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## Resiliency: The Implementation of a Strategic Framework

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## **Abstract**

As the incidences and complexity of student mental health continue to rise, there is an emphasis on the need to review the first year experience to ensure that students are prepared for the challenges they will face in post-secondary education. Institutions attempt to address the concern of student mental health by increasing the scope and number of student supports, both formal and informal, in the context of decreasing budgets and increasing student expectations. Despite institutional efforts, students continue to report confusion about available services and an increased desire for specialized supports.

This OIP uses various leadership approaches and methods of change-management to describe how a postsecondary institution can adopt a strategic resiliency framework across the various administrative departments that support students. This framework is intended to allow the experts in these departments to create a resiliency program which will share important life skills associated with resilience, provide a common understanding of the available postsecondary supports, and increase the understanding of how these supports contribute to student mental wellness. This program will culminate in a common training for student peer supports, allowing for concepts of resiliency to permeate the post-secondary student community.

Keywords: resilience, mental health, first year experience, post-secondary, change management

## **Executive Summary**

This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) presents the context of student support at a small university college (UC), in Ontario. Despite a strong faculty unit and a vast array of student support, student mental health concerns appear to be increasing.

The problem of practice, specifically the need to better prepare incoming students for the challenges that they are likely to face in the transition to university and through to graduation, presents many challenges. An analysis of the available student supports and the pervasiveness of student need as it relates to mental health concerns are reviewed. The concept of mental health and resiliency is complex and ever-changing. As a result, changes to student support may need to be regularly reviewed and modified. It is evident by the investment in external administrative reviews and by the redevelopment of a strategic plan at UC that the institution is committed to supporting students in their mental health challenges. There is an opportunity to leverage the expertise that currently exists within UC to utilize a resiliency framework in the development of a student leader training program.

UC already offers many services and systems to support student mental health, but the issue requires a more focused and systemic framework. Chapter 2 examines the “how” and “what” of planned change at UC by reviewing different theoretical models and solutions. These models outline choices of support that provide a structure that is clear and concise. Various methods of mobilizing this organizational change compliment these change models and will ensure continued interest and motivation of various stakeholder groups. One solution is recommended to strengthen and expand the current student peer volunteer program.

Chapter 3 brings together the vision for change described in Chapter 1, and the Change Plan described in Chapter 2, by discussing specific approaches for implementation. Taken

together, this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) reviews the student supports for mental health and explores ways of utilizing theoretical frameworks to enhance various campus support systems and services in both a theoretical and practical way. It is argued that this perhaps small change can provide UC the ability to have a large impact on student mental health in a cost-effective way.

Finally, the opportunity to empower the different administrative and faculty areas within UC to take an active role in bettering student mental health is offered. The benefits of resiliency education may extend beyond the student leaders, and positively impact the staff, faculty, and others within the UC community. It is envisioned that life on and off campus will improve for students and that they will carry forward the skills for maintaining a healthy, happy, and productive life.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Problem**

It can be argued that there is a postsecondary mental health crisis spanning the province. Many postsecondary students report struggling with issues of mental health, and thus, this issue has become the focus of many colleges and universities across Canada. Addressing this issue is made ever more challenging as the complexity and severity of student circumstances increase, and the ability of these students to cope with life challenges appears to be dwindling (Gray, 2015; Wilson, 2015). As the demand for various types of student support continues to grow, institutions search for ways of balancing academic realities with personal needs. This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) reviews the student supports that are offered at a small postsecondary institution in Ontario as the institution attempts to manage the strain of smaller budgets while supporting ever-increasing student needs. The institution, referred to as University College (UC), has implemented numerous student supports, including a range of professional and peer support services, that are intended to improve student wellness on campus. This Organizational Improvement Plan explores ways of utilizing available theoretical frameworks to enhance the various campus supports, while considering practical methods of implementing this change in the context of UC. It is demonstrated that the arguably small change of adopting a support framework provides UC the ability to have a large impact on student mental health in a cost-effective way.

This first chapter outlines the context of the institution and includes a review of both the political climate and the internal structure of UC. The experiences of incoming students and student mental health will be described, highlighting areas where students are struggling as they progress through their postsecondary education. The Problem of Practice (POP) will then bring these two aspects together, framing the need for the OIP and providing the guiding questions

addressed throughout the remainder of the document. A vision for change is articulated, culminating in an overarching vision for change, with the implementation of this vision discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

### **Organizational Context**

This section reviews the context in which the problem of increasing student mental health concern is occurring. This includes a broad look at provincial trends, and a focused look at a specific academic organization committed to mobilizing change to improve their institutional response to student mental health. Included is a review of institutional structures and various departments within the institution.

**Provincial context.** According to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (now known as Universities Canada) colleges and universities have experienced a decline in government funding (AUCC, 2008a). At the same time, there has been an increase in various social and student expectations to expand access and improve the quality and efficiency of the postsecondary experience (Fallis, 2007; Fisher, Rubenson, Jones, & Shanahan, 2009; Metcalfe, 2010). Despite waning financial support, continued demands and increased expectations for services have caused a growth in expenditures at various levels of postsecondary institutions (AUCC, 2011). Adding to this issue, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU) released the Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education in 2013 which provided a broad direction that aligned with initiatives to review and modernize the provincial educational funding model to be launched in 2015 by the Ontario government. The MTCU Framework was created in consultation with students, university leadership, faculty, employers, colleges, elementary and secondary sector, and professional associations. The funding model within the Framework places increased emphasis on several

factors, including improving student experience and increased institutional accountability through reporting per a specific set of metrics such as retention, student satisfaction, and time-to-completion.

This recent shift in the focus of the Ministry to update the funding model for the post-secondary educational institutions is occurring at a time when students are more vulnerable than ever before for reasons including increasing incidences of mental health concerns (Farabaugh, Bitran, Nyer, Holt, Pedrelli, Shyu, et al., 2012). The mental health of students can impact retention, time-to-completion, satisfaction, and other factors that are measurements now required by MTCU. In addition to the moral obligation to provide a range of supports for students, the funding of institutions could now be impacted by their ability to provide student support. Institutions are thus currently attempting to find ways of improving supports for an increasing number of complex student issues, including mental health, at a time of decreasing financial resources.

**Institutional context.** As noted, this institution of study is a small liberal arts University College (UC). The available archival documents indicate that the school was founded in the mid 1950's. Since that time, the single-building, affiliate institution has undergone development and multiple expansions, now including nine large buildings all designed and renovated with a tremendous amount of care and attention. Despite its growth, UC attempts to maintain its community feel in multiple ways, including the development of multiple common areas, and the decision not to have a classroom that seats over 100 students. The grounds at UC are a source of pride, peppered with various pieces of art all intended to evoke discussion about current social issues.

Today, UC still maintains its affiliation to the larger university. Though it has formally separated from the religious founding partners, it still maintains a close relationship and retains its Christian values. The institutional mission is to create a “vital academic community animated by a Christian love of learning and the pursuit of truth. The College strives to foster an environment based on open enquiry, Christian values and service to the larger community” (UC Website). UC strives to be the best undergraduate institution of higher learning in Canada.

Presently, UC is home to approximately 3,500 full and part-time students, the affiliate institution with approximately 30,000. The population of students is 57% female. As the population of the surrounding city becomes more culturally diverse, the diversity of the college is also expanding. In addition, there are nearly 420 international students enrolled at UC. There are 410 students with disabilities that utilize a range of services on campus. The residence hall is predominantly first-year students, with approximately 45% of them living on campus.

To retain these students, and to continue to grow, UC has attempted to employ quality faculty with supports including ever-increasing grant funding for research projects and programs. There are presently 100 full-time/permanent faculty members and almost 200 part-time faculty members, 46% are female.

In addition to its growing size, UC has experienced growth in its course offerings, and now offers a range of three and four-year degree programs in the arts, social sciences, business/management, and social work (both undergraduate and graduate). In 2015 UC added a major in disability studies. Departmental reviews are standard practice and help the institution to stay competitive in its quality and selection of academic programming; teaching evaluations are closely monitored and publicized to ensure a high quality of instruction for students.

**Student supports.** Given the increased diversity of the student body and the value of service to the community, student support has grown to be a central theme of this institution. Though students can avail themselves of the vast supports available at the large constituent institution, UC has invested in multiple academic and personal student supports designed to complement those offered by its parent institution, thus attempting to ensure that individualized support is available to those who need it. This individualized (and some small group) support is offered in a variety of domains including the transition into post-secondary, academic, financial, disability services, personal, learning, pastoral, career, and international.

The transition into university is managed by the Office of the Registrar. They employ multiple students and recent graduates to meet with each incoming student and work closely with the Academic Dean's Office to ensure that all students are registered in courses. In addition, there is an ongoing cycle of tours hosted by volunteers and student employees who are responsible for providing incoming students and families their first impressions of the institution. An orientation program lasts for one week and is directed by senior students and representatives of the Student Council.

The Academic Dean's Office has five program/information assistants and three counsellors, in addition to the Associate Academic Dean. The office manages general academic counseling and specific requests such as academic accommodation, special examinations, and letters of permission. Quantitative information about student support is not available on the available documents, but the annual reports indicate that the volume of student interaction is very high throughout the year.

The five employees in the Office of Student Finance are responsible for tuition and scholarships and manage functions related to the administration and distribution of student

financial aid programs including student loans, grants, and awards. They are also responsible for tuition and scholarships. Two of these employees also provide individual financial counselling for students, helping those who encounter financial concerns to better manage their money.

Disability Services employs one and a half disability counsellors and three support personnel who help to organize the various accommodations for students that are recommended by the individual counsellors. The number of students with disabilities has risen to 410, an increase in the face of an overall decline in the total number of students attending UC. The largest growth in mental health issues has been seen in the number of students reporting temporary and permanent psychiatric conditions, a number that has near doubled in the past five years and now accounts for approximately one third of students seen by the department.

Personal counselling has also experienced tremendous growth, with a 73% increase in recent years in the number of students seen by the 2.5 full-time counsellors. Students are generally referred by faculty and academic departments, and present a range of concerns from test anxiety to traumatic personal events. Counselling is offered in both individual and group formats which includes mindfulness and skills sessions that afford students the opportunity to explore, understand, and develop new skills for managing personal concerns.

Learning skills support is offered three days a week in both group and individual formats. Academic skills support is also offered by a writing help centre, which has a drop-in peer service and has recently expanded into credit/course offerings in writing. Finally, effective reading and research support are offered through the library.

Pastoral support in the way of individual counselling and group programming is offered by the office of Campus Ministry. Campus Ministry also provides programs and services in the areas of advocacy, catechesis, evangelization, community life, prayer and worship, justice and

peace, leadership development, and spiritual and pastoral counseling. These counsellors seek to nurture and challenge students, staff, faculty, and the wider community to bring everyone into a deeper relationship with his or her spiritual self.

Two hundred and eight students were seen by the 60% FTE career counsellor. This career counsellor provides support for students in connecting their field of study to occupational alternatives, defining vocational goals, creating post-degree educational plans, accessing resources to develop resumes, and job search strategies, etc. The UC document suggested that wait-lists were of concern in this area.

