the entire organization (Joo, 2010). An increase in any of these positive outcomes or a decrease in any of the negative could meaningfully impact employees as they experience a meaningful organizational change. Joo (2010) emphasized OC and retention as imperatives in creating and sustaining competitive advantage. In a knowledge-based economy, maximizing human resources through greater understanding of workplace behavior becomes essential. While competitors can imitate technological advances and product development, human resource-focused strategies remain more difficult to copy, creating competitive advantage for those who can successfully employ them (Mowday, 1998). Additionally, recruiting, onboarding, and training new employees as a result of turnover comes at a high cost (Buck & Watson, 2002).

### **Criticisms of Organizational Commitment**

Most literature related to organizational commitment focuses on outcomes for employers, typically in terms of lowering negative consequences such as turnover intention or actual turnover and increasing positive outcomes such as employee performance and willingness to take on voluntary tasks. A gap exists in examining outcomes for employees including stress, which impacts employees both positively and negatively (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002). Other types of work-related commitment may offer additional explanations for employee behavior. One cannot assume that organizational commitment always or completely explains a situation. For example, supervisor commitment plays a powerful role in determining an employee's connection to their university. Employees who experience supportive supervision exhibit the highest levels of organizational commitment (Joo, 2010). Similarly, union, job, occupational, career, and professional commitment can impact an employee's experience, particularly during times of meaningful organizational change such as during cost containment programs, and their willingness to stay with an employer (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

The framework of organizational commitment provides a complex structure for considering employee response to organizational change. Several factors create an increase in employee's psychological attachment to their employer, including such disparate inputs as continuous and team learning, empowerment, and strategic leadership (Joo, 2010). While investing in employee organizational commitment before, during, and after cost containment programs could pay dividends for higher education institutions, the complicated strategy and concerted effort required to achieve such a goal could be considered daunting and time-prohibitive. Institutional leaders would need to integrate an organizational commitment strategy

throughout a cost containment program to experience results. Given the magnitude of many cost containment programs, expending this kind of effort may not be practical.

Despite the voluminous research supporting the relevance and explanatory nature of organizational commitment, Baruch (1998) argued that the utility of OC is decreasing as the modern business environment moves away from a time of mutual commitment between employers and employees through downsizing and re-engineering. He characterized organizational commitment as a dual phenomenon based on mutual connection. When employers forgo commitment to their employees, as demonstrated through layoffs and other downsizing activities, employees are less likely to return that commitment since the commitment in the relationship is no longer mutual. This critique seems particularly relevant for cost containment programs, which commonly include both downsizing and reorganization activities. In higher education, this particular criticism may resonate differently with staff who serve at the pleasure of their supervisors and faculty who may enjoy a lifetime contract through tenure. Baruch (1998) further argues that in the modern business environment employees focus their energy on keeping their jobs rather than expending effort on behalf of advancing employer goals and objectives.

Another critique of organizational commitment effectiveness comes in describing high levels of OC as leading to less creative work product through a propensity to always promote the party (organizational) line rather than challenge the status quo with innovation and new ideas (Randall, 1987). If poor performers become more committed, the likelihood they will leave an institution, even during times of pronounced change and uncertainty, such as during cost containment programs, decreases (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). These employees are quite likely the very people cost containment initiative planners hoped to lose through attrition thereby enjoying the resultant salary savings. Cost containment initiatives typically contain a design element focused on losing low performing employees through attrition, thereby generating salary savings. Another aspect of this critique takes shape with employees who grow so committed they become unable to judge their employer with any objectivity. These highly loyal employees can experience stress, disappointment, and genuine emotional hurt when their employers make decisions perceived as unfair or not in the best interests of the organization. This close identification with the organization can create the potential for emotional reactions and frustration (Shellenbarger, 2014).

## **Higher Education and Cost Containment**

### **The Modern Higher Education Financial Market**

The universal pressure on colleges and universities to reduce costs, particularly tuition and fees, and justify the value of a degree in a post-great recession American economy, shows no sign of abating (AASCU Report, 2008; Davis, 2012). This complex fiscal and political environment combined with substantial and in some cases draconian reductions in state funding for public colleges and universities increases the financial stress on higher education institutions (Adams, 2016; Adams & Shannon, 2006; Frost, Hearn & Marine, 1997; Kurlaender & Grodsky, 2013; Reed, 1999). Public institutions do not bear this burden alone as cost concerns impact private institutions as well, even those considered *elite* (Clotfelter, 2014). The modern higher education financial market appears settled into a pattern of continued expectations from stakeholders involving cost containment (Denneen & Dretler, 2012). Colleges and universities

individually and collectively help shape the storyline of higher education and the role the industry should play in modern society and ultimately whether the benefits outweigh the costs.

A driving force behind the pressure to contain costs at colleges and universities are the twin narratives of affordability and value. Both serve as popular topics for the media and politicians. Affordability discussions focus primarily on tuition costs, and peripherally include fees, books, and other expenses that constitute the total cost of attendance. Consistently rising costs, particularly tuition prices, also negatively impact the broader higher education conversation, contributing to an erosion of public trust (Massey, 2013). In 2016, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) identified college affordability as the number one concern for state policymakers (Harnisch & Lebioda, 2016). Not only at play on the state level, challenging questions about rising tuition costs also drive policy at the federal level and have done so for the last several decades (Gladieux & King, 2011). Conversations around the financial aid system also center on costs and controlling them to keep college affordable, particularly for those students who rely on financial aid to attend (Doyle, 2013).

Discussions of higher education affordability often include consideration of its value. Critics argue that even when higher education is affordable, the value of coursework or a degree is questionable. Growing concern for rising tuition costs and competition in the labor market for new graduates just entering the world of work increases uncertainty regarding the return on investment for a college degree (Massey, 2003; Tutterow & Evans, 2016). Proponents suggest that any higher education provides inherent value to both the student and society. Labaree (1997) outlined the public and private goods associated with education including social mobility, social efficiency, and democratic equality. These broad positive outcomes support increasing expectations for individual earnings that further define the value of higher education. The average bachelor's degree earned its recipient 67% more in terms of after-tax income than the average high school diploma recipient in 2015. Additionally, college graduates experience healthier lifestyles and serve as more active citizens than their less-educated counterparts (Ma, Pender & Welch, 2016).

### **Cost Containment in the Higher Education Context**

Understanding the term cost containment is vital to any consideration of the issue. While a commonly understood concept, numerous terms and versions of terms create nuance, and potentially complexity. For the purposes of this study cost containment in the higher education context was defined in terms of both curtailing expenses and increasing productivity (Massy, 2013). Put most simply; it is an effort to reduce expenses and increase revenue (Reed, 1999). Cost containment initiatives characterize the modern higher education environment, employed widely across the industry (AASCU Report, 2008), and typically falling within the responsibilities of the chief financial officer (CFO) or chief business officer (CBO). Cost containment activities take a variety of forms, from across the board cuts to combining departments to expanding or developing new revenue streams.

Several factors exacerbate the fiscal complexity in which higher education institutions operate, and complicate efforts to contain costs. The Great Recession, rising energy and labor costs, and government compliance all impact institutional budgets with little opportunity for leaders to influence related costs. Jones and Wellman (2010) asserted that the recession revealed

the financial problems facing higher education are long-term and structural, while Massey (2013) described post-recession American higher education at a *watershed moment*. For example, operational costs continue to rise, particularly in the non-negotiable area of energy. Additionally, higher education is a significantly labor-intensive endeavor. Human resources are the heart of the educational enterprise and the cost of benefits, especially those related to health care, have risen drastically (Jones & Wellman, 2010). Unfunded compliance mandates and increased regulation from state and federal governments generate expenses, often on tight timelines with little time to prepare. For example, Vanderbilt University commissioned the Boston Consulting Group (The Group) to assess its annual spending on government compliance. The Group determined that the university spent 146 million dollars annually, or \$11,000 per student (Adams, 2016). Another study found that Hartwick College staff spend 7,300 employee hours per year on compliance work, or the equivalent of three full-time employees (Adams, 2016).

Higher education revenue has also been impacted by changing economic circumstances. For the past several years, tuition cost growth outpaced that of inflation, making higher education more expensive than other goods and services. Public four-year institutions increased in-state tuition and fees at an average 3.4% more than the inflation rate in the ten years between 2005-2006 and 2015-2016 (Ma, Baum, Pender & Bell, 2015). Additionally, rising tuition costs span the institutional spectrum leaving no institution type immune. In the seven-year period between 2007 and 2013, tuition rose 27% at public, four-year universities, 25% at community colleges, and 13% at private, four-year colleges and universities (Heller, 2014).

