Delina R. Hickey and Trey Williams

A Nontraditional Model of Organizational Change

This article describes similar organizational change processes in two rather different institutions, both keeping the strengths and familiarities of the old while creating a new, more responsive organization. The experiences in both cases suggest some basic principles of organizational change that can be helpful elsewhere. Foremost among these is the need to balance a respect for the former organization while moving to a new set of structures that respond to current needs.

Approaches to Organizational Change

Organizational change usually means a redrawing of the organizational chart in the pursuit of a set of responsibilities and reporting lines consistent with institutional goals and the strengths of available personnel. This approach has familiarity and clear lines of personal authority. Roles and responsibilities are clear. The advantage of a simple and familiar model of expectations is often offset by the failure of organizational change to be perceived as anything other than having to adapt to a change in reporting lines. The focus remains on responding to the people in the roles, rather than on the tasks needed to achieve organizational goals.

Alternatives to this traditional model (e.g., quality circles, "skunkworks," etc.) have emphasized the creation of "working groups" whose members may cross traditional organizational lines, but all of whom bring important information or skills to a collaborative response to an organizationally significant issue. With these alternatives the focus shifts from responsibility to a person, to responsibility for a task or goal. Any change in organizational structure can be quite unsettling and disruptive. If change is needed to refocus institutional effort, it is likely to be more successful if the organizational change forces the staff to refocus on the real issues of the organization, not just on the internal sociology of the organization.

In higher education, increasing complexity and interrelationship of organizational tasks have strained traditional organization and often slowed response to changing conditions and external demands. At the same time, personnel in higher education are no less resistant to change than personnel in other fields. Optimal change will preserve familiarity and comfort while refocusing the attention of the staff on the critical organizational functions.

The following is a case study of organizational change processes in two rather different institutions, in both instances intended to keeping the strengths and familiarity of the old, while creating a new and more responsive functional organization. Rather than putting organizational change models in "either-or" opposition, these institutions have attempted to create a model that combines and coordinates the strengths of both approaches. At the end of the case studies we will present lessons learned and conclusions which we feel are applicable to any institutions attempting organizational change.

The Institutions

Keene State College in New Hampshire is a public institution with an enrollment of approximately thirty-eight hundred FTE. It has followed the common progression from normal school to teacher's college to state college, with a growth in enrollment typical for such institutions. The school, while public, receives a very low proportion of its budget from state appropriations (approximately 27 percent) and operates in a socially and politically rather conservative environment. While creating and maintaining strong programs, many of its organizational systems were slow to scale up to a form appropriate for the current size and levels of complexity. Keene's student affairs staff totals eighty-five.

Hampshire College in Massachusetts is a private institution with an FTE of 1,187. It was started as an alternative institution through a collaborative effort of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Amherst, Smith, and Mount Holyoke Colleges. Hampshire was born from the spirit of the 1960s, having always attracted independent thinkers to its student body and staff. The student affairs staff at Hampshire numbers forty-one. The differences between the two schools and their efforts to produce organizational change in their student affairs divisions stop there.

Reasons for Organizational Change

Both presidents wanted change that would support significant institutional movement in response to new environmental and organizational realities. They wanted more task-oriented and responsive organizations, rather than the more structure-oriented organizations of the past. Traditional structures often acted as psychological barriers to conversations among important players in building organizational

efficiency. Both presidents recognized that a responsive organization had to have a rich contextual foundation for its actions. This could not happen easily if a task was merely assigned to someone with a title that indicated responsibility for it. Enrollment management, for example, involves all components of the institution in some respect. The task can no longer be dealt with as merely the responsibility of the admissions office to bring in the right size class and type of students.

The senior student affairs administrators were directed to initiate organizational change when initially appointed to their positions. These new appointments created an opportunity for organizational change. Each school's president is interested in the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization and provided a great deal of support to the individuals undertaking this task. A mandate from the top makes such changes, while challenging, feasible. When the president publicly asserts the need for and the will to change, and gives the administrators the space and time to make those changes, the transformation of the organizational structure becomes a more attainable goal.

The Change Processes Employed

Both senior student affairs officers—the authors of this article—were new to their positions and thus not saddled with a lot of organizational history, which can cloud the issue of trust on college campuses. However, each had considerable longevity within the organization, providing an ability to recognize "trouble areas." The Hampshire dean was hired specially for the purpose of bringing organizational structure to the Student Affairs Division.

