

## **The Dialectics of Consolidation: Utopia, Dystopia and Creativity at the University of North Georgia**

**Dr. GeorgeK. Danns**

Professor of Sociology

Department of Sociology and Human Services

University of North Georgia

3820 Mundy Mill Rd., Oakwood, GA 30566

### **Abstract**

*As a consolidated institution, the University of North Georgia has been moving towards a more perfect union by seeking to combine the institutional strengths of the former North Georgia College and State University and Gainesville State College into an ideal type entity that would serve the tertiary education needs of its region and the state of Georgia. This paper argues that there is a utopian element in this consolidation concept which serves as an aspirational guide for policy makers and the university community. Differences in the cultures of the consolidating institutions have led to perceptions of dystopia among its faculty, staff and administrators seized with apprehensions over fundamental changes to their very professional existence and futures. This paper integrates the constructs of the dialectic, utopia, dystopia, creativity and institutional anomie into a theoretical framework. Published documents and a survey of employees provide empirical grist for the emergent theoretical perspective.*

**Key Words:** consolidation, merger, culture, dialectics, utopia, dystopia, institutional anomie, University of North Georgia

### **1. Introduction**

As a newly consolidated institution, the University of North Georgia (UNG) has been moving towards a more perfect union by seeking to combine the institutional strengths of the former North Georgia College and State University (NGCSU) and Gainesville State College (GSC) into an ideal type entity that would presumably serve the tertiary education and other needs of the region, the state of Georgia and beyond. This paper argues that there is a utopian element in this consolidation concept which serves as an aspirational guide for policy makers and the university community. Differences in the cultures of the consolidating institutions, and the very act of combining them have led, however, to perceptions of dystopia among significant numbers of faculty, staff and administrators seized with apprehensions over fundamental changes to their very professional existence, their futures and the institutions to which they had previously given their loyalties and commitment. This institutional dystopia is a conflict-ridden but essential phase in the organic development of the university. It is the dialectics of consolidation. It brings to the fore that universities comprise more than campuses, vision statements, colors, mascots, logos, and other institutional trappings. They are made up of people imbued with their institutional cultures, ambitions, hopes and fears.

This paper: 1) employs the Marxian/Hegelian dialectical perspective and argues that consolidation is not a singular event, but a dialectical process that is in turn utopian as a concept, and dystopian and creative as processes; 2) develops a two-fold typology of “utopia” and a five-fold typology of “dystopia” to explicate the dialectics of consolidation; 3) rethematizes and integrates the construct *institutional anomie* to explain the impact of dialectical change stemming from consolidation on employees; 4) employs published documents and data from a survey on the impact of consolidation at the University of North Georgia to provide empirical grist for the emergent theoretical perspective, and 5) concludes that the University of North Georgia will evolve as *phenomenon sui generis* out of the conflict crucible of consolidation.

For this paper, I define “consolidation” as the combination or integration of distinct and separate social systems to form a single new entity. A consolidation is effectively a “merger” or union of previously separate or independent organizations.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Impact of Consolidation**

Consolidating two different organizations may result in employee stress, low morale, reduced job satisfaction, reduced commitment to the emergent institution, absenteeism and, employee turnover (Moran and Panasian, 2005; Pritchard & Williamson 2008). Workers negatively impacted may also resort to what Veblen (1921) calls the “conscientious withdrawal of efficiency” or sabotage. Moran and Panasian (2005) reported that acquired firm employees may suffer from feelings of worthlessness, and may feel inferior because of loss of autonomy and status. One study reported that 58% of managers in an acquired firm are gone within five years or less of an acquisition (Schweiger, Ivancevich & Power, 1987).

Moran and Panasian (2005) noted that negative employee reactions account partially for the failures in mergers and acquisitions. They identified two sources for such negativities. “First, mergers are a source of profound change for the organization, and change, in any shape or form is likely to be a source of stress for the employees as it places special demands on them... Secondly, the main source of stress in the merger/acquisition process is the uncertainty surrounding organizational and personnel changes that follow them. It is often these uncertainties rather than actual changes themselves that are more stressful to employees” (p. 3). Harrison (1984) noted that historically, management are opposed to advance notification before mergers and acquisitions because they fear productivity losses due to work slowdown, intentional sabotage or employees seeking employment elsewhere before the organization is ready to terminate them (Moran & Panasian, 2005).

### **Organizational Culture, Change and Consolidation**

Levinson (1970) highlighted the centrality of culture to an organization’s identity and functioning in suggesting an analogy between mergers and marriages and concluded that culture is as fundamental to an organization as personality is to an individual. Cartwright and Cooper (1992) defined culture simply as “the way in which things get done in an organization.” They viewed culture as shared values and shared basic assumptions that are often unconscious. Culture defines the “shoulds” and “oughts” of the organization (Very, Calori & Lubatkin, 1993). Scholars, Buono and Bowditch (1989) and Pritchard and Williamson (2008) found that cultural transitions tend to be more difficult for people who are involuntarily subjected to a merger. Further that small institutions tend to have a strong organizational culture, and that there are likely to be problems with the fit between persons previously employed in the parent organizations and the new merged institution (Pritchard & Williamson, 2008). Differences in the cultures of organizations present a potent source of conflict for consolidating entities. In-group and out-group biases may surface to counter organizational integration and effectiveness. Employees who are made to integrate and function as one with others who share a different organizational culture, and therefore different perceptions of reality on how “how things are done around here” are bound to have major misunderstandings and to find the forced integration disturbing (Larsson & Rissberg 1998).