Internationalization appears to be an area of growth for UC student support services. In addition to the noted 420 international students, ninety-five UC students participated in academic exchange, summer programs, and Experiential Learning programs during the 2014–2015 academic year. Further, UC hosted thirty-eight incoming exchange students from 20 partner schools around the world. The international student services office works in collaboration with other offices around campus to host conferences and events with partnering institutions, and helps to host visiting faculty members.

This ever-increasing growth and complexity of student life and student support in the context of a small affiliated college creates a unique environment and community for students and staff. Unfortunately, the growth, (e.g., the 10% increase in the use of personal counselling and a 23% increase in students seeking accommodation for psychiatric concerns last year), has created a strain on finances and on multiple departments. In response to these evolving realities, UC is currently in the process of writing a new strategic plan for the institution and in draft documents states that student services will be a foundational aspect of the UC's attempt to improve student experience and institutional marketability. In addition, administration at the

institution believes that the supports will also help to improve student retention and degree attainment. External reviews of senior administration and student services have recently been initiated, mirroring the types of reviews that are standard in academic departments. The information in these documents has turned the institution's attention to the organizational structure of the institution. Though the structure is evolving, the snapshot of the organizational structure, provided later, represents both challenges and opportunities for UC.

**Student led activities and peer supports.** In addition to the formal supports offered by UC, there are a variety of peer supports. These supports take on several different forms. Some are paid and report directly to members of staff or professional officers within the organization. Others are unpaid elected positions occurring within the student government structure through the Dean of Students. Some student support activities exist because of clubs and are voluntary.

As noted, the Office of the Registrar employs student tour guides. These students are responsible for introducing new and prospective students to the UC campus. Consequently, it is important that they have a detailed understanding of the various supports provided by the institution and the purpose of those supports. Also employed are eighteen Residence Assistants (RAs), who help to facilitate the social, academic, and personal adjustment of students to residence, and ultimately to UC. These student employees are supervised by the residence manager who works for the Dean of Students.

Many students volunteer in a variety of capacities with the intent of improving incoming students' transition to university and student wellness while at university. UC has a Peer Mentor program, where senior students volunteer to support incoming students through the various academic experiences that they will face. The program specifies that these are not tutors; rather, they are individuals who can help provide direction (i.e., to services, information and/or support)

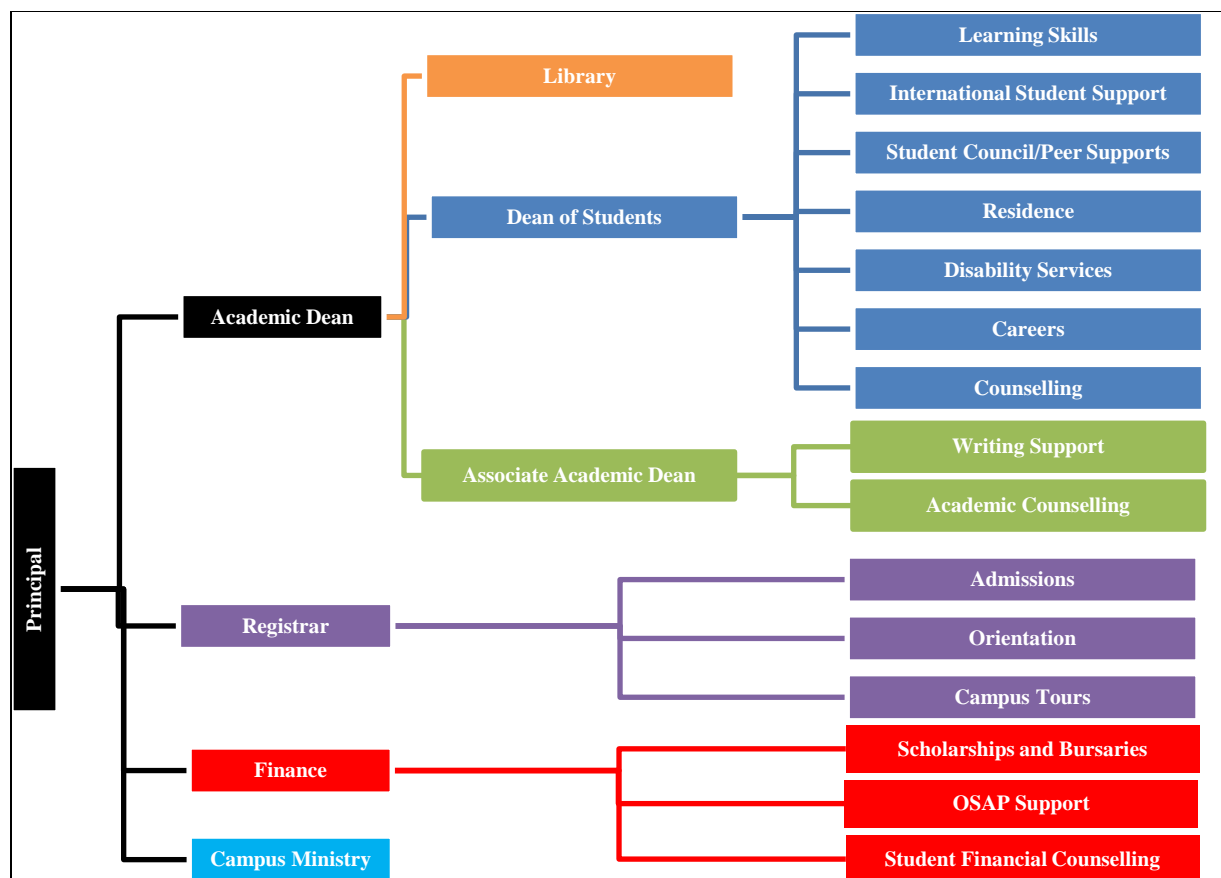


and can help orient students to campus. In addition, Orientation Leaders run a week-long orientation program designed to support incoming students in connecting to other students, to classes, and to the broader campus community.

Finally, the student government, or Student Council, hosts a variety of activities to support student experience and student wellness. These student leaders have an important voice on campus and influence the types of activities available, and they also sit on many of the committees at the college. Student Council also governs all the student clubs that facilitate student connections based on common interest. Taken together, the breadth of student peer support is far-reaching and offers incoming students to UC opportunities for connections with peers who have successfully completed the transition to post-secondary. These thriving senior students have experiences in various subject areas, around campus, and with various supports that are helpful for incoming students.

**Organizational structure.** Administratively, student supports are managed by different departments across campus, many just documented. The Registrar's Office hosts campus tours and is responsible for student admissions in addition to coordinating the first-year summer academic counselling for new students. Student Financial Services provides individual financial counselling as well as information about student loans, scholarships and bursaries. The responsibility of academic advising lies within the Office of the Academic Dean. Campus Ministry functions independently, and Residence, Disability Services, Students Council, Career Advising and Personal Counselling fall under the Dean of Students. A compressed version of an organizational chart of the student supports is provided in this Figure 1.

Figure 1. UC Simplified Organizational Chart



*Note. This chart was developed using the information from the UC Strategic Plan (2015)*

This visual depiction of the structure of student support by colour is over-simplified, but it highlights how the responsibility of these supports is spread across administrative departments. Many of these administrative structures were put in place when the institution was much smaller, and have simply grown as the student body has increased. Consequently, UC conducted an external review of many of the student services in late 2015 which resulted in several suggestions including: (a) formalizing a mission statement for Student Services; (b) establishing and assessing desired outcomes for student support, and; (c) increasing the integration of student support across campus. The review asserts that these recommendations will better position the institution to support student experience, retention, and mental health by creating a more integrated and seamless network of student support. These recommendations are also supported

by the work of authors who have argued that an integrated approach to student services is more innovative, and better able to address the needs of incoming students (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006).

Like the suggestions within the external review, the recommendation for a formalized mission statement for a student services division is outlined by Kouzes and Posner (2012) who articulate the need for an organization to have a shared vision to help build a common purpose so people to see how and where they fit into the new vision. Additionally, the creation of a clear mission statement for student services can help provide stability during times of change. Strategies for establishing specific goals for these services are identified in the external review as well as in the work of Conzemius and O'Neill (2002) who suggest that clear, measurable, and attainable goals are more likely to be accomplished than ill-defined ones.

Overall, these external review recommendations suggest the need for significant changes to the current operation of UC's student support services. However advisable these changes may be, there is also evidence in the literature that emphasizes the importance of a clear vision for departmental/unit change and the challenge of providing an integrated organization structure. The growing demand for mental health services at UC appears to be consistent with the increase of mental health concerns identified at provincial and national levels (ACHA, 2009; Crozier & Wilihnganz, 2006; MacKean, 2011). Though the rise in complexity and numbers of students seeking mental health support was not directly addressed in the external review of student services, the recommendations emerging (e.g., better integration of services), may help to improve institutional effectiveness and efficiency, and at the same time, enable the institution to provide more focused support for these increasingly complex situations.

## **Leadership Problem of Practice**

*There is a need for institutions to better prepare incoming students for the challenges that they are likely to face through the completion of their degree.* This increased emphasis on the need to review the experience of first-year students to ensure that they are prepared for challenges they will face in post-secondary education is of increasing importance (Padgett & Keup, 2011). There are many first-year experience programs at post-secondary institutions, most designed to orient incoming students to the school. Many are peer-to-peer and engage incoming students in a variety of activities and events (Hertel, 2010). Despite the increased number of students who are struggling with emotional distress, these first-year experience programs typically focus on functional tasks such as location of amenities and general campus orientation (Robbins, Oh, Le, & Button, 2009). At UC, there is an opportunity to utilize the available services on campus to improve the training of those working in these already existing peer programs for them to better support students as they enter our institution.

**Overview of the problem of practice.** Examples of the challenge of wellness faced by students and institutions can be seen in colleges and universities across Canada and the United States, as there is an increase in the number of post-secondary students seeking help for mental health problems, and an increasing complexity in the problems presented by these students when compared with previous years (MacKean, 2011). Epidemiological research supports this assertion stating that mental health problems are highly prevalent among college and university students (e.g., Crozier & Wilihnganz, 2006). These trends hold true for many institutions in Ontario, as there has been a reported increase in the number of students experiencing psychological distress (ACHA, 2009). Recent suicides among high school and university students in Canada have underscored the urgent need to improve youth mental health services

and reduce stigma associated with mental health. Also, there is a need for secondary and post-secondary schools to help protect and promote students' mental health. The specific problem presented for these institutions is to create systems and services that support students in managing their stress and mental health.

### **Framing the Problem of Practice**

Each student entering post-secondary education is unique. Each comes to university or college with different experiences, expectations, needs, interests, and stressors. Yet within this generally heterogeneous population, commonalities can be found in students' responses to stress, and in the traits of resilient students. Most commonly, the stressors reported by post-secondary students include academic stress, followed by time management, then financial, practical (dining halls, dorm life), identity related issues, and social concerns (ACHA, 2009; DeRosier, Frank, Schwartz, & Leary, 2013). These evolving stressors can impact students' behavior and adjustment to the post-secondary setting. Many students report that they worry more, lose their temper, cry more frequently, experience headaches or stomach aches, etc., which not surprisingly, can lead to them engaging in maladaptive behaviors (DeRosier, et al., 2013). Students report that these stressors also impact their mental health by causing issues such as sleep difficulties, anxiety/depression, and/or relationship difficulties that, among other things, impact their academic performance (ACHA, 2009).

The Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS) Association uses the Canadian Government's (Government of Canada, 2006) definition of mental health that describes

The capacities of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections, and personal dignity (p. 2)

This is a broad definition that emphasizes wellness and is similar to definitions proposed by the World Health Organization (2001) and concepts of “flourishing” outlined by Keyes (2002). Keyes extended the definition of mental health by conceptualizing health and illness as separate continuums. This suggests that one student with mental illness or diagnosis may flourish where another may struggle even though he/she may not be displaying symptoms of illness. Like physical health, diagnoses or conditions of mental health may be related to general wellness (including coping strategies), but they may occur independently as well. Conceptualizing wellness as different from illness provides an opportunity for interventions to be developed which are intended to improve the mental health of all students regardless of mental illness or diagnosis.

**Mental health and mental illness.** Horwitz and Wakefield (2007) describe how our culture has started to blur the definition of mental health with concepts of mental illness. They explain that the evolution of the diagnosis of depression has changed the meaning of depression in the culture. The authors argue that, in some instances, situations that could be understood broadly as sadness are now interpreted by many as depression. This subtle change takes the situation of sadness, which is understood as the response to a situation, and shifts it towards a condition, which is an affliction residing with an individual. Understanding both sadness and depression as conditions on the same continuum creates several complexities including how they are managed. Issues of sadness, which often result from external factors, can often be resolved with external solutions such as strategies, environmental changes, rest, etc. Depression can be seen as a chemical imbalance within an individual and may require counselling, medication, and accommodation. Blending the two states of being creates confusion about the concepts and the supports that are helpful.

Though Horwitz and Wakefield (2007) focus on depression, the same argument can be made for the blurring of anxiety and stress. Anxiety symptoms are discussed in mental health campaigns as something that needs to be reduced, combatted, and managed, and the term is used interchangeably with stress. One of the focuses of mental health awareness week at many institutions is on reducing stress. The student team of Jack.org holds multiple events at UC, such as a pumpkin smash in October, satellite summits to mirror the larger gathering in Toronto, and various awareness campaigns to highlight the negative implications of stress. But it can be argued that stress, on its own, is not negative, rather it is a natural, predictable, and often advantageous response. McGonigal (2015) argues that stress can have a positive impact on students, but the perception of stress is crucial in understanding how to utilize it. Some people have a negative mindset towards stress, believing that stress depletes health, disrupts performance, stunts learning, and should be avoided. Others believe that stress enhances health, performance, and learning, and should be utilized. McGonigal describes scenarios where students can utilize stress to perform better on tests. It is argued that stress, and its effective management, can generally enhance quality of life (Korte, Koolhaas, Wingfield, & McEwen, 2005).

When looking at the lessons of these authors in the context of the post-secondary interventions described, there are a few points worth noting. First, there appears to be a blurring of the definition of mental health, which moves away from health and towards illness and/or unhealthiness. For example, interventions at UC and its constituent university cite mental health as a focus, even though the interventions appear to include stress reduction, awareness of supports, suicide awareness, stigma reduction, etc. It can be argued that this lack of clarity surrounding mental health is, in part, a result of the phenomena described by Horwitz and

Wakefield (2007), specifically that the culture of these institutions has failed to differentiate external situations from internal symptoms. The continued stigma reduction in this context confuses feelings of sadness with depressive episodes. I would argue that a risk of this situation is that people who experience sadness may begin to feel that they understand what it is to feel depressed, and people with major depressive disorder may not understand why they cannot cope with their symptoms in the same way as someone who is feeling sadness. Similarly, stress becomes muddled with symptoms of anxiety, and anxiety and depression become both normalized (e.g., in the anti-stigma promotions) and villainized (e.g., in the stress-reduction campaigns). Depression can lead to anxiety which can lead to stigma. Symptoms of mental illness are often cumulative—and are exacerbated by inertia, inattention, and/or lack of awareness and coping strategies, including seeing a medical professional. Finally, it can also be argued that individuals are more likely to be engaged in activities that promote positive mental health if the focus is shifted from vulnerable youth and adolescents to all young people and adolescents (Sesma, Mannes, & Scales, 2013). Focusing on at-risk and vulnerable youth (vs. all youth) can have the unfortunate effect of deterring at-risk individuals from participating in activities intended for support, while strengthening the belief that youth development is the responsibility of the professional sector (clinicians, program implementers, social workers) (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998).

**Mental health and resilience.** How is mental health related to resilience? On the surface, the term resilience and its relationship to mental health appears to be straight-forward. As an academic concept, it can be defined much as one might expect: the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity (Prince-Embury & Saklofske, 2012). But it is not necessarily that simple. Understandings of the term “resilience” can vary greatly when comparing academic, popular,



and ethnographic discourse. McGreavy, (2016) suggests that many authors conceptualize resilience as bouncing back without including or acknowledging a learning element, where individuals learn limits and avoid placing themselves in similar situations when possible. He also recognizes some forms of discourse where resiliency is aligned with control; specifically bouncing back may also require reasserting control over a situation. There is a suggestion that with each “bounce back,” an individual may try to take more control over her/his environment which may ultimately reduce her/his ability to cope with variability. Conceptualizing resilience in this way puts it at odds with vulnerability, which could be argued is an important part of learning.

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) (Patry & Ford, 2016) organized various definitions of resiliency as they relate to education into four categories:

1. those that integrated the role of context and external factors;
2. those associated with personal assets;
3. those associated with positive outcomes, and;
4. comprehensive definitions that incorporate the three aforementioned categories.

Though the definitions of resilience can be quite broad, they help us understand and consider it in a practical sense. For the purposes of this OIP, resilience is used to describe the personal and academic traits, skills, and strategies of those who are resilient and those who thrive.

When considering a challenging life event, such as a stressful life transition, it can be argued that people may experience one of four possible outcomes including:

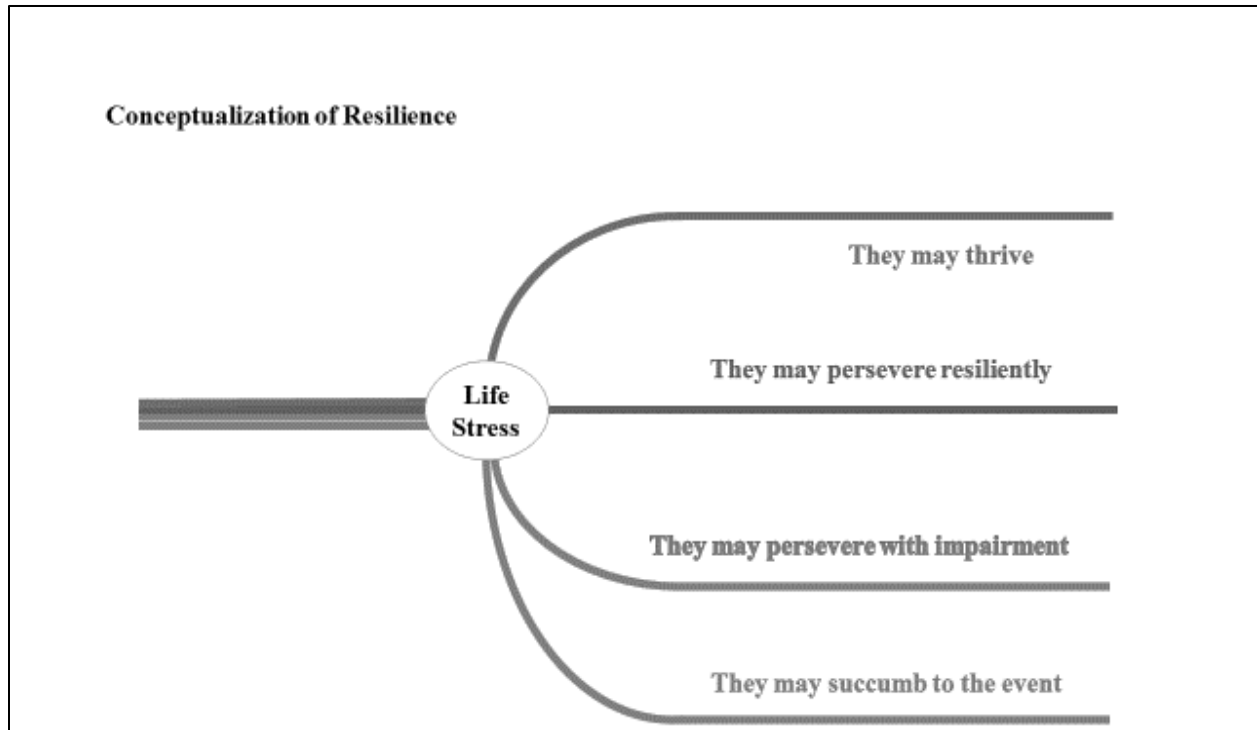
1. succumb to the event;
2. persevere with impairment;
3. persevere resiliently; or
4. thrive (Carver, 1997). (see Figure 2 for these graphed)

In Figure 2, *succumbing* could be withdrawing from school because of various stressors. *Persevering* with impairment would describe a scenario where a student is able to continue with

courses and various activities, but not function at the same level as before the life event.

*Resilience* would be defined as bouncing back to one's previous state, while *thriving*

Figure 2. Conceptualization of Resilience



*Note. Adapted from Carver, C. S. (1998). Resilience and thriving: Issues, models, and linkages. Journal of social issues, 54(2), 245-266.*

would describe a student who emerges from the event stronger than before and more prepared to deal with future life challenges.

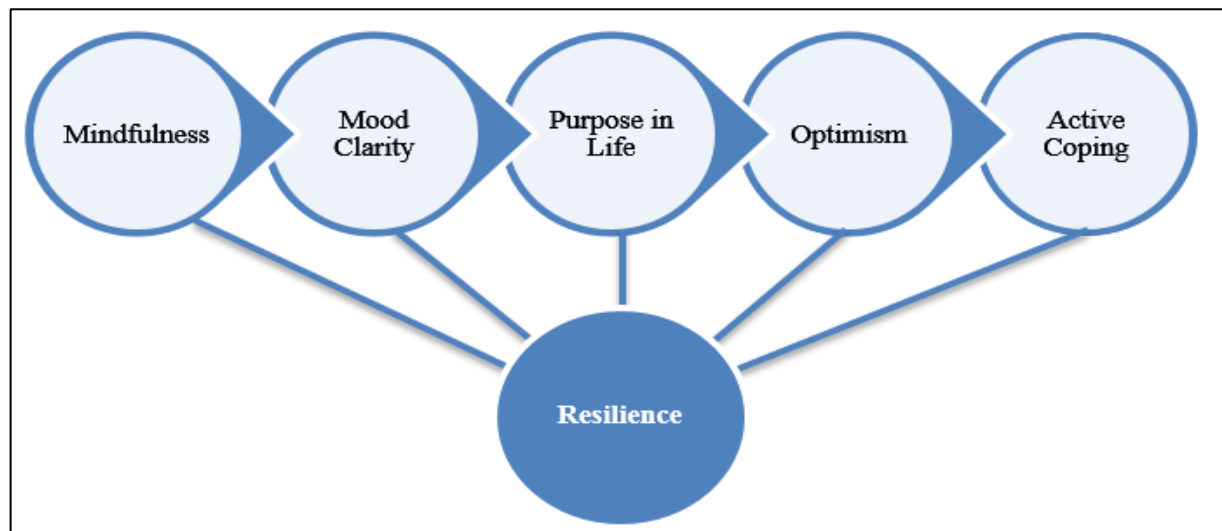
So how does one overcome a stressful event? What does one need to do to be resilient?