After having received clear mandates from our respective presidents, followed by an extremely inclusive consulting process, we moved forward with no concern about trust. All the external factors were present for there to be trust, but any change in leadership can activate staff insecurities, potentially undermining the initiatives begun with such optimism. The assumption of trust may, in fact, have been the biggest mistake made in the process of organizational change. Our initial naiveté may have slowed down the process and clearly had an adverse effect on implementation. Individual staff members have expectations about their working relationships, their access, their autonomy, their budgetary situation, their job security, etc., that are all called into question by a change in leadership. Time spent up front getting to know these more covert habits and expectations—developing an expectation that you will listen—can greatly enhance the sense of trust. This can be a very wise investment indeed.

We encountered resistance from individuals to changes in job roles or staffing. This behavior was most prevalent among those who were long-term employees of the college. For all staff members, the issues of job expectations and the means of evaluations are critical concerns. For long-term staff members, the failure to address these issues directly can create great personal anxiety in this environment of organizational change.

It was essential to be honest with the staff regarding the reasons for the organizational changes. If organizational change means cutting positions, they need to know. For any process of change to be successful, it needs to be perceived as beneficial to individual units. How will these changes support the student affairs staff member in doing his or her job more effectively? This question informs such a process.

Both of us began the process with several underlying assumptions: The purpose of the changes was to provide more support for directors of student services and programs, to empower them in their decision making, and to move away from the hierarchical decision-making model. Directors needed to participate in discussions that enlarged their view of the organization and the context within which they made decisions. This would give them a greater clarity of mission and a stronger base from which to make decisions within their units. We assumed that everyone embraced the notion of a more participatory model of decision making. However, this assumption was met with healthy skepticism. Not everyone welcomes change with the same degree of enthusiasm. Understanding this and respecting this proved to be essential.

Another assumption was that functional systems would change, but reporting lines and the formal organizational chart would remain the same. This would create two simultaneous types of organization: a structural one that conforms to traditional reporting lines, and a functional one that addresses areas of common interest in relation to larger institutional goals. Each individual would have the security of a traditional position and evaluation; however, all pertinent people would be involved in working groups that crossed organizational lines but addressed issues of mutual interest.

An essential assumption—supported by organizational behavior literature—is that the person closest to the action understands the problem best, and if asked and listened to, will provide sound and creative solutions. This meant that any change required consultation with those individuals involved. Based on these assumptions, the quest for change began.

Changing the Formal Structure

At both institutions a faculty member with a background in organizational behavior was employed as a consultant to work with the directors to determine which offices or groups interacted in any given day or week. At both institutions, it became quite clear that directors spent a great deal of time interacting on a regular basis. A series of clusters or petals of collaborative effort emerged from these data. For example, at Keene State it was found that Admissions, Student Financial Management, Upward Bound, Residential Life, and Student Support Services interacted on a regular basis. Each of these groups had an independent organizational position, yet they were constantly working together. This informal working group defined an "enrollment management cluster." At Hampshire, this was reflected through the forming of the support services units, Residential