Finally, cost containment consultants represent a noteworthy force in the market. While present for several years, the extent of higher education's utilization of these companies and their services spiked post-Great Recession (McClure, 2017). Dozens of institutions choose to employ national consulting companies to advise and manage their cost containment programs. Consultants support institutions by providing audits and recommending areas for cost management along with strategies to achieve institutional goals. Despite the wide variety of institutions employing these consultants, their advice remains fairly consistent and similar across campuses. While meaningful savings can be achieved, and often are, institutions rarely meet initial targets (McClure, 2017). Additionally, consultants routinely make proposals based on the majority of their collective experience, which tends to be from the corporate world. The politics of shared governance in higher education are vastly different than that of the corporate world, making it easy for those who have not experienced the shared governance environment to miscalculate. In summary, consultant reviews are mixed, and should receive further scrutiny from higher education (Educational Advisory Board Research Briefing, 2016).

### **Higher Education Challenges with Cost Containment**

While cost containment initiatives are ubiquitous in higher education, the industry is not known for its success with these strategies and does not enjoy a wealth of collective experience upon which to draw. Higher education is historically more comfortable with incremental organizational change achieved at a slower pace than the typical business environment (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Institutions tend to fall prey to common pitfalls such as approaching cost containment without a comprehensive plan, poor documentation and communication, and a lack of committed resources. This ad-hoc approach is often less effective than cross-campus efforts focused on a wide variety of spending activities developed by a campus-wide planning group

(Denneen & Dretler, 2012). Documentation and communication are easy to overlook or not prioritize, yet essential to a successful strategy (AASCU Report, 2008). Insufficiently managed or poor communication creates an Achilles heel for cost containment efforts and can be especially damaging to relationships with key stakeholders, including employees. Another critique levied at planners of cost containment measures is the lack of resources devoted to efforts widely considered vital to the life of the institution. Miscalculating the human and financial resources required to determine savings opportunities and execute initiatives limits the capacity of the planning team (Powers, 2008). Similarly, underestimating the human impact can negatively affect employees and students.

While there are best practices, and researchers (Barr & McClellan, 2011; Facione, 2009) offer several recommendations that are broadly applicable to most colleges and universities, institutional leaders would benefit from additional research related to planning successful cost containment efforts. Colleges and universities, as non-profit organizations, are managed by human beings with deep and often intense feelings about the campuses they serve, motivated intrinsically by their commitment to a cause larger than themselves (Goulet & Frank, 2002). Finding a way to best utilize human resources in the planning and execution of cost containment efforts would be of broad value across institution type and could be influential in planning successful future initiatives both for those already engaged in the process and those considering potential plans.

With institutional efforts towards cutting costs and creating efficiencies so extensive, many colleges and universities have reached a point in their initiatives where the impact of changes have caught up to and in some cases surpassed the original intentions. Cost containment activities can often have ripple effects and unintended consequences. For example, institutional units require a critical mass of human and fiscal resources to continue operations. When cuts progress too far, institutions can lose the efficiencies gained through the initial steps of the process and leave a department or institution less efficient than pre-cost containment efforts (Rowe, 2015). The potential exists for a diminishing return on investment when cost containment becomes the overriding goal to the detriment of departmental and institutional missions. Rowe (2015) outlined potential unintended costs, and consequences of excessive divestment including faculty and staff focused on non-core activities, increased risk and liability, a decline in quality and customer service from vendors, and increased spending. This final category, increased spending, potentially creates the opposite effect from the one intended through the cost containment and efficiency measures, thereby harming unit effectiveness.

Higher education often tends towards incremental change rather than bold strokes. Denneen and Dretler (2012) argued that this makes leading change initiatives at colleges and universities such as cost containment programs, even more challenging than at a for-profit organization. Also, unique to higher education is the diffuse authority inherent in a shared governance model which creates an environment where broad change initiatives can be problematic to mandate without support from the faculty. College and university presidents report placing a high value on cost containment efforts, and a greater satisfaction with their programs when they address a broad range of institutional activities and services (AASCU Report, 2008).

### **Summary of Literature Review**

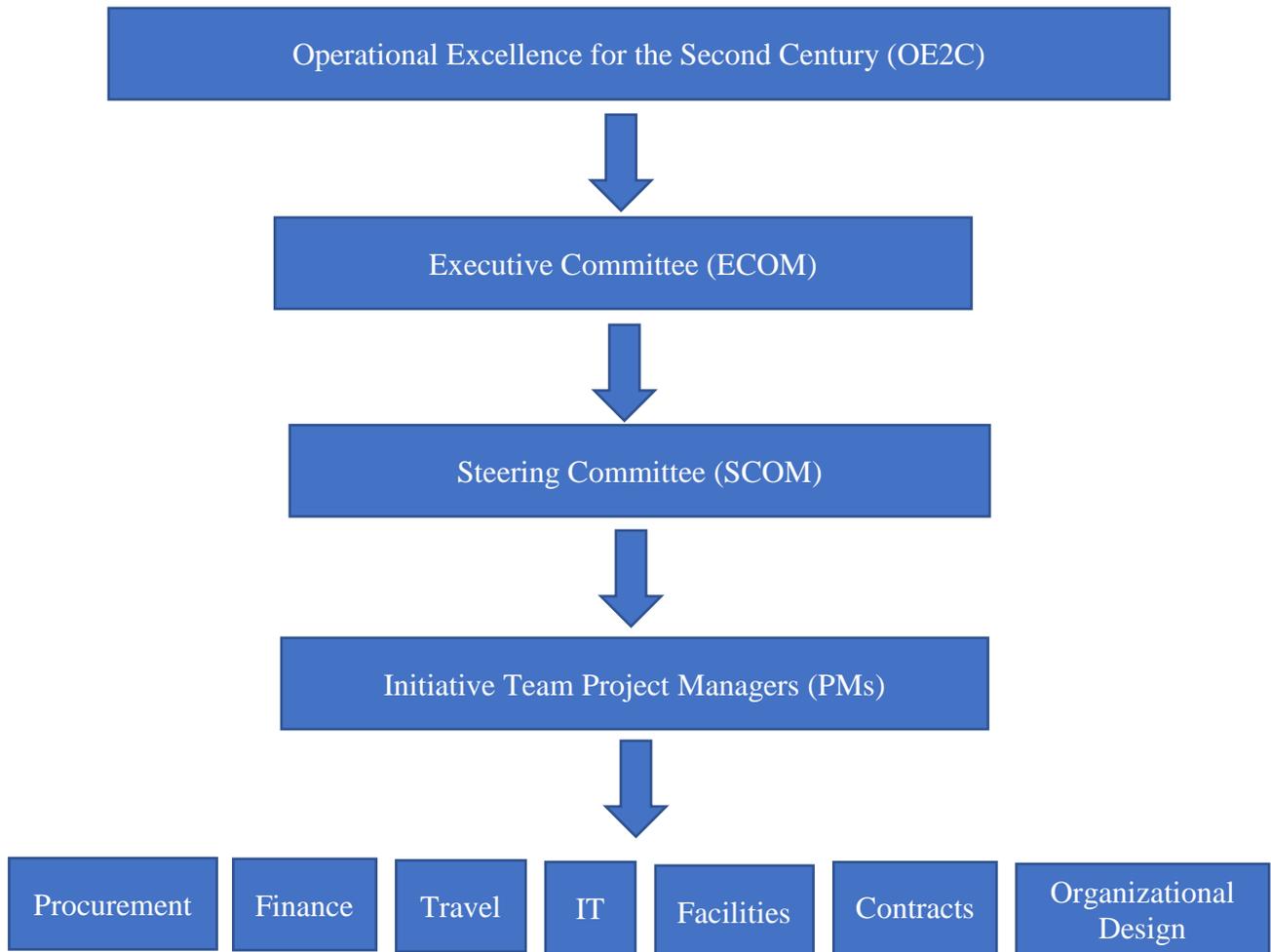
This review of literature informed the development of this research study and created the basis for the methods outlined in the next section of this paper. The two major themes highlighted the theory of organizational commitment and the higher education financial market, including cost containment as a financial management strategy. Previous research has outlined the increasing demands on colleges and universities to reduce costs and the expectation that this environmental factor will continue and grow rather than abate. Higher education can and should improve its collective skill with cost containment programs as institutions continue to employ strategies designed to manage expenses in a challenging fiscal environment focused on affordability and value. Learning more about organizational commitment and its potential to inform both cost containment program development and large-scale campus change initiatives should be valuable to higher education leaders across the industry for the foreseeable future.