HEQCO (Patry & Ford, 2016) itemizes five factors that are critical in understanding resiliency:

1. fixed individual factors that are not easily changed;
2. external protective factors, also called moderators of resiliency;
3. personal assets that facilitate coping during stressful situations;
4. coping processes that focus on strategies; and
5. outcomes associated with resilience.

Though it is important to understand the factors that impact resiliency, it may also be helpful to understand the process and stages that contribute to resiliency. There are three stages experienced by people when recovering from a stressful life event: confronting the event, orienting oneself towards a positive future outcome of the event, and engaging in efforts to cope with it (Smith, Epstein, Ortiz, Christopher, & Tooley, 2013). Although this stage theory may appear simple, each step requires specific skills that can be employed to help an individual overcome adversity. The three stages can be unfolded into more specific categories including

Figure 3: Resiliency Framework



*Note. Reprinted from Smith, B. W., Epstein, E. M., Ortiz, J. A., Christopher, P. J., & Tooley, E. M. (2013). The foundations of resilience: What are the critical resources for bouncing back from stress? In Resilience in children, adolescents, and adults (pp. 167-187). Springer: New York.*

mindfulness, mood clarity, purpose in life, optimism, and active coping. These skills and traits have been found in people who are resilient in the face of adversity, and importantly, they are teachable and learnable (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011). The idea that these skills can be taught, and that they can serve to improve both the quality of life and academic performance of

students, suggests that the concept of resiliency could be an exciting framework for understanding a change for student services.

### **Questions Emerging from the Problem of Practice**

Within the problem of student mental health and the need to review incoming student support exist a few questions that need to be addressed throughout this OIP. Included are these.

1. *Is there a framework that can be implemented to address the various concerns presented by incoming students?*

The recommendation for change rests on the assumption that a common framework exists that will address many of the needs and concerns of students. A review of different understandings, models, and types of mental health support are explored in Chapter 2. The strengths and weaknesses of each of these approaches are reviewed.

2. *Can the framework be implemented in a way that acknowledges the financial realities faced by the institution?*

The implementation of a new plan can often be associated with financial expenses, including employee time, advertising, program development, and training. These can impact the decision to move forward with a new change; even the fear of financial concerns can influence managerial decisions (Meyer, Milgrom, & Roberts, 1992). As mentioned earlier, post-secondary institutions are attempting to improve supports for mental health at a time of ever-decreasing financial resources. Chapter 3 outlines a detailed plan which identifies what is needed by the institution to implement this change. This question also overlaps with the third emerging question that relates to the utilization of existing supports.

3. *Can the expertise of the various departments be leveraged in the development and implementation of the framework?*

UC already has strategies to support student mental health, many of which have been mentioned. In Chapter 2, a gap analysis is conducted with the goal of identifying areas where

there are opportunities for closer collaboration among these areas. The change implementation plan in Chapter 3 describes how to close the gaps, with the goal of bringing the organizational functioning in line with the vision for change, including bringing to life the proposed framework.

4. *Can the results of an organizational change be measured in a way that will allow for program review?*

To ensure that the change is effective and sustainable, clear outcome measures need to be available for review. For the program to be effectively reviewed, appropriate tools and strategies will need to be considered in advance, and appropriately utilized and administered. Chapter 3 delves deeper into monitoring and evaluating this change.

5. *How will the effective change be made permanent/sustained within the institution?*

Ensuring that the adoption of a clear framework remains permanent is an important aspect of this change. By ensuring the change is ongoing, UC will establish a new baseline of mental health support within the institution. The process of implementing and monitoring this change also provides UC an up-to-date understanding of student mental health. With this information, next steps can be taken and future considerations can be discussed in an informed way. The process of making this change permanent will be described in a theoretical way in Chapter 2, and will be put into practice in Chapter 3.

### **Leadership-Focused Vision for Change**

As suggested by the external reviews of UC, there is support for the creation of a clear vision to help mobilize important changes to the administrative structures that provide student support. Included in this vision is the important role of student support as it relates to student mental wellness. There exists the possibility of leveraging existing frameworks, such as those that describe the concept of resiliency, to shape a common understanding and direction for student support.

Utilization of a clear framework could provide several advantages. First, it would provide clarity for the new vision, and provide an understanding of how to implement that vision. Articulating the vision for change will be an important step in the change process as outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. In addition, a succinct and clear vision could be of financial benefit to the institution. In addition to the potential of increasing student retention, strong services might be marketable to the broader public. As noted in the outline of the Problem of Practice, there is an increasing number of students who are attending post-secondary education who have challenges with mental health. Students who struggle with their mental health might be more likely to come to an institution with clear and supportive practices.

One of the methods of implementing the vision could be training enhancement of the various peer support volunteers at UC. Expanding on the training of these students has the potential to influence the student population in both a direct and indirect fashion. For example, the factors associated with resiliency have been demonstrated to be positively associated with academic success and are beneficial skills/traits to possess during life transitions (Majid, Liming, Tong, & Raihana, 2012). If a training with this focus were to be implemented at UC, students would have the opportunity to learn skills that have been demonstrated to support mental wellbeing during a challenging life transition, and in a context where mental health supports are increasing in importance. Although the development of a common peer training system may seem like a relatively small change, there are three intended outcomes that can extend to have larger implications.

1. The most direct impact is that peer support volunteers will pass along information related to resiliency to the incoming students.
2. Resiliency as a foundation could provide the various peer support programs a common language for marketing and describing the services that exist on campus.

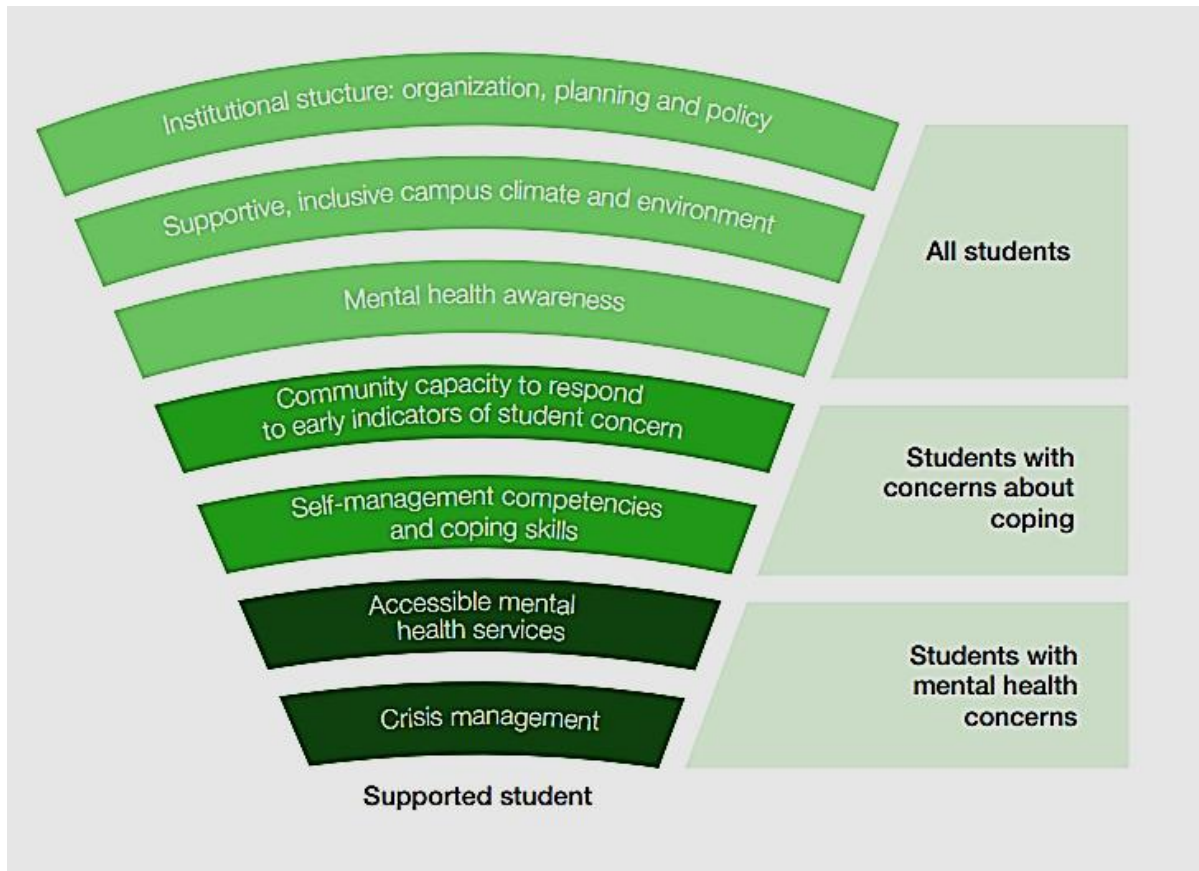
3. The volunteers may develop a better understanding of how support programs can fit together to meet the needs of the students whom they serve.

The adoption of a common framework will highlight areas for future program development within this institution.

When considering injecting a theoretical model, such as that of resilience, into the existing structure of the institution, there are several considerations that need to be discussed. The theoretical model will first need to be considered broadly, appreciating how it will impact all students. The approach will need to complement the existing student mental health supports at UC and align with the broader provincial information. Fortunately, The Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS) created a guide intended to support post-secondary institutions in developing communities that are well-balanced in their approach to student services and mental health. This report described seven components as integral in developing an effective mental health strategy including:

1. institutional structure, organization, planning and policy;
2. a supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment;
3. mental health awareness;
4. community capacity to respond to early indications of student concern;
5. self-management competencies and coping skills;
6. accessible mental health services; and
7. crisis management (Washburn, Teo, Knodel, & Morris, 2013) (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. CACUSS Framework for Addressing Postsecondary Student Mental Health



*Note. Reprinted from Washburn, C., Teo, S., Knodel, R., & Morris, J. (2013). Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach.*

As noted in Figure 4, the three general components at the top of the structure are intended to consider the needs of all students at an institution. These levels focus on institutional structure, supports and general awareness of services and processes that are intended to help all on campus. The next two are intended to account for the needs of students with concerns and include interventions designed to target populations of the student population who may be in a situation where they are having difficulty coping. The final two components at the bottom of the figure address the needs of students who have serious concerns or require immediate support. It is argued that all layers should be considered in the drafting of mental health plans and policies because all students with mental health concerns are important. By considering all layers of the



CACUSS framework when making changes, one can ensure that a change designed to support one group of students does not negatively impact another.