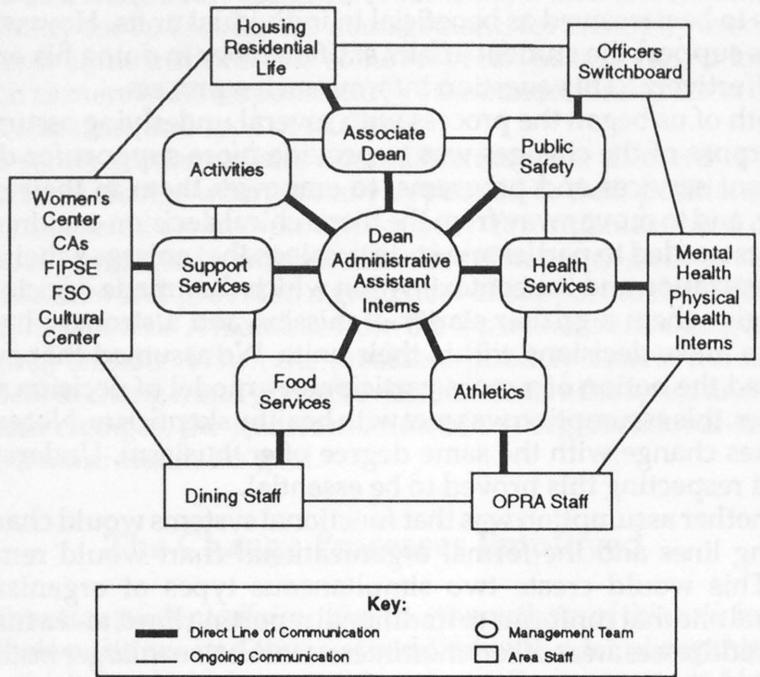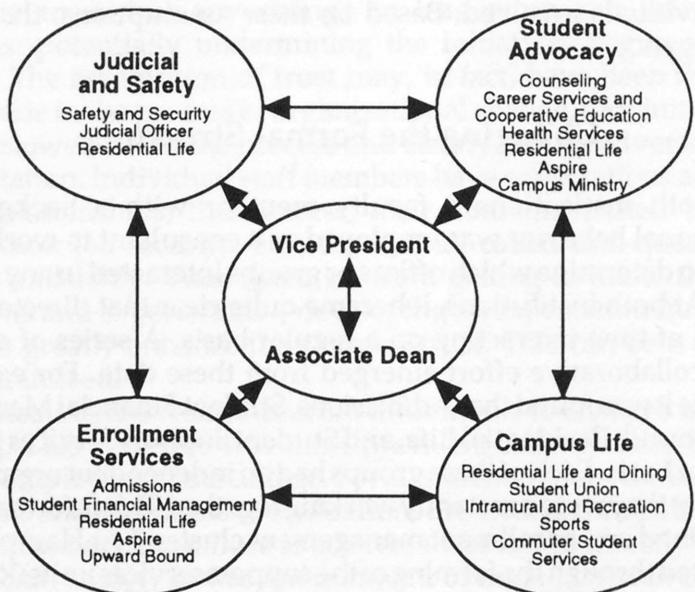## Figure 1: Hampshire College Student Affairs Division Organization

Housing Residential Life

Officers Switchboard

Activities

Associate Dean

Public Safety

Women's Center CAs FIPSE FSO Cultural Center

Support Services

Dean Administrative Assistant Interns

Health Services

Mental Health Physical Health Interns

Food Services

Athletics

Dining Staff

OPRA Staff

Key:

▬▬▬ Direct Line of Communication   ○ Management Team

――― Ongoing Communication   □ Area Staff

Figure 2: Keene State College Student Affairs Division Organization

Judicial and Safety
Safety and Security
Judicial Officer
Residential Life

Student Advocacy
Counseling
Career Services and
Cooperative Education
Health Services
Residential Life
Aspire
Campus Ministry

Vice President

Associate Dean

Enrollment Services
Admissions
Student Financial Management
Residential Life
Aspire
Upward Bound

Campus Life
Residential Life and Dining
Student Union
Intramural and Recreation
Sports
Commuter Student
Services

Aspire also reports to the vice president for academic affairs.
Campus Ministries communicates with each group, as needed.

Life, Drug and Alcohol Education, Health Education, Counselor Advocates, Women's Center, and Student Activities. Though they were always engaged in ongoing interaction, they now interacted through a unit with concise communication and connection.

This led us to create functional working groups with decision-making power that meet regularly. These are groups of people who were not necessarily in organizational proximity, but who were working on the same issues and tasks and thus interacted frequently. These groups can, and occasionally do, bring in representatives from other areas to resolve problems and create new ways of thinking. The internal organization of the division looks and works quite different from the past, yet the formal organizational structure remains the same. This is the *de facto* organizational structure, in contrast to the formal reporting lines. A new structure should reflect these working lines, not just the reporting lines.

At Keene State, an enhanced opportunity for rethinking the structure was created by the retirement of the associate dean for student affairs. In searching to fill this position, the expectations of the position were open for discussion. The individual department directors (refer to Keene organizational chart) began to explore how this position could be redesigned to best serve their needs without changing the formal reporting lines. Through discussions with the faculty consultant, it became clear that the position needed a facilitator/coordinator who would work closely with the directors and facilitate the cluster discussions. However, it was also very clear that the directors did not want to change formal reporting and supervisory lines. We have honored this. At Hampshire College a similar event occurred. The associate position became vacant and an individual who was well-respected moved into this position.