Larsson and Risberg explained that culture creates a form of ethnocentrism in which one tends to regard activities that do not conform to one’s own view of business as abnormal and deviant. Additionally, Robbins (2005) argued that, an organizational culture functions as a liability insofar as it can become a barrier to change; a barrier to diversity; and, a barrier to acquisitions, mergers and consolidations. “It’s very easy to underestimate the differences in cultures” between two colleges, said Ellen Chaffee, a former college president and senior fellow with the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. She said merely proposing a merger “creates new problems” (Fain, 2012). Scholars, Pritchard and Williamson (2008) and Cartwright and Cooper (1996) argued that employees often have strong feelings of attachment to their institutions and the aura of failure that one of the parties may attach to a merger or takeover may cause stress that is similar to that experienced in bereavement.

### **Leadership and Trust**

Trust in the leadership is imperative for realizing the synergies necessary for a successful consolidation. Trust of leaders by employees is an important ingredient for managing change in an organization.

Nikandrou, Papalexandris and Bourantas (2000) concluded that a successful outcome of a merger is the ability of management to gain employees trust, and they stressed the need for good human resources policies and procedures if morale and trust are to be conserved and maintained. When organizations are merged or consolidated trust is an even more crucial element to bring about success.

### 3. Theoretical Perspective: Consolidation And The Dialectical Perspective

In this paper, dialectic is used to mean change coming about through contradiction, through conflict. The Marxian-Hegelian dialectic is essentially developmental, passing through a thesis, which is contradicted and gives rise to an antithesis (Marx 1906). This contradiction is resolved or negated and a synthesis emerges. This synthesis becomes a new thesis and the process repeats itself unendingly. Hegel (1874) also used the parallel notions of abstract, negative and concrete (Fox, 2005). Inherent in the abstract or thesis phase are negatives or conflicts which lead to its negation, and the substitution of a concrete or developmentally improved state or synthesis. The development aspects of the Hegelian dialectic is highlighted by his principle of *measure* or *qualitative quantum* - a transition from quantity to quality; and, his idea of negation of the negation, or sublation, in which an existing entity or moment ceases to be by incorporating the other into itself, or, come to be, by morphing into something new. Figure 1, *The Dialectics of Consolidation* depicts this dialectical process.

The heuristic value of the dialectic for this paper lies in the assumption that conflict is inevitable, normal and necessary for the development and transformation of social systems or social institutions. Conflict in this sense is what Joseph Schumpeter (1994) calls “creative destruction”. Consolidation is of necessity a conflict plagued process, regardless of the actors involved. It would be an error of judgment to interpret such conflicts as merely the mumblings of the malcontent, or what Marx (1976) calls the “sigh of the oppressed.” The conflicts being experienced in a newly consolidated entity are systemic and transcend the individual employee. Not to recognize this, is to forfeit the opportunity to effectively ride the tide of turbulence towards the shores of effective consolidation. To assume the normalcy and inevitability of conflict in a consolidating entity however, is neither to justify its prolonged existence, nor excuse its negative impacts on employees, particularly when such conflicts can be mitigated through constructive action.

#### 3.1 Utopia

Utopia is linked to the dialectic in the “abstract” dimension of Hegel’s tripartite schema. For the purposes of this paper, a utopia is viewed as an “imagined” or “planned” institutional entity which possesses perfect or highly desirable qualities. These utopian ideals are perceived as becoming manifest in the system of governance, administrative statutes and regulations, social conditions, goals, rewards and overall existence. The proponents of a consolidation are advocates of a utopia. Indeed the very concept of consolidation is suggestive of the unification and solidification of separate entities to create a desired and ideal whole. However, as a Utopia, entities undergoing consolidation are circumscribed by restrictive, non-negotiable precepts and catapulted through authoritarian processes aimed at pre-determined outcomes. In the context of consolidation, I posit a two-fold typology of “utopia”: 1) the utopia of aspiration, and 2) the utopia of retrospection.

**The Utopia of Aspiration** - an imagined or intended future state of institutional existence which is planned as ideal desired or perfect. The vision of a consolidated UNG by its architects and managers can be typed the “utopia of aspiration.” It is Hegel’s abstract or thesis phase with all its inherent conflicts that would result from its implementation.

**The Utopia of Retrospection** - a past state of institutional existence which people romanticize, create myths and are nostalgic about. It is the idealization of tradition, a belief in or commitment to what Max Weber (1977) calls “the eternal yesterday.” The nostalgia for the now defunct GSC and NGCSU, by their former employees who are now part of a consolidated UNG, can be typed the *utopia of retrospection*. Pritchard and Williamson (2008) state “reflecting apprehensions about change, there is often a deep psychological resistance to merger that may be accompanied by nostalgia for the “old” institution which may be idealized to facilitate continued attachment to the past with its securities and memories” (p.51).

#### 3.2 Dystopia

**Dystopia** is the opposite of utopia. It is the dialectic unveiled in its conflictual and uncertain stage and processes. This paper proffers a five- fold typology of the “dystopia of consolidation” which explains the patterns of conflicts emanating from the dialectics of consolidation. (See Figure 2: Typology of Dystopia).

These are Institutional Anomie/Dystopia of Change; Dystopia of Culture, Dystopia of Structure (Administrative), Dystopia of Communication, Dystopia of Satisfaction and Engagement. Only the *Dystopia of Change* and the *Dystopia of Culture* are addressed in the rest of this paper.

### **Dystopia of Change - Institutional Anomie**

Anomie is present when there is a breakdown of the norms and rules that govern the behaviors of people in a social system. It is normlessness. "Normlessness indicates a state in which either the appropriate standards of behavior are unknown or there is insufficient reason to abide by them" (Hodson & Sullivan, 2012, p. 60). Institutional anomie exists when there is sudden, rapid and transformative changes in an institution and expectations on behaviors are unclear, confused or absent. Institutional anomie is the negative phase or antithetical manifestation of the dialectic of consolidation.