## Methods

### Introduction

Southern Methodist University (SMU) recently concluded the first phase of an institution-wide cost containment, efficiency creation program titled *Operational Excellence for the Second Century* (OE2C) (SMU OE2C, *Future*, 2016). This high research activity, private, religiously-affiliated, liberal arts university calls Dallas, Texas, home and boasts a total enrollment of 11,739 students, 6,521 of them undergraduates (SMU, *Facts*, 2017). The first phase of SMU's cost-containment process included hired consultants from Bain and Company coordinating efforts organized into seven formal initiatives (contract processing, facilities, finance, information technology, organization design, procurement, travel and entertainment) all of which have now concluded their work and disbanded. Each initiative team included faculty and staff members from across campus, with leadership provided by a project manager reporting up to a steering committee and executive committee. SMU now operates in phase two, Operational Excellence (OpEx) solely managed by SMU administrators and consisting of new initiative efforts such as event management and access control (SMU OE2C website, *Initiatives*, 2016). Figure 1 illustrates the OE2C organizational structure and the placement of those formally involved on an initiative team:

Figure 1: OE2C Organizational Chart



### Research Question

This study sought to answer the research question, how does a university staff member's formal involvement in a cost containment initiative team affect their organizational commitment? To answer this question, the organizational commitment of SMU staff employed during the OE2C cost containment program was measured. This study identified and compared two specific groups of SMU staff employees who experienced OE2C: those who held a formal role in the process, defined as membership on an initiative team, and those who held no formal role. Those with a formal role (team members) served as members of an initiative team during OE2C and actively engaged in this significant organizational change. Those with no formal role (non-team members) may have attended focus groups, responded to surveys, or otherwise participated in some way with OE2C activities, but they did not hold a formal initiative team assignment. To qualify for participation in this inquiry, respondents were full-time, benefits-eligible employees throughout OE2C, (fall 2014 through fall 2015), and remained employed at SMU in spring 2017 at the time of data collection. In order to measure organizational

commitment for both groups and make a comparison, this study utilized the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). Developed in 1979 by Mowday, Steers, and Porter, the instrument measures organizational commitment across 15 factors. This broadly applicable instrument is considered reliable, with coefficient values from .81 to .93, valid with each of the factors rated individually, and has been used successfully in numerous research projects (Fields, 2002). The purpose of this study was to better understand the potential relationship between involvement and organizational commitment, in order to inform improvements in cost containment program development specifically, and meaningful institutional change initiatives in general, particularly in relation to staff organizational commitment.

### **Design**

To test the hypothesis that these two groups of employees (team- and non-team members) would differ in their levels of organizational commitment, the OCQ was administered via the Qualtrics survey program through an electronic mail (e-mail) to all SMU full-time, benefits-eligible staff employed at SMU throughout the OE2C program who remained employed at SMU in spring 2017.

In order to measure organizational commitment for both groups and make a comparison, this inquiry utilized the OCQ along with demographic questions to ascertain additional variables related to the institutional division employing the respondent and their years of service at SMU. Both groups, team and non-team, received the OCQ instrument via e-mail. Two follow-up emails reminded potential respondents of the opportunity to participate. The researcher designed this inquiry based on the assumptions that cost containment programs have an impact on employee organizational commitment, these programs will continue in American higher education, and research supporting improved design of these programs would be valuable and widely applicable to college and university leaders across institutional type.

### **Participants/Data Examined**

Participation criteria required potential respondents be full-time benefits-eligible staff employed throughout the OE2C program, who continued to be employed at SMU from October 1, 2014, the first day of OE2C, through March 13, 2017, the time of data collection. For the purpose of this study, students, faculty, part-time, and temporary employees were excluded. Staff who were also students qualified as participants as long as their primary categorization at the university was as a staff member. This inquiry compared SMU employees who held a formal role (team members) to those who did not hold a formal role (non-team members), to measure the impact of participation in a formal role on an OE2C initiative team on organizational commitment. Potential participants who met the study criteria were identified by SMU Human Resources and the Office of Operational Excellence and recruited via email invitations to contribute their responses to the study. Participants received an initial email including a deadline for participation and two reminder messages regarding participation in the study with two weeks and then one week remaining until the conclusion of data collection. No incentives were offered for participation.

### **Instrumentation**

The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) provides the most utilized measure of employee's organizational commitment (Goulet & Frank, 2002). Likert-scale

responses of strongly disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, neither disagree or agree, slightly agree, moderately agree or strongly agree measure responses to 15 factors. Of the 15 questions, six are negatively phrased to create reverse scored items (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979). Reverse worded questions strengthen the instrument by mitigating some potential forms of bias such as yea-saying, nea-saying, and social desirability. Respondents evidence bias when they lean towards agreeing (yea-saying) or disagreeing (nea-saying) with all statements on the instrument, or when respondents answer questions the way they think they should be answered, rather than what is truthful to their experience (social desirability bias) (Warner, 2008). There is copious evidence that this 15-item, Likert-response scale is internally consistent, reliable and valid. Though researchers have developed additional instruments to measure aspects of organizational commitment, the OCQ remains the gold standard in large part due to the rigorous evaluation it has endured over the years (Meyer & Allen, 1991) and its high internal reliability (Ketchand & Strawser, 2001). For these reasons, the OCQ remains an exceedingly popular choice for organizational commitment researchers.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The 1,030 eligible staff participants received an e-mail message requesting their participation in this study. The e-mail outlined the research inquiry, its purpose, and assured participants privacy in their identity as the researcher would only report data in the aggregate. The e-mail to potential participants contained a link to the OCQ instrument available via the Qualtrics data collection program, and the instrument included instructions for completion and submission of responses. Two reminders were sent to potential respondents via e-mail encouraging them to participate if they had not yet done so. Forty-four individuals (58%) who held a formal role (team members) responded to the request to participate. Three hundred eleven individuals (36%) who did not hold a formal role (non-team members) responded to the invitation to participate. Both comparison group survey response rates (36% and 58%) exceed the 30% response rate threshold established by Crawford, Couper and Lamias (2001) as suitable for web-based surveys. In total 355 respondents completed the survey in its entirety creating cases for analysis.

## **Methods of Analysis**

### **Data Preparation**

Participant response data collected in the Qualtrics survey program was downloaded into Excel to prepare for analysis. Once in Excel, data was transformed in the following ways for analysis in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS):

#### **Team / Non-Team**

- Respondent staff employees (311) who did not serve in a formal role (non-team members) and who remained employed throughout the SMU OE2C cost containment program, were coded as a 0, or as the null hypothesis.
- Respondent staff employees (44) who did serve in a formal role (team members) and who remained employed throughout the SMU OE2C cost containment program, were coded as a 1.

### **Division**

- Respondents who selected *Academic Affairs*, identifying themselves as working in an academic school under the leadership of an academic dean, were coded as a 1.
- Respondents who selected *Business and Finance, Legal Affairs, President's Office, or Technology*, identifying themselves as working in these administrative units, were coded as a 2.
- Respondents who selected *Student Affairs, Athletics, or Development and External Affairs*, identifying themselves as working in these administrative divisions, were coded as a 3.
- Dummy variables for *Division* were created to support regression modeling during analysis.
- Individual divisions were grouped into these clusters of divisions to reduce the chance for identification of any one respondent though revealing their employing division. Division membership proved fairly evenly distributed among respondents further mitigating the possibility of individual respondent identification.

### **Years of Service**

- Respondents selected a whole number from one (1) to forty (40) identifying their years of service at SMU with no data transformation required.
- Years of service responses were binned in SPSS for ease in data analysis grouping into the following bins for equal distribution with 25% of respondents in each bin: [(0 – 6), (7 – 10), (11 – 16), (17 – 40)]

### **OCQ Instrument Individual Questions**

Respondents answered the 15 individual OCQ instrument questions on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree:

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = moderately disagree
- 3 = slightly disagree
- 4 = neither disagree nor agree
- 5 = slightly agree
- 6 = moderately agree
- 7 = strongly agree

Six of the 15 questions are reverse scored with the following variable transformation:

- 1 = strongly agree
- 2 = moderately agree
- 3 = slightly agree
- 4 = neither disagree nor agree
- 5 = slightly disagree
- 6 = moderately disagree
- 7 = strongly disagree

Following these variable transformations, the data was uploaded from Excel into SPSS for analysis.