Changing the formal structure with shifts in the reporting lines would not have worked as effectively. Change is brought about by means of a new set of conversations about institutional goals and means. Changing who reports to whom does not change this; it only requires personality adjustments. Changing the focus of discussion to functional groupings allows people with a common set of interests to participate directly in a new arena of conversation. This produces the new focus of discussion so essential to organizational change without disrupting the existing sense of reporting lines. At both institutions, all of the directors still report to and are supervised by the respective vice presidents for student affairs and their associate deans. An attempt to shift formal reporting lines would have blocked some change. Nothing can be a bigger obstacle to change than moving a person into a reporting line where someone anticipates a personality conflict. By having working groups, or clusters, the focus shifts to the organizational issue, not the person to whom you report. These are some of the trade-offs that need to be made in participatory administration. Some pieces needed to remain the same to provide units or departments with a sense of security and stability.

When the reorganization began at Hampshire, there were only two midlevel managers with any supervisory responsibilities—the director of athletics and the associate dean of students, who supervises the residence staff and the director of housing. Since then, the department of public safety has formally joined student affairs, and the directors of health

services and food services, while not formally part of student affairs, sit at the management team table. Two midlevel, nonsupervisory positions have been added, the director of student activities and the coordinator of an externally funded drug and alcohol education program.

One of the president's goals for reorganization at Hampshire was to impose clear reporting lines in order to better define responsibility and create a system with more accountability. While student affairs (and much of the institution) appeared flat on the organizational chart, there were, of course, hierarchies of skill and supervision. Where the responsibility lay for decision making was often unclear, and staff at all levels would sometimes grouse about the "illusion of inclusion." Participation in discussion without explanation of how and why the final decision was reached often leaves staff with the sense that decisions are made in another arena to which they have no access. A true sense of inclusion requires those who participate in the discussion to feel they are a part of the decision and implementation. Hampshire attracts independent-minded folks, both as students and staff. It is often remarked that no one individual—student, staff, or faculty—ever feels represented by anyone else.

Hampshire College was about to reintroduce the idea of shared or shifted job responsibilities when the president announced that he would charge a budget task force with eliminating some fifteen FTEs from a total college work force of 224. As a result of the dire fiscal forecasts of the budget task force, the task of reorganization became both easier and more difficult. Overnight, the difficult issues to talk about (essential job functions, the possibility of shared tasks, relocations within the division) became issues that the entire institution was talking about—the common focus was working smarter, not harder. However, the task of reorganizing student affairs became somewhat more difficult because people now began fearing for their jobs; any discussion about possible change was suspect. Change became equated with cuts. For student affairs, the net loss of positions from institution-wide budget reduction was 1.5 FTE. After the dust settled from these very painful negotiations, individuals on the student affairs staff were able to regain their confidence in themselves and in their ability to get the job done.

Midmanagers

The role of the midmanager in this structure is a somewhat precarious one. At Keene State College, the associate dean for student affairs is now the facilitator/coordinator, with the responsibility of working with all directors and particularly with each cluster. If the vice president is seen as the divisional senior executive officer, then the associate dean is in the role of the divisional senior operating officer. Each director officially reports to the vice president, but spends much of his or her time working with the associate dean. One obvious advantage of this informal structure is that the associate dean is free to act truly as a facilitator rather than as a boss. The job becomes one of encouraging interaction and empowering the resolution of problems at the director's level.

In theory, the cluster organization seems a positive and healthy approach. Does it really work that way? We believe that it does, most of the time. The vice president has encouraged a team approach to management, and consequently works with the associate dean to support and encourage the use of the informal communication opportunities created by the cluster structure and its facilitator leadership, thus making the informal the real operating methodology. Directors know that, while they are working with the associate dean, the vice president is informed of all that they do and is available to take part in a particular decision or group discussion. There is no limited access to the vice president. This works particularly well when the vice president and associate dean are viewed as a team and would seem to be workable even if the team approach could not be carried out. Certainly, constant communication must take place between the vice president and the associate dean, and the staff must be aware of this joint approach to management. At Keene State, this results in some duplication of effort, but most importantly, it presents the staff with a model of cooperation. Staff evaluations are done by both the vice president and the associate dean, they often co-lead meetings, and the associate dean handles many of the functions of the vice president when she is away from the office.