Durkheim (1964) posits that these changing social conditions impact individuals and invariably lead to conflicts, deviant behavior, and widespread dissatisfaction. Anomic conditions can also impact on mental and physical health and even induce extreme deviant behavior such as suicide. Moran and Panasian (2005) surmised from the organizational and human resource literature that "It is well accepted that mergers and acquisitions often create significant trauma for the employees and managers of both acquiring and acquired firms that result in attitudinal and productivity problems as well as turnover of valued personnel" (p. 6).

### **3.3. Creativity**

Creativity is a process through which an existing institutional structure and functioning are transcended to create a new one. It refers to those symbolic markers and moments which emerge and propel the consolidation process towards "measure" or a "qualitative quantum". Through consolidation, new structures, changed rules and procedures, new or redefined roles and relationships, and changed expectations are instituted or combined to supplant existing ones. Creativity emerges from the crucible of conflict and is underlined by *acceptance*.

Creativity is manifest in the process of consolidating North Georgia College and State University and Gainesville State College which no longer exist as separate institutional entities. Their consolidation has so far created what Hegel (1874) called "quantity" but not yet full "measure" or "quality". UNG is an emerging semblance of the "qualitative quantum" projected in the Board of Regents utopian vision of the consolidation. It is a movement or work in progress towards Hegel's "concrete or the Marxian Hegelian "synthesis".

## **4. Research Methods**

Published documents and primary data collected from an online survey I conducted on *The Impact of Consolidation on the University of North Georgia* provide empirical support for the theoretical constructs advanced or created for this paper. The online survey of faculty, staff and administrators of the University of North Georgia was conducted in January 2014. The survey instrument comprised eight sections and 100 questions. The sections were general participants' characteristics, communication about consolidation, consolidation involvement and outcomes, workload and travel, satisfaction with job, administrative structure and functioning, institutional culture, and employee engagement. Many questions consisted of statements to which answers were given on a five-point Likert scale. The survey was sent to all 1795 employees of the University of North Georgia (UNG) via email, with an encrypted link to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. This survey was mediated through Survey Monkey and was opened for four weeks commencing January 1, 2014. Six hundred and twenty seven (627) employees responded (35% response rate). Of those that responded, 47 % were from the Dahlonega campus of the pre-consolidated North Georgia College and State University (NGCSU); 41% were from the Gainesville campus and 11% from the Oconee campus of the former Gainesville State College (GSC). Less than 2% of the survey respondents were from the Cumming Campus which was jointly established in 2012 by NGCSU and GSC and functioned with employees from both institutions. Not all data from the survey is analyzed in this paper. Data from the *institutional culture*, and the *consolidation involvement and outcomes* sections are mainly utilized to support the theoretical framework of this piece. Percentages reported in the paper are rounded and missing responses are disregarded in calculations.

## 5. Consolidating Gainesville State College And North Georgia College And State University

On January 10, 2012, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia<sup>1</sup> voted to approve the consolidation of Gainesville State College (GSC) and North Georgia College and State University (NGCSU). On January 10, 2013 the University of North Georgia with approximately 15,000 students came into being through the consolidation of a state university and a state college. The two institutions were not complete strangers to each other. Prior to the consolidation there were limited measures of functional collaboration between GSC and NGCSU dating back to 1984. GSC was a feeder institution for NGCSU, transferring over 200 students per year and as much as 269 students in 2009(USG Consolidation Website 2014). NGCSU taught programs and upper division classes on GSC's Gainesville campus for almost 30 years and the two institutions were partners in the development of a new campus, the Cumming campus. (University System of Georgia, 2011a).

The Board of Regents' edicts and declarations on consolidation focused on the economic, financial, academic and strategic dimensions. The Board of Regents stated objective for consolidation was:

*The University System of Georgia is preparing students for the 21st century economy and citizenship. Today the System must look internally to ensure that it has a 21st century structure, providing a network of institutions offering the proper range of degrees and opportunities in research and service to students and faculty. The purpose of campus consolidation is to increase the system's overall effectiveness in creating a more educated Georgia. (University System of Georgia, 2011b)*

This core objective was stated in broad and idealistic terms. Systematic consideration was not given to the likely impacts of the consolidation on roles, perceptions and feelings of human actors involved. Notwithstanding the idealism and intent of its architects, consolidation was destined to be a conflict-ridden process insofar as people and not only plans, buildings, and assets were being integrated. Cartwright and Cooper (1996) noted that people are the forgotten or hidden factors in a merger's success or failure.

## 6. Profiles of GCC And NGCSU

The two consolidating institutions could not have been more different. First, Gainesville State College (GSC) was founded in 1966 and was in existence for 46 years before consolidation. GSC was a commuter, multi-campus, access state college with a student population of 8,569 students in Fall 2011. Twenty three point three percent (23.3%) of the college population were minorities. Seventy three percent (73%) of the population were located on Gainesville Campus and 23.5 percent were located at the Oconee Campus (Nesbitt, 2013). The 2012 budget of the former GSC was \$56.5 million and the number of degrees conferred in 2011 was 882. In-state tuition in 2012 at GSC was \$1,388 a semester and \$93 per credit hour (USG, Board of Regents).As a state college, GSC provided "quality" liberal arts education primarily for the Northeast Georgia population. It offered a wide array of two-year degrees and certificate programs along with a limited selection of baccalaureate degrees. GSC prided itself in being the "student focused, learning centered institution" in North Georgia.