## Results

In order to evaluate the hypotheses outlined in this study, data evaluation included descriptive statistical analysis of all independent and dependent variables, followed by correlation analysis to determine relationships among variables. Finally, regression analysis estimated the impact of initiative team involvement on the organizational commitment of participants. Descriptive statistics organize and summarize data while inferential statistics create an opportunity to draw conclusions based on respondent characteristics. This inquiry yielded responses from 355 individual cases,  $n = 355$ . Of those, 311 (87.6%) identified as non-team members having no formal involvement in the cost containment program, and 44 (12.4%) identified as holding formal roles in the process as initiative team members. The data collected provided the opportunity to assess the hypotheses that:

1. Formal involvement in a meaningful organizational change such as the cost containment program OE2C would have an impact on employee organizational commitment;
2. the impact could be measured via the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire;
3. the results gathered via the OCQ instrument would reveal differing levels of organizational commitment for the two groups (team and non-team members) to facilitate comparison; and
4. the involved group (team members) would demonstrate higher levels of organizational commitment than the uninvolved group (non-team members).

For further analysis, the researcher computed a Z-score for each variable along with a composite Z-score for the instrument to represent Commitment. This non-refined method of summing the scores of standardized variables was utilized to standardize raw scores to the same mean and standard deviation before summation. This strategy creates easily interpretable observed variables which may vary widely in terms of standard deviation, making it the recommended technique in this type of query (DiStefano, Zhu & Mindrila, 2009). Additionally, years of service was visually binned in SPSS resulting in four bins each containing 25% of respondents (0 – 6), (7 – 10), (11 – 16), (17 – 40).

Table 1 outlines each statistical test performed as part of this study, along with the corresponding variables:

Table 1  
*Variables and Statistical Tests*

Variable	Statistical Test(s)
Years of Service	Descriptive (frequency, mean, median, mode)
Division	Descriptive (frequency)
Commitment	Descriptive (mean, median, mode, minimum, maximum, range, standard deviation)
Team/Non-Team and Division	Descriptive (Crosstab)
Team/Non-Team and Years of Service	Descriptive (Crosstab)
Division and Years of Service	Descriptive (Crosstab)
Team/Non-Team by OCQ instrument question	Descriptive (mean, standard deviation)

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Statistical Test(s)
Team/Non-Team	Years of Service	ANOVA/Independent t-test
Team/Non-Team	Division	ANOVA/Independent t-test
Team/Non-Team	OCQ instrument question	ANOVA/Independent t-test
Commitment	Team/Non-Team	Regression analysis
Commitment	Years of Service	Regression analysis
Commitment	Division	Regression analysis

#### Additional Statistical Analysis

Instrument validity	Cronbach alpha
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#### **Instrument validity**

The first descriptive statistic analyzed the internal reliability and consistency of the study instrument using a Cronbach alpha, resulting in an  $\alpha = .904$ . For multi-item scales, the Cronbach alpha remains the most popular reliability assessment (Warner, 2008). The resulting Cronbach alpha is represented numerically between 0 – 1.0 and scores over .70 are generally considered acceptable, with higher scores indicating greater reliability, reflecting the homogeneity of the scale (Santos, 1999). This study's  $\alpha$  of .904 revealed high levels of consistency in the responses across the 15 self-reported items. This finding was consistent with other reliability ratings for research projects utilizing the OCQ. In their 1990 meta-analysis, Mathieu and Zajac reported research studies employing the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire enjoyed an average alpha of .88. In summary, in this research study the OCQ instrument effectively measured what it was intended to, the organizational commitment of the respondents.

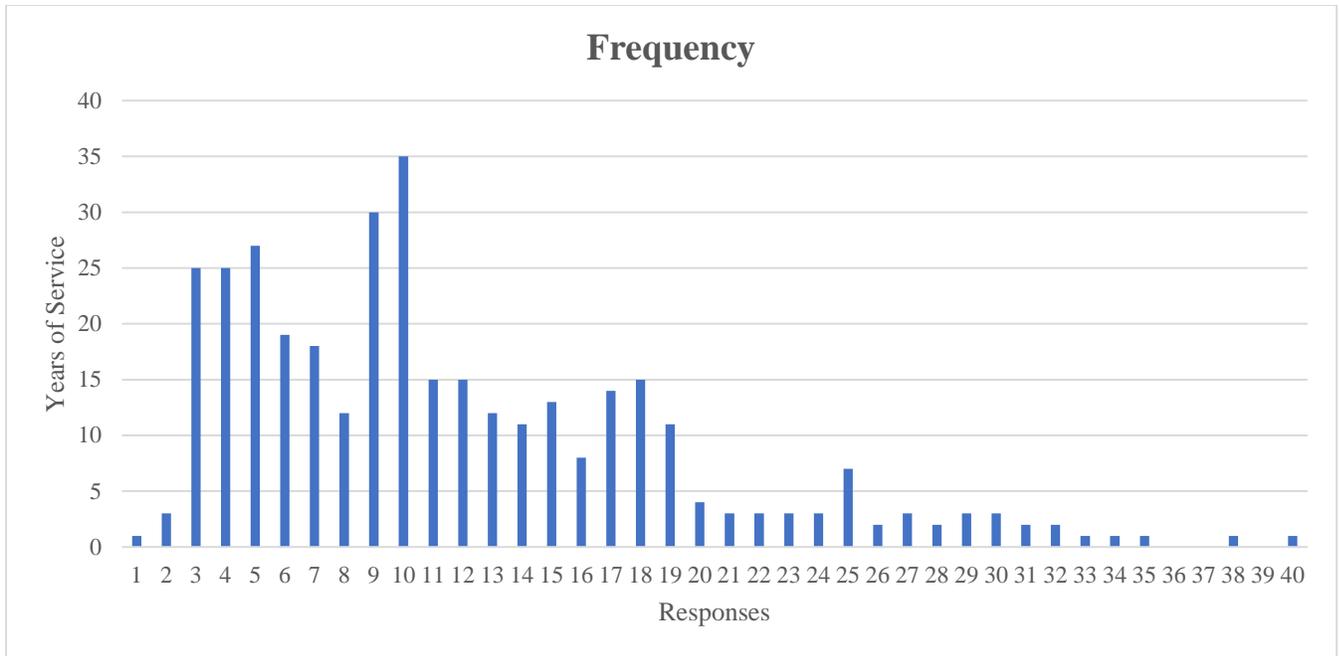
#### **Descriptive Statistics for the Sample**

##### *Years of Service*

Of the 355 respondents, 354 indicated their years of service at SMU, ranging from 1 – 40, and their distribution is represented visually in the histogram contained in Table 2.

#### Table 2

##### *Participant Years of Service*



Notably, of the 40 options for years of service between one – 40, all but three were represented in the sample with no respondents indicating 36, 37, or 39 years of service. Additionally, years of service was visually binned in SPSS resulting in four bins of (0 – 6), (7 – 10), (11 – 16), (17 – 40). The mean years of service for the respondents was 11.77 years. Interestingly, ten years of service emerged as both the median and mode, with a standard deviation of 7.425 years.

*Division*

Of the 355 respondents, 354 indicated their employing institutional division at SMU as represented in Table 3:

Table 3

*Division Membership*

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Academic Affairs	135	38
Business & Finance, Legal Affairs, President’s Office, Technology	89	25.1
Student Affairs, Athletics, Development & External Affairs	130	36.6
<u>Missing</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>.3</u>
Total	355	100

Divisional membership was fairly evenly distributed, between 25.1 – 38% for each of the three divisional groupings with only one respondent choosing not to answer the question, the same number as chose not to answer the question regarding years of service.

*Commitment*

Each of the 355 respondents completed the full OCQ instrument measuring their organizational commitment. The sample produced a mean Commitment score of .000, a median of .225, and mode of .349. The minimum recorded Commitment score for a respondent was -2.625 with a maximum of 1.71 creating a range of 4.337. The standard deviation in the respondent results was 1.000.