The implementation of a strategic framework such as resiliency is intended to improve mental health awareness and services for all students, and especially for those with concerns about coping, as identified by the model in Figure 4. This OIP change is not intended to influence the treatment of students with mental health concerns, as professional and individualized support may still be required by these students. It is intended to strengthen campus wellness broadly, increase students' ability to implement proactive strategies, and improve the awareness of the available supports at UC. It is important that the development and implementation of this plan not detract from the institution's ability to support the most vulnerable section of the population, specifically students in need of accessible mental health services and/or crisis management (See Figure 4 bottom levels).

### **Organizational Change Readiness**

Combe (2014) outlines that being ready for change can help to provide a measure of confidence that a change will be adopted by using defensible data and information. Evaluating the change-readiness of this institution can be done by first evaluating the capacity for change, then the commitment, and finally the culture (Combe, 2014).

*Capacity* involves the capability of the institution's processes, physical resources, organizational systems, and technology to interact. As described earlier, UC possesses many of the elements required for change that could be found in a capacity assessment. There are currently numerous professionals who possess the necessary skills, abilities, and knowledge to produce a quality program. The structures, such as orientation week, Peer Mentors, Residence

Advisors, and tour guides are in place, and a common training now exists. The organizational systems are also in place for monitoring and supporting the peer leaders.

Second, a review of the *commitment* for change at UC reveals an area where the institution may not score as high as it relates to change readiness. There are many individuals who value the student experience, have the skill required to roll out these changes, and are often involved with the peer leaders already. Even with stretched resources, the institution has done a great deal of work to recognize the potential mental health concerns of students. A weakness on the commitment scale exists with regards to the available time of the professionals to create this curriculum.

Finally, Combe (2014) describes the *culture* of an institution as the most prominent cause of failure in programs and projects because of the tremendous impact that mindset and attitude have on change. As noted earlier, the preliminary documents that outline the direction for the new UC strategic plan view student support as central. The values and mechanisms are in place for this change to be implemented. The adoption of a clear framework to address the concerns of student mental health would help to ensure congruency of the available services. If the institution agrees that resiliency is the appropriate framework and perceives value in this approach, there will be a greater likelihood that the change will be successful.

Overall, the institution appears to have many of the foundational components in place for successfully implementing the proposed change. Within UC exists the capacity and culture that could propel the change required to bridge the gap caused by increasing size and financial constraints. The commitment for change is not entirely absent, rather it will need to be fostered. To do this, the type of change being recommended will need to be adequately explained and

justified. The selected framework will need to be demonstrated to be an improvement from what currently exists.

## **Conclusion**

I have long felt that so many conversations about mental health are over-simplified. Many employees with whom I have spoken in the college and university setting often conceptualize mental health on a straightforward continuum from wellness to illness, and seem to believe that the mental health of students can be improved with simple life changes. They typically prefer to conclude these discussions quickly with logic which suggests that, “given the student would need to make these life changes outside of the classroom, the institution truly cannot do very much to be helpful.” I have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter that the concept of mental health and resiliency is complex, and changes to the structure of student support may be required to effectively attend to the increasing need of students. My hope for the institution is that this perspective is empowering, and that employees will start to believe that educational institutions can have a positive influence on student mental health. For the students who are struggling with their mental health, my hope is that the path to wellness is inclusive and collaborative. At UC, it is evident by the investment in external administrative reviews and by the redevelopment of a strategic plan that the institution is preparing for change that emphasizes student support.

UC already offers many services and systems to support student mental health, but the issue requires a more focused and systemic framework. Chapter two examines the “how” and “what” of planned change at UC by reviewing different theoretical models and solutions.

## **Chapter Two: Planning and Development**

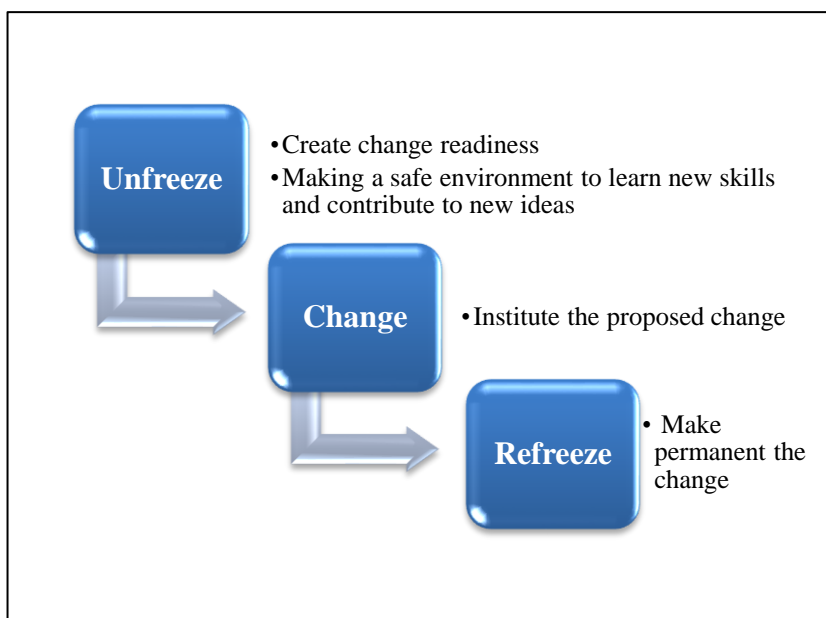
This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section, frameworks for leading a change process, offers an analysis of how change occurs in an organization and identifies theories about organizational change. In the second section a critical organizational analysis explores “what” to change at UC by reviewing models that isolate gaps between the current organizational structure and the new vision. Solutions for addressing the problem of practice (specifically the need to review the experience of first-year students to ensure that they are prepared for challenges they will face in post-secondary) are reviewed, and an analysis of leadership methods for implementing and communicating the selected change completes this chapter.

### **Framework for Leading the Change Process**

An enhancement to student-leader training at UC may seem to be a straightforward change but it has a much broader intention, specifically to address the broad and important topic of student mental health. Given the breadth of the intended impact, and the magnitude of the topic and issues of mental health, it is possible for this seemingly straightforward change to become complicated. Lewin’s (1951) model provides a simple framework for managing the development and implementation of a new curriculum for peer leaders. Though this framework provides an important starting point, opportunities to use additional frameworks will be reviewed, providing the institution an opportunity to better manage and implement the proposed change, monitor the effectiveness of the change, and roll out the change more broadly if desired.

**Lewin's change theory.** Lewin (1951) provides a clear and direct model for implementing organizational change which is depicted in Figure 5. This basic, foundational model of organizational change conceptualizes the process in three distinct phases: *unfreeze*,

Figure 5. Lewin's Stages of Change



*Note. Developed by Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics: Concept, method and reality in social science; social equilibria and social change. Human relations, 1(1), 5-41.*

is the *unfreeze* stage requiring a leader to prepare the organization for change and to *unfreeze* previous attitudes, actions, or policies. This stage requires a motivation in the organization. In stage two, the model emphasizes the need for communication and empowering employees to be involved in the change process. This change is crucial, as the organization needs to mobilize people to look for new ways to do things. This requires ample time for people to accept the need for change, and for them to adopt the selected change. Finally, the *refreezing* phase focuses on embedding the new change as part of organizational culture.

The intention of this proposed change at UC is to provide a small but impactful addition to the student experience, specifically a strategic change to the training process of peer support services. Given the specificity of the change, many people (e.g., incoming students and first-

time peer support people) will not have experienced the previous training program and philosophy. The new approach will need to target key stakeholders and returning peer leaders. Given the scale and precision of the intended change, Lewin's simple and clear model aligns nicely with the type of change being recommended. By including modern conceptualizations of Lewin's classic theory, it is predicted that this framework will help to guide the structure, goal-setting, and evaluation of the proposed change, thus increasing the likelihood that it will be adopted fully by the organization.

Authors such as Schein (2010) and Kang (2015) elaborated on Lewin's framework, synthesized it with other approaches, and included aspects of workplace culture within each phase. Kang (2015) presents numerous theories (Bullock & Batten, 1985; Kolb & Forhman, 1970; Kotter, 1998; Lippitt, Watson, Westley & Spalding, 1958; Whetten & Cameron, 2005) to help expand upon and clarify *unfreezing*. He illustrates how *unfreezing* is also described as need development, scouting, exploring, establishing urgency, and creating a positive climate. Schein (2010) argues that *unfreezing* is accomplished by presenting enough data to cause doubt about the current situation, redirecting to new goals and ideals, and creating a safe space for people to learn new skills, tools, or strategies. Given the amount of work currently being done at UC to contribute to the betterment of student mental wellness, it is important that this new change is presented as complimenting the work that is currently being done. If people feel that this proposal for change is disparaging of the current efforts, Schein argues that there is the possibility that people may repress the need to change if the recommendation creates anxiety or guilt. Addressing such feelings in a proactive way, and providing a safe space to allow for a new approach will be an important aspect of the *unfreezing* process.

The *change* phase will include a review and revision of the training documents and the education program of the trainers. This is the stage of change where new learning and growth occurs. Schein (2010) notes that different people may take different paths towards the identified goal, but he points out that the goal must be clear. This is consistent with the work of Kouzes and Posner (2012) who describe inspiring a shared vision and modeling the way forward as important practices of leading change. Kang (2015) shows how change can include creating a guideline, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the vision, empowering employees, generating short-term wins, and action. Though some of these aspects (such as developing a vision) are like the *unfreeze* process, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the vision helps to ensure that the change is accomplishing what it is intended to, and that the team of people mobilizing the change remain aligned and committed.

Finally, the *refreezing* phase will involve the implementation and monitoring of the peer support training and ensure that “the change is assimilated and the system re-enters a period of relative equilibrium” (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols, 2016, p. 59). Schein (2010) states that the change will become permanent when it is reinforced by results. Once reinforced, there is an opportunity for the change to become part of the broader UC culture. This is consistent with Kang (2015) who highlights that change includes integration, anchoring, and institutionalizing the positive change. This stage is crucial in an academic context because each year represents the start of a new cycle including the influx of new students, new faculty, employees returning from vacation, etc. Without the *refreezing* process, it is possible that the change would be quickly forgotten as the wave of one year ends and another begins.

The structure of Lewin’s three phase model flows nicely with this type of change (e.g., a new peer training program) in the academic context as the phases of the model can be aligned

with the cycle of the year at UC and the ebbs and flows of work volume for various stakeholders. Understanding the change in the context of these three phases helps to identify when each phase should happen within the academic year. Once timelines have been set, this model provides a framework for isolating check-points where the success of the change can be measured throughout its implementation. Finally, refreezing allows the institution to establish a new baseline from which future plans can be generated and further steps can be taken.

As suggested, the simplicity of this model is a strength in this context. Conceptualizing the change in three phases helps to articulate what is involved in the change without overcomplicating the intention of the change or the work required to implement it. The intended outcome of the model is for the change to be fully incorporated in the institution's functioning (Cawsey, et al., 2016), which aligns nicely with the goal of the intended change.