NGCSU was founded in 1873 and was in existence for 139 years. It was the second oldest university in Georgia and the first to admit women. NGCSU was a state university and a residential campus with a student population of 6,500 in 2012. It offered more than 50 programs of study and conferred bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees. In 2012 NGCSU had a budget of \$65 million. In-state tuition was \$2,367 a semester and \$158 per hour in 2012. It graduated 1,203 students in 2011

NGCSU was one of only six senior military colleges in the United States with its Army ROTC comprising 13% of its student population. NGCSU was designated by the Georgia General Assembly as The Military College of Georgia and as Georgia's Leadership Institution. NGCSU had the distinction of being the first co-educational college in Georgia and the first to graduate a woman, in 1878. It was a "public university which emphasized strong liberal arts, as well as pre-professional, professional and graduate programs." It prided itself in the education and traditional values that helped students excel in whatever career they chose and in being large enough to provide a wide array of opportunities and activities, yet small enough to foster personal attention from professors and friendship among students. (North Georgia College and State University, 2013). Illustrative of its utopian vision, the University System of Georgia, Board of Regents specified eight "opportunities" that it projected would be realized by the NGCSU/GSC consolidation.

<sup>1</sup>The University System of Georgia (USG) is a collective body that includes 31 public institutions of higher education in Georgia. The Board of Regents is the governing and managing authority for USG.

**“Opportunities**

- Creates an institution of nearly 15,000 students that provides a strategic approach to meeting the higher education needs of students in the Northeast Georgia region.
- Provides a broad spectrum of academic programs from associate to graduate degrees in a student-friendly, seamless system. Students from both institutions already share a similar geographic origin and transfer between both institutions.
- Increases access to educational attainment and enrollment opportunities in significant growth and population area of the state.
- Efficiently expands baccalaureate and graduate offerings in Gainesville while allowing for increased enrollment, e.g., teacher education, foreign languages.
- Capacity for on-campus growth is limited at North Georgia. The consolidation provides additional capacity in Gainesville.
- Builds on a strong foundation of collaboration and partnership that already exists as reflected in North Georgia’s and Gainesville’s program offerings in Cumming and Gainesville.
- Increases opportunities to hire for specialized needs. Through economies of scale, there is the capacity for needed higher education enterprise professionals with appropriate expertise and experience levels.
- Combines resources to enhance responsiveness to regional economic and community development needs” (University System of Georgia, 2011a, p. 11-12). Indicative of its idealism, the BOR identified only two challenges:

**“Challenges**

- The institutions currently serve student populations with differing levels of college readiness. Balancing access and college completion will be a challenge to address during implementation.
- Watkinsville (Oconee) campus will be maintained; however, implementation will need to consider how to best optimize the role of that campus.” (p. 11-12)

**7. Findings From Survey**

**The Utopia of Retrospection** -Data from the survey (see Table 1) lend support to this construct. University of North Georgia (UNG) employees who participated in the survey when asked “*My pre-consolidated institution was a happier place than UNG*” 61.4% of 522 respondents who answered the question said they strongly agree or agree; Respondents from the former GSC (72 %) were more likely to report that their institution was a happier place than those from NGCSU (52 %). Further when employees responded to: *I feel that the culture of my campus should be preserved.* 76.9 % of 524 respondents strongly agree or agree; 81% from GSC and 76 % of NGCSU employees strongly agree or agree with this statement. Further, UNG employees who participated in the survey responding to: “*I am very nostalgic about my pre-consolidated institution.*” Forty two percent (42%) of 518 respondents agree or strongly agree compared to 21% who disagree or strongly disagree; while 35% were neutral. Forty five percent (45%) of GSC employees and 40% of NGCSU employees strongly agree or agree that they were very nostalgic about their former institution.

Both Gainesville State College and North Georgia College and State University were relatively small tertiary institutions. At GSC, in particular, both management and employees alike described themselves as a “family.” This notion of “family” was integral to GSC’s culture. NGCSU was a military college and its material and ideational culture were impacted by its cadet corp.

**4.2 Dystopia of Change – Institutional Anomie:**

Responses to the impact of consolidation on UNG survey confirm that the announcement of the consolidation was very unsettling to the respective campus communities. When responding to: *How would you best describe the atmosphere at your prior institution (GSC or NGCSU) when it was announced that the two institutions would be consolidated?* a sizable majority of survey respondents of both institutions reported the atmosphere as being strained (41%), nervous (55%) and disturbed (45%) as opposed to happy (6%), hopeful (19%), expecting (6%) and optimistic (15%). Respondents from GSC were more likely to report being nervous (63%) and disturbed (48%); compared to respondents from NGCSU (48%) who reported being nervous, and 44% who said they were disturbed. Forty one percent (41%) of respondents from GSC and 43% from NGCSU reported the atmosphere being strained when consolidation was announced.

One consequence reported in the UNG survey, is that UNG lost some key, fervently committed employees with invaluable institutional memory, who let themselves go rather than remain with the new institution. Responding to, “*Did you think the consolidation was a good idea*” 69% of respondents said “no” and 31 % said “yes”. Sixty-five percent (65%) of respondents from the former GSC and 76% from the former NGCSU said consolidation was not a good idea.

### Indicators of Institutional Anomie

Table 2: *Indicators of Institutional Anomie* provides further data on indications of institutional anomie. Large majorities of respondents agree or strongly agree that the UNG consolidation brought about lots of changes, uncertainty, challenges, conflicts and stress for them in their work environments. Similarly a majority of respondent report increases in their workloads.