**Crosstabs**

Several cross-tabulations were conducted to discern a clearer picture of respondent characteristics. These tables present frequency distributions simultaneously in order to illuminate the nature of the relationship between the variables. Crosstabs provide an efficient method to describe demographic variables (Nardi, 2006). Table 4 illustrates the distribution of team and non-team members by Division:

Table 4  
*Team / Non-Team and Division*

	<u>Team</u>	<u>Non-Team</u>
Academic Affairs	14	121
Business & Finance, Legal Affairs, President’s Office, Technology	23	66
Student Affairs, Athletics, Development & External Affairs	7	123

Academic Affairs (121) and Student Affairs, Athletics, Development & External Affairs (123) contain a similar number of non-team participants with Business & Finance, Legal Affairs, President’s Office, Technology (66) having close to half that number. Team participants were distributed more unevenly (7, 14 and 23) with Business & Finance, Legal Affairs, President’s Office, Technology having the greatest number of team respondents (23) and least number of non-team (66).

Table 5 further clarifies team and non-team participants and their recorded years of service:

Table 5  
*Team / Non-Team and Years of Service*

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Non-Team	310	11.25	7.261
Team	44	15.43	7.614

On average, team members reported 4.18 additional years of service than their non-team counterparts, while the standard deviation for both groups proved similar, separated by .353.

Table 6 illuminated the distribution years of service by division membership:

Table 6  
*Division and Years of Service*

	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Academic Affairs	12.31	8.393

Business & Finance, Legal Affairs, President's Office, Technology	12.45	6.528
Student Affairs, Athletics, Development & External Affairs	10.73	6.849

Unsurprisingly, with both a mode and mean of 10 years of service for the respondent group writ large, when reviewed by division, mean scores are proximate (10.73, 12.31 and 12.45) and near 10. Standard deviations reveal greater differences with closer results for Business & Finance, Legal Affairs, President's Office, Technology and Student Affairs, Athletics, Development & External Affairs (6.528 and 6.849 respectively) than Academic Affairs (8.393).

Of the 15 items measured on the scale, participant responses varied from a minimum of one to a maximum of seven in 14 cases. Only on the fifteenth and final question, *Mistake: Deciding to work for this organization was a definite mistake on my part*, was the response *strongly agree* not selected by a single participant, with all responses ranging from two to seven. Responses to the 15 questions produced means ranging from 3.43 to 6.55 with standard deviations from .959 to 2.083. Considering each question individually, and the responses of team members and non-team members provides thought-provoking comparisons as presented in Table 7. A key to the individual instrument questions immediately follows.

Table 7

*Team / Non-Team by Question*

	<u>Team</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Non-Team</u>	<u>Non-Team Standard</u>
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Deviation</u>
Q1: Effort	6.59	1.019	6.12	1.316
Q2: TalkUp	5.82	1.402	5.54	1.701
Q3: Loyalty	5.52	2.085	5.26	2.084
Q4: JobAssign	3.73	2.05	3.38	2.014
Q5: Values	5.07	1.704	4.85	1.736
Q6: Proud	6.16	1.293	6.12	1.287
Q7: DiffOrg	3.61	1.646	3.62	1.875
Q8: Inspire	5.11	1.742	4.72	1.853
Q9: Change	5.36	1.672	5.01	1.824
Q10: GladChose	6.09	1.137	5.99	1.272
Q11: Sticking	5.7	1.374	4.98	1.938
Q12: Policies	4.43	1.835	3.96	1.969
Q13: Care	6.57	.900	6.12	1.354
Q14: BestOrg	4.84	1.804	4.61	1.948
Q15: Mistake	6.66	.888	6.54	.969

## Key to Table 7: OCQ Instrument Questions

Q1: Effort	I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful.
Q2: TalkUp	I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for.
Q3: Loyalty	I feel very little loyalty to this organization. (R)
Q4: JobAssign	I would accept almost any types of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization.
Q5: Values	I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar.
Q6: Proud	I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.
Q7: DiffOrg	I could just as well be working for a different organization as long as the type of work was similar. (R)
Q8: Inspire	This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.
Q9: Change	It would take very little change in my present circumstance to cause me to leave this organization. (R)
Q10: GladChose	I am extremely grateful that I chose this organization to work for over others I was considering at the time I joined.
Q11: Sticking	There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely. (R)
Q12: Policies	Often, I find it difficult to agree with this organization's policies on important matters relating to its employees. (R)
Q13: Care	I really care about the fate of this organization.
Q14: BestOrg	For me, this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.
Q15: Mistake	Deciding to work for this organization was a definite mistake on my part. (R)

*Sticking: There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely* (reverse scored) produced the greatest difference in means when comparing the two groups (.72) with team members reporting a higher level of commitment on that factor (5.7 vs. 4.98). *Proud: I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization* and *DiffOrg: I could just as well be working for a different organization as long as the type of work was similar* (reverse scored) resulted in the most similar responses when comparing the two groups, .04 (6.16 vs. 6.12) and .01 (3.61 vs. 3.62) respectively.

This inquiry sought an answer to the question, how does formal involvement in a meaningful organizational change impact organizational commitment. Results indicated involvement leads to higher organizational commitment as the team mean Z-score for Commitment (the survey instrument total) was .032 and the non-team was -.0045. These results were not significant at .473. Descriptive statistics for the sample reveal several noteworthy characteristics of the sample and team/non-team comparison groups:

- Of the 40 possible options for years of service, all but three were represented with an average of 11.77 years, median and mode of 10. On average, team members reported longer lengths of service;
- Divisional membership was fairly evenly distributed in the sample; less so when divided in to the comparison groups of team/non-team;
- OCQ individual question responses reveal a range of mean scores, and when compared they illustrate those questions where team/non-team responses were most alike and most different;
- Team members indicated a higher level of commitment than non-team respondents.

### **ANOVA Tests/Independent t-test**

Creswell (2013) identified the t-test or univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) as the statistical test utilized to analyze categorical-continuous variables. ANOVA analysis reveals the difference between the means of team (15.43) and non-team (11.25) respondents in terms of years of service was statistically significant at  $p=.000$ . On average, initiative team members worked at SMU longer than their non-team counterparts. When comparing team and non-team years of service by division, the result was not statistically significant at  $p=.135$ . Similarly, a statistically significant relationship did not exist between years of service and division in this study at  $p=.135$ .

Analyzing each instrument question revealed that three questions: effort:  $p=.023$ , sticking:  $p=.017$  and care:  $p=.034$  were statistically significant when comparing team and non-team responses. Sticking revealed the strongest relationship of the three factors. *Effort: I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful.*

*Sticking: There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely* (reverse scored).

*Care: I really care about the fate of this organization.*

The next model reviewed each individual question for team and non-team members for their division affiliation, illustrating similarly that three individual questions revealed statistical significance, with two of those three identical questions in the previous model: effort at  $p=.031$

and sticking at  $p=.029$  with policies at  $p=.003$  replacing care in the third position. This question also revealed the strongest relationship of the three.

*Policies: Often, I find it difficult to agree with this organization's policies on important matters relating to its employees (reverse scored).*

Years of service, when binned, did not produce significant results for any of the individual instrument questions or the instrument itself.

In summary, independent t-test/ANOVA analysis revealed the following statistically significant results:

- The sample revealed a statistically significant ( $p=.000$ ) difference between the means of team (15.43) and non-team (11.25) respondents in terms of years of service;
- Three individual OCQ instrument questions proved statistically significant in comparing team and non-team responses: effort:  $p=.023$ , sticking:  $p=.017$  and care:  $p=.034$ ;
- When incorporating division affiliation, again three individual OCQ instrument questions proved statistically significant in comparing team and non-team responses: effort at  $p=.031$ , sticking at  $p=.029$ , and policies at  $p=.003$ .

## **Regression Modeling**

Next, the researcher utilized regression modeling to analyze respondent data and ascertain if any of the independent variables (Division, Years of Service, etc.) shared a causal relationship with the dependent variable (Commitment). Bivariate and regression analysis predict scores on a single outcome variable (Warner, 2008). One of the primary uses of regression is in casual analysis to determine if the independent variables are a cause of the dependent variable and if so, to identify the unique contribution each variable makes along with the magnitude of the impact (Allison, 1999). Additionally, regression analysis is commonly used to evaluate the relationships among variables when a linear relationship is assumed (Nardi, 2006). In this case, comparing the organizational commitment of Team and Non-Team members and the influence of Division and Years of Service on those results.