Essential to the success of this concept is the continued acknowledgment that the model is not intended to be hierarchical. Directors and clusters are empowered to pursue their own solutions rather than seek an answer from the upper-level administrator. Because the associate dean was hired after this structure was developed, it has been perhaps an easier task for that role to become "re-invented" within this new system.

A brief verbal evaluation conducted after the first year of this system at Keene State indicated that the staff were still overwhelmingly in favor of the model, and believed it to be working well. This was the feeling in all of the clusters, even though each had developed somewhat different styles of operation. Based on both program function and the director's capabilities and personality, each of the clusters has developed its own personality. This presents a challenge particularly for the associate dean, who seeks to encourage the most effective use of cluster meeting time and to define the role of each group.

The enrollment services cluster became particularly task oriented, with very clear agendas and measures of accomplishment. The student advocacy cluster tended to be highly supportive, to work hard at processing issues, but still accomplished tasks as identified. The judicial/safety cluster was the most vocal and demanding cluster in the sense of tackling particularly difficult and challenging tasks. The campus life cluster developed a fairly effective method of sharing information and working together to help accomplish individual tasks and to think about approaches to goals from slightly different perspectives. As facilitator, the associate dean needs to be aware of the most appropriate approach to each group, and needs to be flexible enough to encourage each cluster to accomplish its goals in whichever way works best for that group.

The clusters have been effective at reaching out to other offices for information, for sharing, and for assistance. When the enrollment services cluster identifies a need for a change in the course selection process, their

problem-solving organization leads them to initiate a conversation with the advising staff and the registrar. With a more traditional organization, the job is more circumscribed and there is less impetus to take responsibility for working across the boundaries of the organizational structure. The clusters have tended to be inclusive, bringing in resources from outside the cluster and from outside the student affairs division, when appropriate. This crossover into academic or other administrative areas has been particularly helpful to the institution as a whole, and has created a model of cooperation that is currently being discussed institution-wide.

Results

Institution

Within each institution, change was initially confined to local matters within the student affairs division. As time went on, the collaborative problem-solving spirit developed through this change process began to spread to other areas of the organization. Because in both cases the president was supportive of what was happening, there has begun a movement from successes in the student affairs division to other areas of the institution with whom student affairs professionals work. At this point it is too early to draw any strong conclusions about this impact.

Student Affairs Division

One year later, at a Keene State Student Affairs Division retreat, an evaluation of the clusters/petals bore some interesting fruit. The directors indicated that the functional structure was working. The surprise was that each group had a different reason for its positive evaluation.

The enrollment management petal, for example, made administrative changes to better serve incoming students and review processes of data communication. Long-standing inefficiencies in coordination of what data are kept by whom, who sends what to whom and when, are now resolved rather quickly and easily. The student advocacy petal found the meetings helpful in providing support for each other and the opportunity to share relevant information on students. There was an improvement in mutual understanding of expectations and processes that allowed staff to communicate with a common voice, thus reducing confusion and frustration among students.

The judicial petal felt it was working together regarding student-related incidents and the reporting of Cleary statistical data, and developing policies and procedures for dealing with judicial matters on campus. The student life petal works to coordinate activities and programs offered to students on campus. The changes have enabled this staff to streamline its efforts and identify redundancies, and to begin the process of better coordination of efforts with the activities and programs of the academic division.

At Hampshire at the end of a year, a few small but important reporting relationships had been successfully changed along with the structure and attendance at some key meetings. With the major work of

reorganization and budget reductions completed, the atmosphere of suspicion and fear has subsided greatly. Despite the rigors of self-examination and budget cutting, the division has emerged as a strong and competent group of individuals who are committed to fostering the development of students and of themselves. In student affairs, much of the work of the division occurs in a loosely configured committee-of-the-whole. Subtle but meaningful changes in meeting structure and supervisory responsibility continue to be made, and these changes are more often than not regarded at they are intended: as aids to productivity and to healthy workplace interactions, rather than as power moves.

Staff

At both institutions the student affairs personnel have blossomed. Where once there was a considerable amount of defeatism, cynicism, and backbiting, there has developed a strong "can-do" spirit. Many members of the student affairs staff have bloomed as leaders, changed from competent staff people to initiators with great potential to develop into top-level leaders. Most striking has been the sustained "we-are-on-the-move" spirit in the face of quite significant budgetary pressure.