Table 2 presents the overall percentages for the consolidated UNG but there is apparently a greater evidence of the dystopia of change (institutional anomie) among the respondents from the former Gainesville State College. The percentages of respondents who agree or strongly agree with the above statements were invariably higher for GSC. 77% of GSC employees and 67% of NGCSU employees who responded to the survey agree or agree strongly that: *Consolidation has brought a lot of changes for me in the workplace.* 72% of GSC respondents compared to 53% of NGCSU respondents agree or strongly agree that: *Consolidation has caused a lot of uncertainty in my work environment.* 84% of GSC respondents compared to 77% of NGCSU employees agree or strongly agree that: *Consolidation has brought new challenges for me in the workplace.* 53% of respondents from GSC and 49% of respondents from NGCSU agree or strongly agree that: *Consolidation has come along with a lot of conflicts/ disagreements for me.* 61% of the respondents from GSC compared to 53% of respondents from NGCSU agree or strongly agree that: *Consolidation has stressed me out a lot personally.*

Respondents from the survey were further responded to: *As a result of consolidation my workload has increased.* Sixty seven point six percent (67.6%) said their workload had increased significantly or somewhat. A higher percentage of respondents from Dahlonoga (70%) said their workload has increased compared to Gainesville (67%). 40% of respondents from Dahlonoga and 33% from Gainesville said their workload has increased significantly.

### Support for Consolidation

The survey found that only 37% of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement that “*I fully support the consolidation*”. Thirty eight (38%) disagree or disagree strongly with this statement; while 25% reported being uncertain. After one year of the existence of UNG just over one-third of respondents agrees or strongly agree that they support the consolidation. 38% of respondents from GSC and 35% from former NGCSU said they supported the consolidation. Overall a slightly higher percentage of respondents from NGCSU who took the survey either did not support or were uncertain about consolidation of their institution with GSC.

#### 4.2.2. Dystopia of Culture

Data from the survey support the dystopia of culture proposition. (See Table 3: Indicators of the Dystopia of Culture). A large majority of respondents (82%) agree or strongly agree that “*There are major differences in the organizational cultures of the former NGCSU and the former GSC.*” A larger percentage of respondents from GSC (90%) compared to NGCSU (77%) said that there were major cultural differences between the two legacy institutions.

More than half of survey respondents (55%) agree or agree strongly that: *Since consolidation the culture of my campus is being eroded or seriously threatened.* 68% of respondents from the former GSC agree strongly or agree that since consolidation the culture of their campus is being threatened or eroded compared to 41% of respondents from the former NGCSU. Over three-quarters (77%) of survey respondents agree or agree strongly that: *I feel that the culture of my campus should be preserved.* Eighty percent (80%) of the former GSC respondents and 76% of the former NGCSU agree strongly or agree that the culture of their campus should be preserved.

Almost 60% of respondents agree strongly or agree that: *The management culture of the former North Georgia College and State University was transferred to the University of North Georgia.* A sizable 83% of respondents from former GSC compared to only 35% of NGCSU respondents agree strongly or agree with the statement. Indeed, only 10% of all survey respondents agree strongly or agree that: *The management culture of the former Gainesville State College was transferred to the University of North Georgia.* 15% of respondents from NGCSU compared to 6% of former GSC employees agree or strongly agree with the statement.



## Leadership and Trust

Only 33% of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that: *I feel that leaders have a lot of trust in their employees* (See Table 3). Respondents from the former NGCSU were more likely to strongly agree or agree with this statement compared to respondents from the former GSC (27%). Overall more respondents (34%) disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, while 33% percent were neutral. Higher percentages (40%), of GSC respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement compared to 30% of NGSU respondents. When asked: *I feel that employees have a lot of trust in their leaders*, 53% disagree or disagree strongly while only 33% agree or agree strongly. A higher percentage of respondents from GSC (58%) than NGCSU (50%) disagree or disagree strongly that employees have a lot of trust in their leaders

The reported deficit in trust by employees in relation to their leaders is further manifest in the following survey findings. When asked: *How would you have described the management culture at your pre-consolidated institution?* Over eighty percent (83%) said participatory and somewhat participatory; 3% said permissive; 15% said it was autocratic or somewhat autocratic. Respondents from the former GSC (94%) and former NGCSU (75%) reported their pre-consolidated institution to be participatory, somewhat participatory and permissive. 25% of respondents from former NGCSU said their pre-consolidated institution was autocratic or somewhat autocratic compared to only 6% of former GSC respondents.

In contrast, when asked: *How would you describe the current management culture at UNG*, 60.2% described it as autocratic or somewhat autocratic. Just 1% said permissive; 38% described it as participatory or somewhat participatory. Seventy three percent (73%) of the former GSC employees in the survey and 49% of the former NGCSU employees reported the management culture to be autocratic or somewhat autocratic. It is noteworthy that although the top leadership and management of NGCSU was largely transferred to and became the top leadership of the University of North Georgia, 49% of survey employees from the former NGCSU now see the management of UNG as autocratic or somewhat autocratic compared to only 25% who thought so of their pre-consolidated institution's leadership.

### 4.3. Creativity and Acceptance

The consolidation survey results point to some movement towards Hegel's notion of "concrete." Data reveal that a sizeable majority (68%) of respondents were in agreement with the name University of North Georgia for the consolidated institution. Only 10 percent did not agree with the name and 21% said that the name did not matter to them. A higher percentage of respondents from the former NGCSU, (84%) than from the former GSC (73%) strongly agree or agree with the name, "University of North Georgia". Further, the great majority (78%) of employees in the survey said: *I am willing to accept the changes and adapt my behavior accordingly*. Twenty percent (20%) said "partly" and less than 3% said "no" or "mainly no". Eighty-four percent (84%) of former NGCSU respondents and 73% of former GSC employees said "yes" or "mainly yes" to this statement.