### *Regression Models*

1. The first regression model measured if the independent variable of Team or Non-Team membership could predict the dependent variable Commitment in terms of the instrument Z-score in a bivariate regression analysis. These variables did not prove statistically significant at  $p=.086$ .
2. The second regression model considered the dependent variable of Commitment as measured by the instrument Z-score utilizing Years of Service and the dummy variables for Division as potential predictors. Again, this overall relationship was not statistically significant, also at  $p=.086$ . However, separately analyzing each individual variable resulted in two statistically significant relationships: Non-Team members at  $p=.05$  and those identifying as members of the administrative units Business & Finance, Legal Affairs, President's Office, or Technology at  $p=.044$ .
3. Considering each of these variables in relation to the other through multiple regression models did not reveal any statistically significant relationships.

Regression modeling revealed two independent variables as statistically significant predictors of Commitment: membership in the non-team group ( $p=.05$ ) and identification as a member of the administrative units Business & Finance, Legal Affairs, President's Office, or Technology ( $p=.044$ ).

When SMU launched their cost containment efficiency generation program, leaders selected staff employees to serve in formal roles on initiative teams. This involvement created two groups of full-time, benefits-eligible staff employees who experienced the same meaningful organizational change, OE2C, at the same institution at the same time, creating ideal samples for comparison. This environment offered the opportunity to answer the research question, how does a university staff member's formal involvement in a cost containment initiative team affect their organizational commitment? To answer this question, measure and compare their organizational commitment, participants completed the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). Utilizing SPSS, the researcher performed both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, determining instrument validity and illustrating respondent characteristics, ultimately answering the research question, determining that involved (team) staff employees did indeed enjoy a higher level of organizational commitment. Better understanding this relationship can inform improvements in cost containment program development specifically, and significant institutional change initiatives in general, particularly in relation to staff organizational commitment.

The results provided evidence responding to the hypotheses indicating that:

1. Formal involvement in a meaningful organizational change did indeed have an impact on employee organizational commitment;
2. The impact was measurable via the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire;
3. The results gathered via the OCQ instrument revealed differing levels of organizational commitment for the two groups (team and non-team members); and
4. That the involved group (team members) demonstrated higher levels of organizational commitment than the uninvolved group (non-team members).

## Discussion

This study sought an answer to the research question, how does a university staff member's formal involvement on a cost containment initiative team affect their organizational commitment? Four hypotheses provided the foundation for this research project. First, that formal involvement in a meaningful organizational change initiative such as the cost containment program OE2C would have an impact on employee organizational commitment and second, that impact could be measured via the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire. Third, the results gathered via the OCQ instrument would reveal differing levels of organizational commitment for the two groups (team and non-team members), so that a comparison could reveal which of the two groups demonstrated higher levels of organizational commitment. Fourth, the author hypothesized that the involved group (team members) would demonstrate higher levels of commitment than the uninvolved group (non-team members) as a result of their formal involvement in the change process. As tested in this research project, all hypotheses were established as accurate, as the two comparison groups did indeed demonstrate differing levels of organizational commitment via the OCQ. As expected, the formally involved group (team members) exhibited higher levels of organizational commitment than their uninvolved (non-team) colleagues. The results answered the research question exposing that involvement positively impacts organizational commitment for university employees experiencing a meaningful organizational change.

Although research reveals a good deal about organizational commitment, a dearth of knowledge exists illuminating its influence in higher education, more specifically with staff employees. Study results add to the body of knowledge by illuminating the positive impact of involvement during times of meaningful organizational change at a college or university. Higher education institutions operate in a constantly changing environment and plan major change initiatives regularly to address evolving needs of students, to push forward with research, and as legal and cultural environments change. Senior leaders responsible for these organizational change initiatives can utilize this research in planning the involvement (or lack thereof) of key staff members in organizational change programs such as general curriculum reviews, senior leader searches, or the launch of a cost containment initiative. Employees experience a sense of justice when given the opportunity to participate in the process and contribute to decisions (Lawrence, 2010), further supporting organizational commitment. Managers and leaders can design formal involvement roles for vital employees in order to strengthen their organizational commitment and intentionally exclude from formal involvement in the change program those employees they would rather see depart. This highly flexible strategy supports both desired retention and attrition.

As pressure on higher education to contain costs and increase efficiency grows and government investment declines, the need to maintain or reduce costs through organizational change initiatives will continue (AASCU Report, 2016; Denneen & Dretler, 2012) and likely increase. The post-recession economy and negative publicity surrounding the high cost of a college degree paired with those who question affordability push institutions creating a significant national issue for higher education. College and university presidents are left with little choice in considering and addressing this issue. Those who stick their heads in the sand will most certainly one day learn they and their institution have been left behind in this new and dynamic higher education environment. Organizational change characterizes the modern

environment for colleges and universities and organizational commitment, a significant influence on organizational behavior, offers a tool for administrators in planning major institutional change. Formal involvement in change initiatives supports organizational commitment, which can then create support for organizational change as employees with stronger commitment to their organization demonstrate a greater propensity to endure the effort required for their employer to succeed during times of significant change (Nordin, 2012). In essence, a mutually supporting cycle. While the concept that involvement supports organizational commitment is a seemingly accessible concept, it would behoove institutional leaders to recognize and respond to this simple truth and plan their activities in order to reap the positive outcomes this leadership strategy can influence.

### **Limitations**

While this research project offers important insight to higher education senior leaders planning organizational change initiatives, there are limitations to consider in interpreting the results and generalizing to other contexts. First, data collection took place at a single campus with distinct characteristics that may limit transferability to other institutions, even in higher education. SMU is a private four-year university, religiously-affiliated, and located in a metropolitan area of the South, and any of these characteristics can influence its employees and their level of organizational commitment. Additionally, this research was conducted at an American university, potentially culturally limiting translation to institutions of higher education outside of the United States.

A second limitation of this study lies with the nature of the data collection tool itself. Data measuring organizational commitment was collected via the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) survey instrument. While considered the best-in-class instrument for measuring employee organizational commitment, the survey elicits self-reported data, relying on the participant's honesty and self-reflection. This limitation is built-into any survey instrument, and the researcher employed strategies to mitigate any participant concerns that might limit the honesty of their responses. The researcher assured participants of their confidentiality and that no one but the researcher would be able to access their data, and that data would only be reported in the aggregate.

A third limitation of this inquiry is that no research methodology can fully account for all aspects of an individual's organizational commitment to their employing institution. Those feelings are complex, highly personal, and evolve. While formal involvement in an organizational change program can increase that organizational commitment, involvement alone cannot account for 100% of any single employee's organizational commitment. No one instrument can measure all of the factors influencing a human's feelings towards their employing organization, including their commitment to that organization. Another factor to consider is the selection process for those chosen to participate formally in an organizational change program such as OE2C. The possibility exists that those chosen for formal participation were selected in part due to their already robust organizational commitment.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

The goal of this inquiry was to better understand the influence of formal involvement in a meaningful organizational change on a university staff employee's organizational commitment. Gaining this knowledge could inform improvements in cost containment program development specifically, and significant institutional change initiatives in general, particularly in relation to staff organizational commitment. Despite the aforementioned limitations, this research study contributes to the understanding of organizational commitment and policy development addressing organizational change in a number of ways, across institution types and administrative levels. Expending the effort to understand the complexities of employee organizational commitment and how to leverage that commitment during times of meaningful organizational change offers a key preparatory strategy (Nordin, 2012).

### *Recommendations at the staff employee level*

A starting point for consideration of implications for improving practice is at the smallest unit of measurement, the potential positive impact on a single staff employee. Organizational commitment outlines an organizational theory describing individual, human feelings.

- Higher education administrators and supervisors can design their practice around the concept of nurturing and encouraging organizational commitment for each individual employee, particularly those they most desire to retain;
- Conversely, supervisors can limit their investment in those employees whose organizational commitment is not deemed critical to the organizational change program.

As the literature indicated, organizationally committed employees bring a host of positive attributes to work resulting in numerous beneficial outcomes and competitive advantage to the employer, along with mitigating several negative potential outcomes such as tardiness and intention to leave a job (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Based on the results of this inquiry, the author recommends:

- Practitioners consider opportunities for involvement, particularly during times of meaningful organizational change. Each organization enjoys essential employees who can move an initiative forward and motivate others to higher levels of excellence. Investing in these employees through involvement in significant change initiatives can pay dividends over the life of their employment;
- Involvement can take many forms including formal committee roles, assignments to short-term project teams, or positions on advisory groups, creating an important, cost-effective, and highly flexible retention strategy.