Senior Student Affairs Officer

These changes would have been unlikely unless each of the senior student affairs officers were comfortable with them. Authoritarian memo-writing administrators who look for problems rather than opportunities would not have initiated these changes. Thus, the changes this process produces in the leaders' outlook are modest. At the same time, an issue can now be identified to a director or cluster, and they develop a solution without the more extensive personal involvement that might have been necessary in the past. There is often a real joy in helping people figure out how to get things done; the leader is not a controlling manager, but a coach and facilitator.

Lessons Learned

With the support and suggestions of the Student Affairs Think Tank, sponsored by the New England Higher Education Resource Center and located at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, a discussion about the general issues of organizational structure and change of student affairs divisions began. The following points emerged as essential to success at restructuring a student affairs staff:

1. Trust is the most critical factor in achieving successful organizational change. It is essential to take time to build, as clearly and as solidly as possible, a sense of trust throughout as much of the division as possible. This takes lots of personal contact (memos won't do), lots of listening (not just to what is said, but how, and with what emotional tone), and patience.

2. A mandate of support from the president is essential to facilitate change. If there are mixed messages in the organization's leadership, change will be exceptionally difficult. At the outset, make sure there is a commitment to the institutional goals.

3. Not everyone wants change. Individuals fall along a continuum in their desire to embrace change. Change will not be uniform or smooth. Work with those most ready. Use them as models. Get them working with those who are less ready to change. Be particularly alert to frustration induced by change happening slower or faster than expected.

4. Change and *discussion about change* take a great deal of time.

5. Any organizational change needs to be perceived by those directly affected by it as a method to facilitate work. Thus it is critical to find out what people perceive as their work and what they perceive as their needs to do it successfully. Ask the questions, listen to the answers, adapt the change strategy based on what's learned.

6. The functional structure needs to be assessed regularly—is it still meeting our needs? A set of indicators needs to be identified that allows assessment of the structure as it relates to the organizational goals.

7. Functions are fluid and need to be flexible enough to be modified along the way while remaining stable enough to be usable. Don't throw away old structures, use them as strengths in building the new.

8. New data about the organization's funding and staffing as well as profiles of student populations need to be gathered, and a continued evaluation of priorities needs to take place. Readiness to change can be generated best by data—not exhortation.

9. The professional on the line knows best how to run her or his operations, especially the veterans. Ask them, build their trust, rely on them, support them in taking leadership with their staffs.

10. Develop an expectation for each working group to find its voice and identity *and agenda*. Provide the proper coaching and support, making clear the institutional goals and the issues to be addressed.

11. Assume that *everyone* wants to be engaged and seen as a competent professional. Look for issues, functions, and personal strengths. Avoid the temptation to blame people.

12. Don't *assume* everyone holds the same values. Set aside time and space for safe discussions of personal goals, preferred means, and needs. Self-disclosure by the leader is a great start in making others comfortable sharing their personal feelings. Discuss the differences and similarities often. Respect the individual differences—strengths and weaknesses. Keep the focus on the organizational goals.

13. Bring a "beginner's mind" to the task. It is helpful to know the organization, its history, structure, and people. It is best to be naive—avoiding assumptions of permanence, rigidity, or resistance.

14. Expect people to attempt to undermine your credibility and commitment. The fear of a change in one's role or position (i.e., "reporting line") almost always brings out some guerilla tactics.

15. Doing things differently may not initially seem more efficient; *change most assuredly will take more time* than remaining the same, but will be worth the effort in the long run.

Conclusion

In two superficially quite different institutions, attempts to produce change in the student affairs divisions followed quite similar lines. The experiences derived from these institutions suggest there are some basic principles of organizational change that can be useful to other institutions. Foremost is the need to balance a respect for the former organization while moving to a new set of structures that meet current organizational needs. The organizational change that works best is that which creates a new set of conversational environments. These environments enable the staff to learn from each other what needs to be done, and to elect to do it rather than having change thrust upon them from a position of authority. In both our cases, the creation of working groups changed conversations and created a readiness to develop and implement important organizational changes. At the same time, those involved developed a sense of their power and participation in the process.