When responding to: *Currently, I am proud to be an employee of UNG*, 65% of respondents agree or strongly agree. Only 12% disagree or disagree strongly. 70% of employees from the former NGCSU and 60% of respondents from the former GSC agree or strongly agree with the statement.

Further when responding to: *I would recommend UNG to others as a good place to work*, 52% said "yes" or "mainly yes"; 29% said partly and 19% said "no" or "mainly no." Twenty six percent (26%) of employees from the former GSC and 14% of respondents from the former NGCSU answered "no" or "mainly no" to the question.

## 8. Conclusions And Implications

This paper argued that consolidation is an imposed dialectic, organized conflict if you may. Two separate institutional entities are thrust into a marriage of convenience, to realize a qualitative quantum, a concrete existence, a new synthesis with perceived ideals or utopian elements. The negatives of the two institutions are overcome as the totality transforms itself in a process which preserves and accentuates the positive and useful. The University System of Georgia(USG) Board of Regents (BOR) saw as advantages, that NGCSU had no place to expand, and GSC needed access to new degree programs, and that consolidation would overcome these disadvantages to their separate development. (USG, 2011a)

The consolidation of GSC and NGCSU was a fundamental, major and impacting event. The two institutions had no say about whether or not they should be consolidated. It was an imposed arrangement. To the policy makers this was the realization of a strategic objective.



It would become a process that could be accomplished by work groups assembled from reasonable people from both institutions (USG, 2011b). The impact of such sudden, rapid changes on the lives and work behaviors of employees was not a primary consideration. Neither were the preparedness, training and capabilities of managers in the two “legacy institutions” tasked with leading the process adequately assessed. What became manifest as a consequence of such rapid and transformative change was what the sociologist Emile Durkheim (1964) calls “anomie”.

In this paper, I submit that the emergent University of North Georgia, consolidated as it was from GSC and NGCSU is experiencing institutional anomie. Institutional anomie is dystopia. It is the dialectic articulated and unveiled. The USG Board of Regents kept the decision to consolidate as a closely guarded secret, even from the presidents of GSC and NGCSU and other consolidating institutions within the USG<sup>2</sup> until it was formally announced. News of the consolidation leaked out before the BOR had finalized the structure and voted on it. This led to a “wave of panic” among the public and within the affected institutions (Fain, 2012). The pre-consolidating institutions were then given one year to become one. University System of Georgia consultant David Brown (2013) during his evaluation of the leadership of UNG’s President, Dr. Bonita Jacobs reported that: “Transition tensions exist everywhere” (as quoted in Sharec C, 2013).

The Board of Regents consolidation decree, coupled with its guiding principles and implementation principles, arguably is an “ideal.” It appropriates the first or “abstract” stage of the Hegelian dialectic with all its uncertainty and promise. There was no clearly delineated strategy handed down on how consolidation was to be achieved. This set the consolidation process from the outset down the second or “negative” path Hegel outlined in his dialectic. This paper argued that the utopian declarations on consolidation as put forward by the Board of Regents may have had dystopian effects on the two consolidating institutions and the emergent University of North Georgia. The dystopia of the consolidation was immediate. It was caused, *inter alia*, by fear over what the future held for faculty, staff and administrators, for their jobs and livelihood; and, unhappiness over the rapid and sudden changes in their work lives and work relations over which they had no control.

This remarkable increase in workload for slightly over two thirds of all employees is largely an unanticipated, anomic and dystopic change consequence of consolidation. Most employees would have been unprepared for significant workload increases which invariably came, and is still coming, both without warning and compensation. One possible explanation for a higher percentage of former NGCSU employees reporting significant workload increases compared to their GSC counterparts is because proportionately more managerial positions are occupied by employees of former NGCSU. Pritchard and Williamson (2008) found that a frequent rationale for a merger is the desire for operating efficiencies and/or cost savings and these imperatives may lead to overwork or in some cases redundancies.

This current study further revealed that the culture of NGCSU with its heritage as a military college was reported as being formal, hierarchical and closed. The culture of GSC in contrast was reportedly more informal, participatory and open. NGCSU was reported to be a more rule driven administrative culture while GSC was seen as having a more goal driven administrative culture. GSC, a commuter institution, was a creature of the community in and from which it was created as a community college. NGCSU as a residential college was a creature of its history as an agriculture and later military college and was less intertwined with and reactive to its environing community. Many respondents wanted to have their campus culture preserved.

This finding suggests that employees at GSC are more impacted by the changes in the management culture to which their counterparts at NGCSU may have been more accustomed. An organization’s leaders and top executives are principal purveyors of its culture (Weber 1996). Further, cultural differences at the top management level are very likely to influence the merging organizations’ ability to realize synergies (Moran and Panasian 2005). The large majority of UNG administrators, including the President and Provost, all of the Deans and most Department Heads of the consolidated University of North Georgia derive from the Dahlonega campus which housed the former NGCSU. The main Gainesville campus of the former GSC has no overall campus administrator and is instead managed primarily from the Dahlonega Campus of the former NGCSU. This managerial strategy may in part be seen as an attempt to minimize cultural differences in the leadership, reduce organizational conflict and control the message among the leadership of the consolidated University of North Georgia.