### *Recommendations at the department or division level*

After the individual employee, the next level of recommendation for practitioners addresses the departmental or divisional level. A new division leader launching a strategic plan offers a specific example for contemplation of using formal involvement as an employee retention strategy. Consider the division preparing to develop and launch a strategic plan under new leadership. The senior division leader planning for the development and rollout of the new strategic plan utilizes the opportunity to consider employee organizational commitment in developing the initiative's structure and determining employee roles in the process. While one approach would be to hold tightly to control and limit involvement to a small group of trusted team staff, this research inquiry suggests the opposite approach. In order to encourage the

organizational commitment of employees throughout the division and support retention, the author recommends:

- The senior divisional leader incorporate staff throughout the process creating multiple opportunities for formal involvement at every stage;
- Some employees could serve on the team developing the plan providing a range of faces and voices for the project while diversifying input;
- The development committee can further participate through presentation of the plan to the rest of the division and to institutional stakeholders;
- Different employees can serve formally in implementation, creating additional opportunities for staff to buy into the process through their involvement.

Implementing these recommendation costs next to nothing financially for the divisional leader, while simultaneously generating an ongoing opportunity to invest in their staff and encourage their organizational commitment.

#### *Recommendations at the institution or industry level*

Next, this research study offers recommendations for higher education at the institutional and industry levels. Organizational change programs affecting the entire institution, such as a redesign of the general education curriculum or the launch of a cost containment program, can be improved through consideration of employee involvement to further organizational commitment. Colleges and universities hold membership in a labor-intensive industry that relies heavily on the contributions of their human resources for their success. As a result of this research project, policy developers at the institutional and industry level have an opportunity to leverage the capacity of this vital and costly resource. This recommendation holds many positive attributes and potential positive outcomes:

- provides a specific yet easily adaptable tactic for improving staff employee organizational commitment;
- hard-cost effective;
- manageable in terms of leadership time required.

Providing opportunities for formal involvement during times of meaningful organizational change can be instituted from community colleges to four-year institutions to higher education professional associations.

#### *Recommendations for for-profit corporations*

Finally, this research study also offers insights for the corporate world. Employers pursuing profit also experience times of significant organizational change often at a rapid pace and similar to higher education, make substantial investments in their human resources through the processes of recruitment and training. Companies regularly restructure through merger, acquisition, the spinoff of a division, or a general company reorganization. Like their higher education counterparts, corporate officers can consider the organizational commitment of their employees in designing formal involvement opportunities during times of major organizational change.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Scholar-practitioners who wish to further this research have several paths to pursue. First, higher education, as a labor-intensive industry, relies on the strengths, talents, and commitment of its employees. While this study investigated full-time benefits-eligible staff, other sub-populations of university employees similarly deserve research attention. Staff organizational commitment after a meaningful organizational change initiative may vary by status (part-time) or level (i.e., entry vs. mid vs. senior). Additional staff characteristics may also influence commitment such as alumni status. Colleges and universities broadly classify employees as either faculty or staff. This project excluded faculty, primarily due to the unique nature of tenure, likely to appreciably influence organizational commitment. A study of faculty organizational commitment could also consider the differences between tenured, tenure-track, clinical, and adjunct faculty. In addition to employment status, future research could include a study examining the impact of demographics such as gender, race, or ethnicity. Any of these characteristics or demographic categories offer potential for fruitful research to add to the body of literature.

A second area of potential future research lies with the wide variety of institutional types within American higher education. Research designed to consider this institutional diversity could reveal the differences between two- and four-year institutions, community colleges, public and private institutions, etc. Of course, the national context is also a factor with potential differences for institutions outside the United States. Other institutional characteristics also offer opportunities for research. Does institutional religious-affiliation impact the outcome? How do relationships change when the student population is single-gender, or when students work on campus to pay their tuition? Additionally, since this research was conducted at a single institution, replication at additional campuses would provide valuable insight on the topic. Any of the dynamic, unique institutional characteristics within American higher education offer an opportunity to further this line of inquiry.

## Conclusion

The ever-growing pressure to limit the price of a college degree constrains higher education in the modern era, and this pressure will only intensify. Governing boards demand responsiveness to these political and governmental pressures, challenging institutional leaders to articulate not only how and why a degree is worth the expense, but how they are endeavoring to restrain costs and demonstrate value. Colleges and universities routinely engage in organizational change initiatives aimed at achieving these goals of cost containment and creating efficiency. Research-based strategies, such as the one developed through this research study, that address cost reductions and meaningful organizational change, designed to leverage the vast human resources available to higher education leaders through an understanding of organizational commitment, place institutions in the strongest position to navigate the complex fiscal and political environment. The potential exists to improve cost containment programs specifically, and meaningful organizational change generally, when employers consider the human impact on their employees. Understanding how involvement in change initiatives can increase and encourage employee organizational commitment allows leaders to employ an impactful, hard-cost effective retention strategy.

Organizational commitment, composed of three component parts – affective, continuance, and normative – explains the phenomenon of an employee’s connection to their employing organization. College and university leaders who capitalize on the benefits of employees with high levels of organizational commitment can support and encourage its continued development and tap into the potential to reduce employee anxiety driven by the change associated with cost containment initiatives. This inquiry sought to understand the influence of formal involvement in a meaningful organizational change on a staff employee’s organizational commitment in order to inform improvements in cost containment program development and significant institutional change initiatives in general. Utilizing the gold-standard OCQ to compare to groups of staff employees who experienced a meaningful organizational change, the study results affirmatively answered the research question exposing that involvement positively impacts organizational commitment for university employees experiencing a meaningful organizational change. This knowledge provides college and university leaders, regardless of institutional type, with a powerful tool for planning, executing, and leading through organizational change. Administrators can utilize involvement designed to support organizational commitment at the departmental, divisional, and institutional levels with entire teams and individual employees.

This research study adds to the body of knowledge by illuminating the positive impact of staff involvement during times of meaningful organizational change at a university. Higher education institutions operate in a constantly changing environment and regularly plan major change initiatives such as senior leadership searches, strategic and master planning, and curriculum reviews. Formal involvement in major change initiatives encourages organizational commitment, which can then create support for that organizational change as employees with stronger commitment to their organization demonstrate a greater propensity to endure the effort required for their employer to succeed during times of meaningful change (Nordin, 2012). This approach creates a mutually supporting cycle between the involved staff employee and the organizational change initiative.

Scholar practitioners who wish to further this research have several paths to pursue including the study of faculty organizational commitment, and additional exploration of the impact of respondent demographics. A second area of potential future research lies with the wide variety of institutional types within American higher education. While this research project offers important insight to higher education senior leaders planning organizational change initiatives, the outlined limitations add context. The results of this study suggest that higher education supervisors design their practice around the concept of nurturing and encouraging employee organizational commitment. The author recommends practitioners consider opportunities for involvement, particularly during times of meaningful organizational change. Investing in these employees through involvement can pay dividends over the life of their employment through an effectual, low-cost, and highly flexible retention strategy of supporting organizational commitment.

**Appendix A – IRB approval letter**



From: IRB Committee

To: Dawn F. Norris

Date: February 17, 2017

Re: IRB New Submission Approval; Protocol # H17-002-NORD – The impact of involvement in cost containment program initiative teams on organizational commitment

Dear Ms. Norris,

The IRB Committee completed review of your application and granted approval of your protocol on 02/16/2017. This approval is valid until **02/16/2018**. If work will continue beyond this date, it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to submit an annual review of progress (CFR 21 §56.109(f)). Failure to gain approval of this annual review prior to the expiration date could result in suspension of the work covered under this protocol. This suspension of work would include halting all subject enrollment, collecting data, and/or analyzing previously collected, identified data.

Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted to the IRB as an amendment prior to initiation (CFR 21 §56.108 (a)(3); §56.108 (a)(4)). Please be advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to report unanticipated adverse events to the Office of Research Administration within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon acknowledgement of the occurrence (CFR 21 § 56.108 (b)(1)).

All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented IRB CITI or NIH Training on file with this office. The certification will expire in 3 years, so please plan your renewal accordingly. For NIH training only, please include a copy of your certificate with your submission.

Southern Methodist University's Office of Research and Graduate Studies appreciates your continued commitment to the protection of human subjects in research. Should you have questions, or need to report completion of study procedures, please contact the Office of Research compliance at 214-768-2033 or at [researchcompliance@smu.edu](mailto:researchcompliance@smu.edu).

Thank You,

*IRB Committee Chair*

Office of Research and Graduate Studies Southern Methodist University PO Box 750302 Dallas TX 75275-0240 Office: 214-768-2033 Fax: 214-768-1079

## Appendix B – Emails to potential participants

**Subject:** Want to help with a dissertation research project? It'll be quick!

Dear SMU Staff member,

Good day! Will you take a few moments to assist me with my dissertation research? I am a doctoral student here at SMU in the Simmons Education Policy & Leadership Higher Education program.