**Extending the theory.** Lewin's model provides a structure for designing and implementing a training program for the various peer leaders. Although these are important and useful steps, the model does not extend far enough to observe and measure other important aspects of success. The primary goal of this change is to have students learn skills that foster resiliency to stressful life circumstances including the transition to post-secondary education, and for them to then mobilize that knowledge when needed. Although Lewin's model provides a great structure for the process of internally adapting UC's training materials and processes, the theory needs to be extended, or complimented with additional models, to ensure that the incoming students are receiving all the desired benefits that this organizational change can provide.

Given UCs interest in research, there is an opportunity for the institution to adopt a familiar, and more traditional experimental approach when mobilizing this change. A pre-post



survey would allow the institution to develop an understanding of the resiliency of students as they enter, identify and monitor areas of concern, and demonstrate areas where students grow and develop. Psychometric measures such as the “Brief Resilience Scale” (BRS; Smith et al., 2008) are intended to assess resilience specifically as the ability to bounce back or recover from stress. This tool is used to validate models of resilience (along with other measures), has strong psychometric properties and is appropriate for use with students in the targeted age-range of most of the students who enter UC. Additionally, and importantly, it is very short. This six-question survey could be administered quickly, or added to other customer service scales already administered by the institution. Use of this measure would allow the institution (or an interested researcher) to compare the results of direct instruction to the model being used to frame the program.

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) has also taken an interest in resiliency in postsecondary and is in the process of conducting a study to evaluate the validity of the Resiliency Scale (RS; Wagnild & Young, 1993) in the Canadian postsecondary environment and it cites extremely strong psychometric properties. Utilization of this tool would allow UC to compare the results of its institution against those of other Canadian institutions as measured by HEQCO.

Qualitative data, from focus groups and interviews, could also be collected to ensure that the change is meeting the needs of the intended audience. Focus groups can be an effective way of gaining a wide range of information from respondents. The format allows for participants to disclose information that one may not get from individual interviews or surveys (Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley, & McKenna, 2017). Focus groups are also an excellent way for participants to gain support when discussing common issues. Ideas can be shared in a trusting environment,

concerns and personal issues can be raised without fear of being singled out or stigmatized. The opportunity for continued research may entice faculty members to participate in these activities. Further, additional research may serve as a means of educating the college more broadly about the change and the culture of resilience.

The next stage of the Organizational Improvement Plan reviews the current structure of the institution and looks for gaps between the desired and the current state of the institutional change proposed.

### **Critical Organizational Analysis**

This section of the OIP helps the key stakeholders identify where change needs to occur, to prioritize the change, and to recognize key strengths that will aid the institution in mobilizing and successfully implementing the desired PoP change. This information will support the mobilization for change by highlighting areas where the institution is agile and able to institute change quickly, and areas where the change process may be more complicated.

**Gap analysis.** There is currently tremendous work done at UC to ensure that the supports described in Chapter 1 (e.g., personal counselling, pastoral counselling, career supports, etc.) are marketed, promoted, and available to students. UC reports that the various service providers engage in ongoing collaboration with UC's Communications Department to ensure that awareness of these services is widely promoted. Despite the breadth of services, they are conceptualized by the college (and thus by the students) as separate. Together, these supports have the potential to produce outcomes for students that are greater than the sum of their parts. Each service provider separately works with individual students, helping them to build skills that, when combined, include the five associated resiliency skills of the Smith, et al. (2013) model (including mindfulness, mood clarity, purpose in life, optimism, and active coping).

These skills are considered foundational for all post-secondary students (see Figure 3 for the model).

Consequently, a gap analysis can be utilized to help determine areas of disconnect or ineffective service between the proposed model of resiliency and the services provided at UC. A gap analysis, as described by Cawsey, et al. (2016), includes a review of the cultural dynamic, structures, stakeholders, students, and change agents. An analysis of these areas will help to identify ways in which these student support services could collaborate to maximize efforts (e.g., ways they are not collaborating currently).

UC describes itself as a small affiliate college, and many employees began their employment at the institution when it was much smaller. The culture and values from that time still exist within the institution despite its near doubling in size. Although the “small community” ideal has advantages such as individualized approaches to student service, the institution has grown so that the volume of work caused by increased numbers has left gaps that were once filled by informal structures and relationships. Where once Counselling, Career Services, Pastoral Counselling, and Learning Skills would informally update each other on events and activities, the institution is now at a size where event titles are circulated via electronic newsletters, and the collegial conversations about events and their purpose occur less frequently.

An analysis of the structure of the institution reveals that there is one location for students to access Counselling, Career and Learning Skills, and separate places of contact for Writing Support, Pastoral Counselling, Academic Counselling, and Financial Counselling. Students are referred across services easily, but services are separate. Although collaboration exists between departments, common programming is not typical. Given the administrative structure of the institution, there are numerous stakeholders that would need to participate in this institutional

change. The Dean of Students, Campus Ministry, and department managers responsible for counselling, orientation week, and student council will need to participate, along with enrolment services.

The recipients of the intended change are the incoming students. As incoming students, the previous processes and services will be unknown to them. They will be entering post-secondary with varying backgrounds, so it will be important to have a base-line understanding of their current emotional readiness for their transition to this new environment. Refer to the Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation section in Chapter 3 for more information about measurement.

Finally, the change agents are the peer leaders on campus. Specifically, these groups include the Campus Tour Guides, the Orientation Leaders, Peer Mentors, Residence Advisors and Student Council. Extensive training is already provided to these groups, but the summer of 2015 was the first time at UC that a common training was delivered. Although this common training exists, there is an opportunity to include a common vision for the institution and extend beyond procedural regulations to include resiliency factors.

**Institutional mental health information.** UC conducted a Student Mental Health Survey in 2014 which was supervised by the office of the Dean of Students. The purpose of the survey was to determine what was causing students stress, and what support they wanted in order for them to best cope with that stress. The survey also queried students' understanding and awareness of the supports already available. The information was gathered in focus groups (65 participants) and in a written survey (147 respondents). The themes that emerged regarding student stress included Academics, School/Work/Life Balance, Transitioning to University, Relationships, and Finances. The survey uncovered several areas where students felt UC could

enhance its help and support. First, students requested more informal supports where they could connect with other students and participate in activities. Students also requested an increase in the visibility of services, potential technology enhancements for the organization and scheduling of appointments, events etc., and a greater connection between faculty members/class time and mental health and wellness activities. Finally, the survey uncovered areas where students were suggesting the need for supports they were seemingly unaware were already offered by the institution. There were some instances where students admitted to not having knowledge of the available supports offered at UC or the constituent institution. But even in cases where students felt knowledgeable of services and empowered to support incoming students, there was a tremendous amount of misinformation uncovered by the focus groups and the written survey.

The Mental Health Survey complements the information in Chapter One, where an outline of available supports and student service usage was provided as an overview. Also of note, student retention between year one and year two is an area of interest as cited in the 2015 Principal's report. This document indicates that retention of this cohort dipped to 76%. Unfortunately, information about the reason for this decline in registration is not available so it is not known if mental health issues played a part. Though measures of retention and service usage cannot be considered measures of student mental wellness, they can come together to help illustrate the picture of student experience at UC, and they are easy numbers to review as this institutional change is implemented.

### **Possible Solutions to Address the Problem of Practice**

This section reviews possible solutions to the problem of increasing student mental health concern. Three possible solutions are explored, and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach is described. Ultimately, one solution is recommended and will be used throughout the

rest of this document, including through the development and implementation of the plan for institutional change.

**Possible solution 1: Maintain the status quo.** At UC, a strong argument could be made to maintain the status quo. As described in Chapter 1, there is a broad range of student supports at the school including formal, informal, professionally organized, and peer-led. These activities, programs, and events occur throughout the year, are generally well attended, and feedback appears largely positive. Further, these programs are constantly evolving as members of student body change, thus allowing for a steady growth and development of activities.

Though students seemingly enjoy and appreciate these events, the activities that focus on mental health do not occur with a high degree of frequency throughout the orientation. Further, as noted in the institutional mental health information, the student leaders who are offering these activities have a varied and often inaccurate view of the types of mental health supports currently available at UC. Finally, though the current system has strengths, the need for student mental health support is continuing to increase. Thus a change needs to be considered that will improve these outlined shortcomings of the current system.

**Possible solution 2: More events during the orientation of new students.** It is possible that a solution to the problem of practice is to simply incorporate more of the events that focus on mental health awareness into the orientation programs. As noted in Chapter 1, UC provides many events and supports, and it could be argued that these could take a more prominent place throughout the orientation for new students. In fact, many post-secondary organizations have engaged in the types of events that are designed to reduce stress or raise awareness of what is commonly termed mental health. Mental health awareness weeks occurring in post-secondary institutions incorporate events such as mindfulness classes, physical activities such as exercise

classes, information sessions about depression/anxiety, visits from therapy dogs, etc. These events are intended to reduce stigma and reduce stress. Organizations, such as Jack.org (formerly the Jack Project), exist on several campuses with the goal of improving communications about mental health, reducing stigma, and fostering community. This project focuses on the post-secondary population and was developed in memory of a university student who completed suicide. At UC, and at its constituent institution, an online search for mental health supports appropriately directs students to campus and community services such as counselling, education about rights such as sexual violence policies, and general information about wellness

Though these programs and information bring numerous benefits to UC students and to Canadian campuses, there are some mental health issues that these interventions may not address, and specific services and supports may not be easily identified. Though events that focus on mental health can be important in reducing stigma and raising awareness, they also have the potential to cause confusion, as described in Chapter 1. It can be argued that ambiguity surrounding the term “mental health” may be causing issues of clarity across these various supports. As anti-stigma endeavours are blurred with wellness activities, the lines among disability, illness, wellness, and health seem to also become blurred. It is important that an approach to campus mental health be as holistic as possible and increase the clarity of the purpose of various services that are available to students.

**Possible solution 3: Resiliency—A strategic framework.** In Chapter 1, concepts of resiliency are defined and discussed. The conceptualization of resilience is in line with national definitions of mental health and focuses on the building of skills that foster independence rather than the reactive approach of supporting students in solving problems that have already occurred.

Fostering resiliency in students by teaching that it has the potential to improve the wellness of students is proactive. An agreement towards the use of one resiliency framework, specifically the Smith et al., (2013) framework, would provide a strategic approach for student services. This strategic framework could then be marketed, allowing all at the institution (students and staff alike) to have a common understanding of the various supports and how they work together to support student wellness. This common language could be leveraged to better market student supports. Finally, the student volunteers, if trained to support and foster resilience in incoming students, would learn that these skills improve mental wellness. The adoption of a strategic framework that focuses on resiliency fulfills the needs of the institution and has the potential to accomplish the desired outcomes of this organizational change. Before moving forward, however, it is important to fully consider this recommendation and determine if this approach is suitable.