---

<sup>2</sup> Four consolidations of eight USG institutions were announced in January 2012 by the USG Board of Regents

The data suggest that employee's value and are nostalgic about the culture of their respective pre-consolidated institutions. Further, their concern about the erosion of their heritage culture in the consolidated UNG may suggest an underlying cultural chauvinism, if not also ethnocentrism, within the two consolidating entities. The data also suggest that legacy cultures of NGCSU and GSC may well be functioning as barriers to change in an emergent UNG. Additionally, the data also reveals that the culture of the former NGCSU is being perceived by employees of both legacy institutions as the more dominant culture in the consolidated University of North Georgia. This can be attributed to the fact that a predominant majority of UNG's administrators derive from Dahlonega.

Culture in the sense of "how we do things around here" is thus a source of in-group out-group conflict and may be a possible cause of resistance to change. These data suggest that mistrust of the leadership and management of the consolidated University of North Georgia compared to the leadership of their pre-consolidated institutions may be a direct consequence of consolidation. A majority of employees responding to the survey reported not having trust in the leadership. Mistrust often negatively impacts the efficacy of an organization. In addition, they view the management culture as being autocratic. In times of rapid institutional change and crises, autocratic leadership is very likely to emerge to make things happen. This autocratic and task-oriented leadership as opposed to people-oriented leadership may have been dictated by the necessity of seeking to consolidate two very different institutions in a period of one year. Such a leadership culture, if it becomes embedded, is very likely to be dysfunctional for the long term and effective development of a university which is heavily reliant on the creativity and intellectual manufacture of its highly qualified and professional workforce for its success and development.' The University of North Georgia is a creature of the creativity of the consolidation process. Notwithstanding the persisting dystopias of consolidation, data from this study suggest some movement towards acceptance; the emergent crystallization of a new "synthesis". This movement towards what Hegel calls "the concrete" is far from final. The question to be answered is: What would a fully consolidated UNG manifest itself to be, or not to be?

## References

- Cartwright, S & Cooper, C., (1992) Organizational marriage: "Hard" Versus "Soft" Issues? *Personnel Review* 24 (3), 32-42.
- Cartwright, S., & Cooper, C. (1996), *Mergers and acquisitions: The human factor*. (2<sup>nd</sup>ed.). Oxford. Butterworth-Heinemann
- Coser, L. (1977) *Masters of sociological thought*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich
- Durkheim, E. (1964). *The Division of Labor in Society*. Free Press. pp. 182-183
- Fain, P. (2012, January 6). Major mergers in Georgia. *Inside Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/01/06/georgia-university-system-proposes-consolidation-8-campuses#sthash.AeZqneAw.i4yE7zA8.dpbs>
- Fox, M.A. (2005). *The Accessible Hegel*. Prometheus Books. 2005. p.43
- Gainesville State College. (2013) *History of Gainesville State College*. Retrieved from [www.gsc.edu](http://www.gsc.edu)
- Harrison, B. (1984). Plant closures: Efforts to cushion the blow. *Monthly Labor Review*, 107(6), 41-43.
- Hegel, G. (1874). The Logic. *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. 2nd Edition. London: Oxford University Press) p.108-109.
- Hodson, R. & Sullivan, T. (2012). *The social organization of work* (5<sup>th</sup>ed). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Larsson, R. & Risberg, A. (1998). Cultural awareness and national versus corporate barriers to Acculturation. In M. Gertsen, A. Soderberg, & J. Torp (Eds.). *Cultural dimensions of international mergers and acquisitions*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co.
- Levinson, H. (1970). A Psychologist diagnoses of merger failure, *Harvard Business Review* 48 (2), 137-147.
- Marx, K. (1906). *Capital: A Critique of political economy*, ed. Frederick Engels (New York: Modern Library, no date, first published 1906), p. 25
- Marx, K. 1976. *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. *Collected Works*, v. 3. New York
- Moran, P. & Panasian, C. (2005), *The human side of mergers and acquisitions: A look at the Evidence*. FACE WPS Working Paper Series. No.01 Ano 3. Retrieved from [http://dspace.utalca.cl/bitstream/1950/1152/1/SWP\\_3\\_1\\_2005.pdf](http://dspace.utalca.cl/bitstream/1950/1152/1/SWP_3_1_2005.pdf)
- Morgan, G. (1986). *Images of Organization*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

- Nelson, D., & Quick, J. (2006). *Organizational Behavior: Foundations, realities and challenges*. (5<sup>th</sup>ed.) Mason, OH: South-Western/Thompson
- Nikandrou, I., Papalexandris, N., Bourantas, D., (2000). Gaining employees trust after acquisition: Implications for managerial action. *Employees Relations*, 22(4) 334-355.
- North Georgia College and State University. (2013). *Campus Information*. Retrieved from [www.northgeorgia.edu](http://www.northgeorgia.edu).
- Pritchard, M., & Williamson, A. (2008), Long-term human outcomes of a “Shotgun” marriage in higher education: Anatomy of a merger, two decades later. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, (20)1. 47-69.
- Robbins, S., & Judge, T, (2013). *Organizational Behavior* (15th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Schumpeter, J. (1994). *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. London: Routledge.
- Schweiger, D., Ivancevich, J. & Power, F. (1987). Executive actions for managing human resources before and after acquisition. *Academy of Management Executive* 1 (2), 127-138.
- Sharec, C. (July 6, 2013) “UNG survives bumps in transition: Jacobs vows to fulfill review’s charge to improve communication”. *Gainesville Times*, July 6, 2013.
- University System of Georgia. (2011a). *Recommended Consolidations*. Retrieved from [www.usg.edu/docs/consolidations.pdf](http://www.usg.edu/docs/consolidations.pdf)
- University System of Georgia. USG (2011b, November 8). “Regents approve principles for consolidation of institutions. Retrieved from [http://www.usg.edu/news/release/regents\\_approve\\_principles\\_for\\_consolidation\\_of\\_institutions](http://www.usg.edu/news/release/regents_approve_principles_for_consolidation_of_institutions)
- University System of Georgia. (2013). *Campus consolidations*. Retrieved from [http://www.usg.edu/consolidation/university\\_of\\_north\\_georgia](http://www.usg.edu/consolidation/university_of_north_georgia)
- University System of Georgia. (2014). *FAQs regarding proposed consolidation of North Georgia College & State University and Gainesville State College*. Retrieved from [www.usg.edu](http://www.usg.edu)
- Veblen, T (1921). *The Engineers and the Price System*. (Reprint 2001). Kitchener, ONT: Batoche Books. Retrieved from <http://socserv2.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/veblen/Engineers.pdf>
- Very, P., Calori, R. and Lubatkin, M. (1993). An investigation of national and organizational cultural influences in recent European mergers. In P. Shrivastava, A. Huff & J. Dutton (Eds). *Advances in Strategic Management*, (9<sup>th</sup>ed), Greenwich, CT: JAI Press 323 – 346.
- Weber, Y. 1996. Corporate culture fit and performance in mergers and acquisitions. *Human Relations* 49(9). 1181-1202.