You have been selected as a potential participant in a dissertation research study. This study investigates the commitment of individuals to an organization. Specifically, I am interested in how commitment is different for individuals involved in organizational change programs like the OE2C cost containment initiative. In order to answer this question, the organizational commitment of full-time benefits-eligible SMU staff employed during OE2C will be measured. I'll compare the measured organizational commitment of those who held a formal role as an initiative team member, to those who did not serve in a formal role. All data will be reported in the aggregate, so your identity and responses will remain private.

To participate, you will read and electronically sign an informed consent document and complete a brief survey instrument. Estimated participation time ranges from 5 – 20 minutes. Just click this link to get started:

Follow this link to the survey: [Take the survey](#)

Or copy and paste the URL into your internet

browser: [https://smu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/preview/SV\\_acasX3og1nm5KKh?Q\\_CHL=preview](https://smu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/preview/SV_acasX3og1nm5KKh?Q_CHL=preview)

Follow this link to opt out of future emails: [Click here to unsubscribe](#)

If you have any questions or concerns at any point in the process, please do not hesitate to contact me. **Thank you** in advance for your support. I appreciate you!

Dawn F. Norris

Candidate for the Doctorate in Higher Education,

SMU Simmons School of Education & Human Development

[dfnorris@smu.edu](mailto:dfnorris@smu.edu) or (214) 768-4425

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**Subject:** Please help with my dissertation research project - it'll be quick!

Dear SMU Staff Member,

Good day! Will you take a few moments to assist me with my dissertation research? I am a doctoral student here at SMU in the Simmons Education Policy & Leadership program.

You have been selected as a potential participant in my dissertation research study investigating

the commitment of individuals to an organization. All data will be reported in the aggregate, so your identity and responses will remain private. To participate, you will read and electronically sign an informed consent document and complete a brief survey instrument. Estimated participation time ranges from 5 – 20 minutes.

If you are interested in participating, please click this link to get started: [Take the survey](https://smu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/preview/SV_0vVxYQMS9SGXSyF?Q_CHL=preview)  
Or copy and paste the URL into your internet browser: [https://smu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/preview/SV\\_0vVxYQMS9SGXSyF?Q\\_CHL=preview](https://smu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/preview/SV_0vVxYQMS9SGXSyF?Q_CHL=preview)

If you have any questions or concerns at any point in the process, please do not hesitate to contact me. **Thank you** in advance for your support. I appreciate you!

Dawn F. Norris  
Candidate for the Doctorate in Higher Education,  
SMU Simmons School of Education & Human Development  
[dfnorris@smu.edu](mailto:dfnorris@smu.edu) or (214) 768-4425

Follow this link to opt out of future emails: [Click here to unsubscribe](#)

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**Subject:** LAST CALL! Please help with my dissertation research.

Colleagues:

This is your last chance! My survey closes this Friday, April 28<sup>th</sup> at 12 noon, and I want to hear from **you**.

You have been selected as a potential participant in my dissertation research study investigating the commitment of individuals to an organization. Estimated participation time ranges from 5 – 20 minutes.

To participate, please click this link today: [Take the survey](https://smu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5zOEqLRpo5EXqrb?Q_DL=80oVfCcMidOCulD_5zOEqLRpo5EXqrb_MLRP_3OUXTIpJ0kaaRyB&Q_CHL=email)  
Or copy and paste the URL into your internet browser: [https://smu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5zOEqLRpo5EXqrb?Q\\_DL=80oVfCcMidOCulD\\_5zOEqLRpo5EXqrb\\_MLRP\\_3OUXTIpJ0kaaRyB&Q\\_CHL=email](https://smu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5zOEqLRpo5EXqrb?Q_DL=80oVfCcMidOCulD_5zOEqLRpo5EXqrb_MLRP_3OUXTIpJ0kaaRyB&Q_CHL=email)

If you have any questions or concerns at any point in the process, please do not hesitate to contact me. **Thank you** in advance for your support. I appreciate your support!

Dawn F. Norris  
Candidate for the Doctorate in Higher Education,  
SMU Simmons School of Education & Human Development  
[dfnorris@smu.edu](mailto:dfnorris@smu.edu) or (214) 768-4425

Follow the link to opt out of future emails: [Click here to unsubscribe](#)

## **Appendix C – Informed consent letter**

### **Informed Consent**

You are being asked to take part in this study because you were a full-time benefits-eligible staff member at Southern Methodist University (SMU) throughout the period of the Operational Excellence for the Second Century (OE2C) program and continue to be an SMU employee today.

### **Why Is This Study Being Done?**

The purpose of this study is to understand how formal involvement in a cost containment initiative team affects organizational commitment. To answer this question, the organizational commitment of full-time benefits-eligible SMU staff employed during the OE2C program will be measured and compared to those who served on initiative teams.

### **What Is Involved In The Study?**

If you agree to participate, you will answer a few demographic questions, and complete the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). The instrument is 15 questions requiring Likert-scale responses. Estimated completion time ranges from 5 – 20 minutes.

### **How Long Will I Be In The Study?**

If you agree to participate, your participation consists of completing the survey one time.

### **What are the Risks and Benefits of Participation?**

This study creates minimal risks for participants. Survey instrument results will only be reported in the aggregate, protecting the privacy of individual respondents. While participants should not expect a direct benefit to themselves, their participation may support potential benefits to society including contributions to knowledge of organizational commitment and cost containment programs or other significant change initiatives in higher education.

### **What Are the Costs and Will I be Paid for Taking Part in the Study?**

There is no cost to you for taking part in this study, and no incentives are offered.

### **What About Confidentiality?**

You have a full right to privacy. This means that only the researchers who are part of this study will see the information about you from this study. The results of this study may be published in a scientific book/or journal or presented to other people. If this is done, your name will not be used so no one will know who you are. All information about you from this research project will be kept in a locked office. Information that is kept on computers will be kept safe from access by people who should not see it, through password-protection.

### **What are My Rights as a Participant?**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study and it is okay to refuse to sign this form. If you agree to take part and then change your mind, you can withdraw for any reason. Deciding not to be in the study, or leaving the study early, will not result in any penalty from SMU. If you change your mind and later want to withdraw your permission, you

may do so. You may notify Dawn F. Norris through email (dfnorris@smu.edu). If you decide to do this, all of your information will be destroyed.

**Whom Do I Call If I have Questions or Problems?**

If you have concerns or questions about the study, contact any of the following:  
Dawn F. Norris (dfnorris@smu.edu) or Dr. Ashley Tull (atull@smu.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact: Austin Baldwin, Ph.D., IRB Chair, researchcompliance@smu.edu 214-768-2033

**Confirmation of Consent by Research Participant:**

By answering the question (clicking the button below) you are giving your permission to be in the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

I do not agree to participate in the study.

## Appendix D - Survey Instrument

### Demographic Questions

How many years have you worked full-time at SMU?

[Drop down menu with whole number responses from 1 – 40]

Please select the unit cluster of which you are a part.

- Academic Affairs
- Business & Finance, Legal Affairs, President's Office, Technology
- Student Affairs, Athletics, Development & External Affairs

### Organizational Commitment Questionnaire\*

*Instructions:* Listed below is a series of statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about the company or organization for which they work. With respect to your own feelings about the particular organization for which you are now working [Southern Methodist University (SMU)], please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by checking one of the seven alternatives below each statement.

1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful.
2. I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for.
3. I feel very little loyalty to this organization. (R)
4. I would accept almost any types of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization.
5. I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar.
6. I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.
7. I could just as well be working for a different organization as long as the type of work was similar. (R)
8. This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.
9. It would take very little change in my present circumstance to cause me to leave this organization. (R)
10. I am extremely grateful that I chose this organization to work for over others I was considering at the time I joined.
11. There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely. (R)
12. Often, I find it difficult to agree with this organization's policies on important matters relating to its employees. (R)
13. I really care about the fate of this organization.
14. For me, this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.
15. Deciding to work for this organization was a definite mistake on my part. (R)

Items denoted with a (R) are reverse scored.

\*The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) was originally developed by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979). It uses 15 items to describe global organizational commitment. Mowday, R. T., Steers, R. M., & Porter, L. W. (1979). The measurement of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*; 14, 224-247.

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