**Consideration of the proposed solution: Resiliency as a framework for change.**

Though some of the benefits of adopting a resiliency framework have been discussed, it is important that the approach of adopting resiliency as a framework for change is fully considered, including a discussion of the potential shortcomings of the approach. Other models of resiliency have been developed, such as Hammond and Zimmerman (2010) who included intrinsic and extrinsic factors related to resiliency. Extrinsic factors included the role of adult relationships, family, peers, and school in multiple capacities. Intrinsic factors included aspects such as planning, self-efficacy/esteem, spirituality, empathy, resistance skills, etc. These intrinsic and extrinsic factors come together in a holistic way to help practitioners work with clients to develop and build upon skills to foster resiliency. Though this strength-based approach aligns with the benefits of resiliency discussed in this chapter, much of the research used to support this



understanding of resilience was focused on children generally, or specific populations of children, such as those raised in foster care, or those with profound medical conditions.

Another reason for the selection of this resiliency framework is its focus on teachable skills. Unlike factors such as family support and spirituality, the selected model concentrates on areas that are teachable in the context of a post-secondary setting. Though the model may be omitting strengths that may significantly predict resilience in a very practical way, it addresses multiple aspects that significantly relate to resiliency in the targeted population.

The remainder of this document will discuss various methods for planning and implementing a resiliency training program for peer support leaders at UC. This program will strategically implement the resiliency framework, providing students with a common understanding of mental health and available services at UC. It will also teach skills intended to support mental wellbeing. The development of this training will be done by leveraging the expertise of professionals already working with students at UC. The collaboration of these student support professionals represents a holistic and proactive approach to student mental health.

### **Leadership Approaches to Change**

Leadership in an educational context can be challenging. Each incoming class of students brings to the institution a unique set of personalities, experiences, engagement, and needs. The proposed institutional change is intended to address this evolving student group by bringing together various departments and individual expertise to enhance the effectiveness of the various programs dealing with student mental health by adopting an agreed-upon organizational change. To accomplish this task, an authentic belief in the vision needs to be communicated across several teams who will be expected to contribute to the creation of a

training program. Further, the vision/change will need to be adaptable to the varying needs of each incoming student cohort, or it will soon become obsolete. This will require a flexible management style, including aspects of adaptive leadership, team/shared leadership, and authentic leadership approaches.

**Adaptive leadership.** The adaptive leadership theory and its approach to change is important for two primary reasons. First, though the resiliency framework provides a broad approach to addressing the mental wellness of students, each group participating in the development of the new program has expertise, and will have valuable contributions which may extend beyond the theory. Further, as noted, the strengths and needs (resiliency) of each student cohort, and the individuals within each cohort, may vary. Thus, adaptability when considering the implementation of the developed curriculum may also be important.

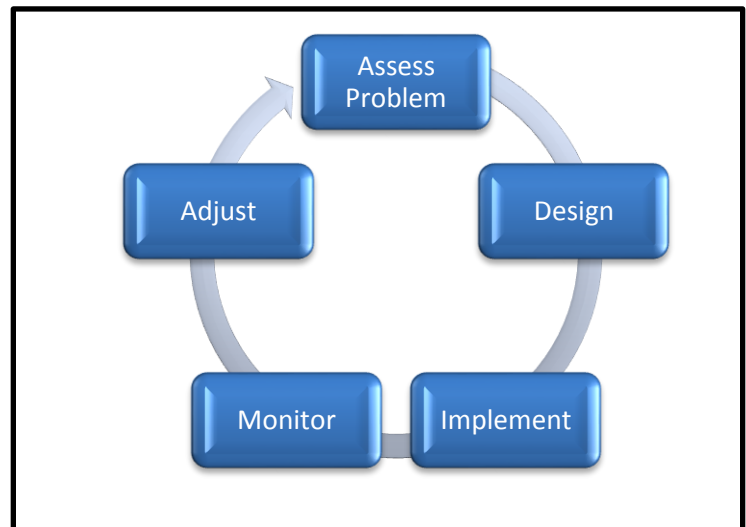
Generally, adaptive leadership focuses on the processes by which people adjust in a changing environment (Northouse, 2015). Adaptive leadership requires six skills including:

1. a big picture approach,
2. identifying challenges, regulating distress,
3. maintaining disciplined focus on the required change,
4. managing uncertainty during change,
5. providing structure to peoples' work, and
6. listening to ideas with an open mind.

Embedded in this approach is an ongoing process combining assessment with management with the goal of understanding the complexities of system dynamics while achieving intended outcomes (Gunderson, 2015). The actions of a leader then, need to be robust and consider uncertainties among alternative explanations of the variables surrounding the intended change and determine what actions will help test and reduce those uncertainties

(Walters, 1986). Though models of adaptive leadership such as those presented in Figure 6 help with understanding the adaptive approach, these models rarely present a straight path to change. Risk-taking and adaptive experimentation are hallmarks of adaptive leadership, though the objective is to only include enough complexity to capture essential dynamics as not to overcomplicate the change (Clark, Jones, & Holling, 1979, Walters, 1986). An integrative and holistic approach to this POP provides the underpinnings for the adaptive approach, because surprises are inevitable and knowledge will always be incomplete.

Figure 6. Model of Adaptive Leadership



*Note: Adapted from Williams, B.K, Szaro, R.C. & Shapiro, C.D. (2009) Adaptive management: The U.S. department of the interior technical guide. Adaptive Management Working Group, Washington, DC.*

There are also some potential concerns with adaptive leadership, and aspects of the approach that may limit institutional learning. Gunderson (2015) summarizes key concerns at the broad and individual levels. He argues that in scientific and technical communities, the adaptive leadership approach may be seen as threatening to traditional research and scholarly approaches. During broad institutional change, there is an inability to control key variables, and some may have an unwillingness to engage in approaches that are “research-like” and do not adhere to the strict standards of traditional research practices. He also argues that the cost of experimentation is sometimes seen as prohibitive, and adds to a fear of failure, thus continuing to limit the commitment and risk-taking necessary for learning to occur.

To address the described potential concerns of the adaptive approach, alternative leadership strategies can be infused into the approach to increase the likelihood of a successful institutional change. As identified in the Gap Analysis, there are multiple departments with varying levels of expertise. To facilitate the sharing of this information, a team or shared approach can be used to support different groups as they develop their section of a resiliency curriculum, while addressing some of the limitations of the adaptive approach.

**Team leadership.** The team approach to leadership lends itself nicely to this proposed institutional change as this approach requires ongoing, simultaneous influences from multiple team members (Pearce, 2004, p. 48). In the context of this OIP, multiple members will be helpful in contributing to the development of a resiliency program, and supporting the unfolding of that curriculum to incoming students. Though the recommended institutional change itself is arguably simple, the development of a curriculum is a complex task that will require input from the numerous experts.

By promoting the sharing of information within a team, it is argued that there is an increase in individuals' motivation, team cohesion, team consensus, satisfaction (Bergman et al., 2012), and ultimately performance (e.g., Boies, Lvina, & Martens, 2010; Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007; Pearce & Sims, 2002). Unlike adaptive leadership, team leadership is a unique style of leadership and is more process oriented (Northouse, 2015). Its flat organizational structure lends itself to faster response capabilities. In this way, the flexibility provided by this approach is very complimentary to adaptive practices. In this approach, the leader focuses on the functioning and effectiveness of the team.

Overall, team leadership connects strongly with attitudinal outcomes, behavioral processes, and team emergent states (Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). Additionally, the effects

of shared leadership are more strongly observed when the work of team members is more complex (Kleingeld, van Mierlo, & Arends, 2011), like developing a curriculum. These aspects of this approach connect with the proposed institutional change and help to offset the concerns of the adaptive approach.

**Authentic leadership.** Given the importance of mental health, and the nature of the desired outcomes, it could be argued that authenticity be an important component of this change. Further, the variability associated with adaptive leadership may be easier to navigate if the team believed in the authenticity of the leadership. For these reasons, authentic leadership should also be discussed and remain in the consciousness of the stakeholders during the planning, implementation and monitoring of the proposed change.

Although authentic leadership may appear to be an intuitive concept, Northouse (2015) notes that the process of authentic leadership is difficult to define and characterize. Northouse describes definitions that focus on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and developmental attributes of a leader, and the impacts of those aspects on the approach to leadership. In short, authentic leaders are followed, in large part because of their ability to demonstrate characteristics such as self-awareness, a strong moral perspective, and relational transparency. These abilities are continually developed and applied during a change for the common good as they serve others.

At first glance, the individualized focus of authentic leadership may appear to be at odds with the approach of team leadership. However, Steffens, Mols, Haslam, and Okimoto, (2016) argue that these viewpoints are complementary. Many leaders may construct their sense of self based on individualized characteristics such as those proposed by Northouse, and on the basis of who they are as members of a distinct collective team. In turn, it is argued that followers may make sense of leaders' authenticity from not only the leaders' personal traits but also with

reference to a collective as well. Members will be more likely to follow a leader who is seen to champion the collective interests of the group. Moreover, their research suggests that a leader who advances collective interests is regarded as more authentic (Steffens et al., 2016).

Taken together, these three approaches to leadership (namely adaptive, team, and authentic) are appropriate leadership practices when considering the dynamic nature of this institution, the collaborative process required to implement the proposed change, and the sensitivity of the problem of practice being addressed. Although very different, a change agent using these leadership approaches can be effective in moving this organizational change forward.

### **Communicating the Need for Change**

The connection between leadership and communication is so closely tied that it may become difficult to separate a communication strategy from a leadership approach. For this reason, it can be argued that leadership approaches are often thought of to be enough on their own, and communication strategies are typically overlooked (Tibble, 1997). This can prove problematic for any organizational change as the impact of culture on communication is so important to the implementation of change (Benita, 2003). Included in this section are strategies for developing the message to be communicated, the behavioural components of delivering the message, and the effect of culture as it relates to communication.

Mayfield and Mayfield (2017) have divided the research on leadership communication into two approaches. First is a traditional approach to leadership communication, which is used when leadership is individually centred and maintains a position of power. In the context of this OIP, more collaborative approaches are the intended leadership style, so the research which focuses on this more traditional leadership communication will not be discussed in the communication plan development. The secondary approach described by Mayfield and Mayfield

(2017) is associated with shared and fluid leadership styles where the process of communication is associated with organic discovery. In these cases, the author argues that perception of leadership communication, message comprehension, acceptance, and support of strategy implementation are of primary importance.

**The development of the message.** As the change agent develops the message to be disseminated about the project, it is imperative that she/he considers the experience that the message generates for the intended recipient (Ishizaki, 2013). For example, winning a hockey game can be described in terms of an experience, or in terms of statistics, each fostering a different meaning. Determining the message based on the experience of the recipient forces the communicator to attend to the object of focus, and the audience who is focused on the object. These considerations highlight two potential concerns with communication as it relates to this project.

First, communication about mental health related concerns needs to consider that the recipient of the message who is supporting students may also be experiencing a mental health concern. This assumption may influence how the intended change is framed. Second, it is important to articulate the message about improving mental health supports with an understanding of the perceptions of the employees within those supports, and the perceptions of students who utilized said supports. Attention to the object, focus, and subject of the message can change the experience for the recipient. The change agent will need to evaluate his or her discourse for the general coherence and fidelity while ensuring that the messages are aligned with the values and beliefs of the intended change. This fluid style of developing a message complements the flexible leadership approach selected for mobilizing this institutional change.