### Figure and Table

## THE DIALECTICS OF CONSOLIDATION

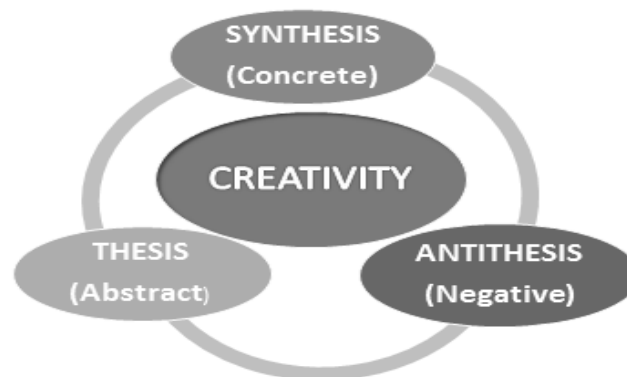
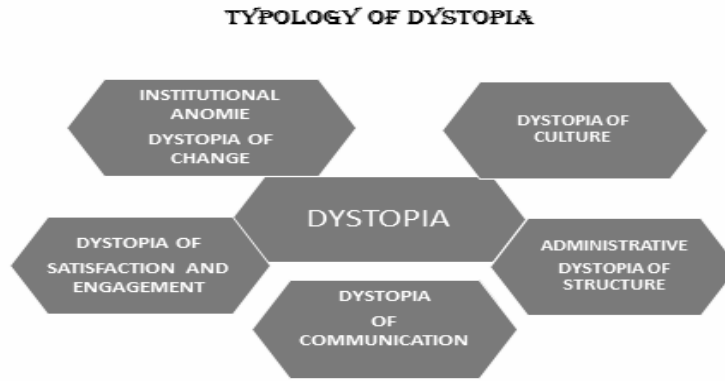


Figure 1: The Dialectics of Consolidation



**Figure 2: Typology of Dystopia**

**Table 1: Indicators of the Utopia of Retrospection**

| Question   | Agree or Strongly agree | Disagree or strongly disagree | Neutral |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|
| My pre-consolidated institution was a happier place than the University of North Georgia | 61.4%                   | 16.1%                         | 22.5%   |
| I feel that the culture of my campus should be preserved.                                | 76.9%                   | 5.6%                          | 16.7%   |
| I am very nostalgic about my pre-consolidated institution                                | 42.3%                   | 21.9%                         | 35%     |

**Table 2: Indicators of Institutional Anomie**

| Question  | Agree or Strongly agree | Disagree or strongly disagree | Neutral |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|
| Consolidation has brought a lot of changes for me in the workplace.         | 70.1%                   | 12.5%                         | 17.3%   |
| Consolidation has caused a lot of uncertainty in my work environment.       | 61.1%                   | 19.9%                         | 20%     |
| Consolidation has brought new challenges for me in the workplace.           | 78.9%                   | 7.4%                          | 13.7%   |
| Consolidation has come along with a lot of conflicts/ disagreements for me. | 49.7%                   | 23.7%                         | 26.7%   |
| Consolidation has stressed me out a lot personally.                         | 55.8%                   | 20%                           | 24.2%   |

**Table 3: Indicators of the Dystopia of Culture**

| Question   | Agree or Strongly agree | Disagree or strongly disagree | Neutral |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|
| There are major differences in the organizational cultures of the former NGCSU and the former GSC                                  | 82.6%                   | 4.2%                          | 13.2%   |
| I feel that the culture of my campus should be preserved.  | 76.9%                   | 5.6%                          | 16.7%   |
| Since consolidation the culture of my campus is being eroded or seriously threatened   | 54.8%                   | 17.7%                         | 27%     |
| The management culture of the former North Georgia College and State University was transferred to the University of North Georgia | 59.5%                   | 12.14%                        | 28.3%   |
| The management culture of the former Gainesville State College was transferred to the University of North Georgia.                 | 10.34%                  | 54.4%                         | 35.3%   |
| I feel that leaders have a lot of trust in their employees.  | 32.84%                  | 34.3%                         | 32.8%   |
| I feel that employees have a lot of trust in their leaders.  | 19.3%                   | 53.1%                         | 27.6%   |
| The changes were well implemented  | 33.1%                   | 66.9%                         | 0%      |