**The behavioural components of delivering the message.** The connection between leadership behaviour and communication can also be highlighted when trying to relay intended messages. It can be argued that effective communicators should effectively lead committees and teams, actively pursue opportunities, present ideas effectively, and self-manage emotions and reactions during meetings (Johnston & Joyner, 2005). To accomplish this, the change agent must be able to articulate the overall vision of the project, hold a meeting only if necessary (i.e., respecting peoples' time), update people between meetings, demonstrate authenticity, and adhere to punctuality. These traits compliment the leadership approaches described in the previous section. Also of importance is effective face-to-face communication, as this can be considered the impetus for true transformational change (Men, 2014).

**The effect of workplace culture on communication.** De Long and Fahey (2000), identified aspects of organizational culture that influence communication as it relates to sharing knowledge. They concluded that the nature of the *knowledge in question, the motivation to share, culture of the work environment, and the opportunities to share* knowledge are all interconnected. These factors shape the institutional assumptions about which types of knowledge are important and impact the relationship between the perception of knowledge and sharing across the institution. Thus, these aspects of communication contribute to the workplace norms that determine the willingness of individuals to share knowledge with the broader organization (Staples & Jarvenpaa, 2001).

The *nature of knowledge* can play an important role in communication. Knowledge is increasingly perceived as being commercially valuable, and its ownership is being recognized by both individuals and the organizations with which they work (Brown & Woodland, 1999; Staples & Jarvenpaa, 2001; Weiss, 1999). When individuals perceive that the knowledge they



possess is a valuable commodity, knowledge sharing becomes a process mediated by decisions about what knowledge to share, when to share, and who to share it with (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000). This sense of ownership comes from the fact that in some settings, individual knowledge is linked to status, career prospects, and individual reputations (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000). The sharing of such knowledge is a complex process that involves many aspects including the extent to which individuals perceive themselves to be valued by their organization (Jones & Jordan, 1998).

Closely related to the nature of knowledge is the *motivation to share* knowledge. If individuals perceive that power comes from the knowledge they possess, it is likely to lead to knowledge hoarding instead of knowledge sharing (Davenport, 1997; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). In a competitive environment, withholding knowledge from those considered competitors is often regarded as being useful to attaining one's goals (Pfeffer, 1980). Power politics is therefore an important aspect of the *culture of the work environment* that impacts knowledge sharing in organizations (Weiss, 1999). An important part of the communication plan at UC will need to be the recognition of the role of intellectual ownership as it relates to the sharing of information since this may impact the willingness of the various departments to contribute their knowledge and expertise. Failure to manage the politics of information could cause collaborative efforts to unravel (Davenport, Eccles, & Prusak, 1992).

Finally, *opportunities to share* knowledge in organizations can be both formal and informal in nature, and both can be crucial in this sharing (Bartol & Srivastava 2002; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Jones & Jordan, 1998; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Pan & Scarbrough, 1999; Rulke & Zaheer, 2000; Truran, 1998). Facilitation of face-to-face communication allows for the building of trust, and the development of respect and friendship, which in turn

is critical to sharing knowledge (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Granovetter (1992) termed this “relational embeddedness,” which is the kind of personal relationships that people develop when they interact with each other over a period of time.

Taken together, the communication plan for the OIP needs to be intimately connected to the culture of the workplace as culture shapes assumptions about which knowledge is important, and it creates the context for social interaction (De Long & Fahey, 2000). Thus, the communication plan will need to frame the sharing of knowledge as positive, provide rewards for contribution to the project, and provide opportunities for formal and informal sharing of knowledge. A specific communication plan for UC utilizing the above information will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

## **Conclusion**

In Chapter 1, I emphasized just how intricate the concepts of mental health can be, and how important it is to make changes to mental health programming while considering the broader institutional structure. By contrast, the models provided in this chapter that outline *how* to change provide a structure that is clear and concise. This will help to ensure that the intended path to change is articulated clearly to all stakeholders.

Various methods of mobilizing the change will ensure continued interest and motivation of these individuals and groups. As noted in Chapter 1, there are multiple administrative and student-led structures on campus already supporting student mental health. Understanding specifically *what* to change will provide clarity for the broad range of existing supports. This is accomplished through the analyses that reviewed the gaps within the institution and the communication strategies necessary to articulate the plan.

As I was selecting the various leadership theories to include in this document, I started to believe that the most important is the active involvement and inclusivity of multiple voices. As I have suggested throughout this document, I am hoping for this proposed framework to have broad implications within the institution. I believe that the method of accomplishing the change is often as important as the change itself. In other words, if the intended outcome is a more inclusive and supportive climate for students, then the process that you use to accomplish the change should be inclusive and supportive. The models and leadership approaches that have been discussed in this chapter allow for the leader of this change to “walk the talk.” In Chapter 3, I will bring together the vision for change described in Chapter 1, and the Change Plan described in this chapter, by discussing specific approaches for implementation.

### **Chapter Three: Implementation, Evaluation, and Communication**

This chapter bridges the gap between theory and practice by utilizing theoretical frameworks of mental health resiliency to describe a plan for change implementation and then it outlines methods of monitoring the proposed change. Leadership ethics are discussed and, given the sensitivity of the topic of student mental health, ethical standards will be an important aspect of this organizational change. Communication and knowledge sharing strategies are developed in a practical way, suggesting a series of strategies that can be utilized by the change agents to mobilize this change at different levels of the institution. Finally, potential next steps and future considerations are discussed.

#### **Change Implementation Plan**

Implementing the student support program at UC can be understood as mobilizing Lewin's model, or bringing it to life. This will start with *unfreezing* the current ways of thinking about the institutional responses to mental health and aligning people with an agreed-upon framework. Creating the *change* will include program development, and *re-freezing* will involve the implementation and incorporation of the new training process of the peer leaders.

It is recommended that someone be hired to oversee this project, or that a leader from within the institution be allocated time specifically for the management of this project. It will be important that this individual have an understanding of mental health, have a collaborative approach to leadership, and be well versed in the political climate of the institution. For the remainder of this document, the person responsible for the oversight and accountability of this project and the follow-through of these phases will be referred to as the project lead. This person will be the primary change agent. She/he will play a crucial role in communicating with stakeholders, chairing meetings, bringing together the various experts to create the resiliency

curriculum, and maintaining accountability and transparency to the students, the organization, and community. There are several important aspects to consider when selecting this project lead. This person will need to possess the requisite knowledge about student mental health issues, he/she must be known and respected by the various departments participating in the proposed change, and must be a good communicator, facilitator, and leader. To increase the likelihood of success in this position, this individual should also be allotted time to gain information about resiliency and project management. Additionally, feedback should be provided to this individual throughout the course of the project by all involved (Rees & Ed, 2001).

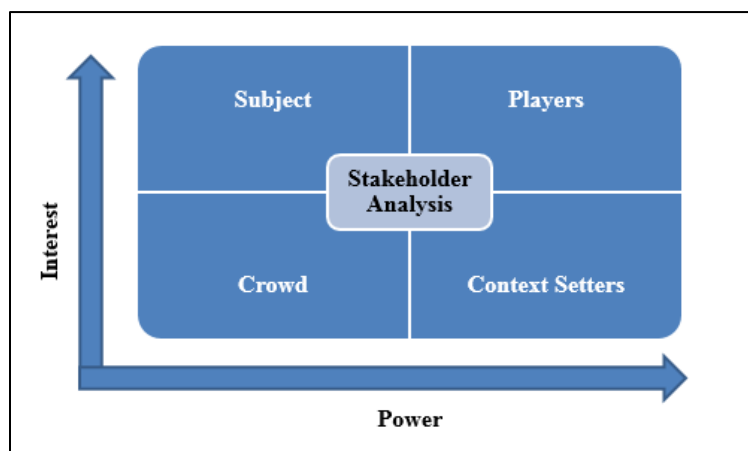
**The Development of Stakeholder Groups.** As mentioned in Chapter Two, the unfreezing phase will focus on ensuring stakeholder buy-in, articulating the message of mental health and resiliency, and managing doubt. This change plan represents the merging of multiple student supports, and as such, stakeholder groups will need to be brought together. Though the identification and selection of these groups may seem straightforward, the work of Paul Nutt (2002) indicates that this may not be the case. He asserts that half of new departmental decisions fail (i.e., are not implemented, only partially implemented, or otherwise produce poor results) because the leaders fail to attend adequately to the interests and information of key individuals in the organization. Thus, for this change to be implemented successfully, it could be argued that the networks of stakeholders will be at least as important, if not more important, than hierarchies within the institution (Powell, 1990).

To determine who to invite to the stakeholder groups, it is first important to operationalize what a stakeholder group is. There are two authors with very congruent definitions of stakeholder groups appropriate for this OIP. First, a definition offered by Freeman (1984) states that a stakeholder group includes “any group or individual who can affect or is

affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (p. 46). These groups can also be thought of as including "all parties who will be affected by or will affect [the organization's] strategy" (Nutt & Backoff, 1992, p. 439). These definitions are important as they help the leader of this change to consider a broad array of people and groups as stakeholders, including the nominally powerless. By giving weight and voice to all levels of the organization, these working definitions of stakeholder groups align with UC's institutional mission and vision, which is democratic in nature and thoughtful about social justice issues. This broad understanding of stakeholder groups can be balanced by limiting involvement to those who have information that cannot be gained otherwise and those whose participation is necessary to ensure successful implementation of initiatives (Jones, 1995).

To support people in effectively striking this balance, Ackermann and Eden (2001) developed a Power Interest Grid, a helpful tool in the development of stakeholder groups. This grid, seen in Figure 7, includes four quadrants where potential stakeholders are ranked in the

Figure 7. Stakeholder Analysis: The Power Interest Grid



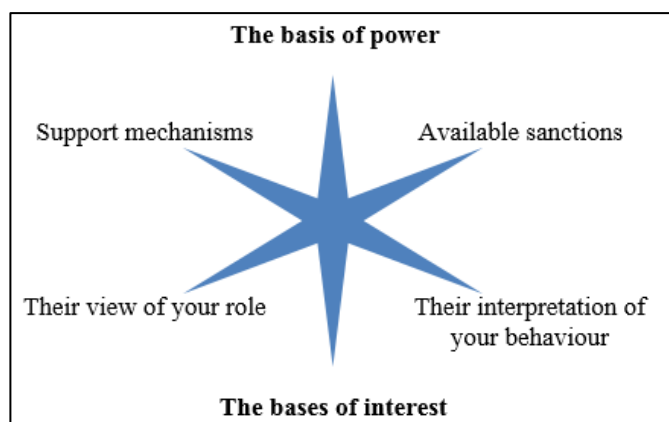
*Note. Adapted from Ackermann, F., & Eden, C. (2001). Stakeholders Matter: Techniques for their identification and management. Department of Management Science, University of Strathclyde.*

areas of both interest in the proposed topic and power to implement change. Consequently, when considering who is needed as a stakeholder and what each role will be, the information about institutional structure from Chapter One becomes helpful. As various people, departments, and groups are added to the chart, clarity is gained

who is most interested and most powerful with respect to student wellness and change plan implementation.

The next stage of the development process includes the creation of a star diagram (also

Figure 8. Stakeholder Analysis: Star Diagram



*Note. This figure was adapted from Ackermann, F., & Eden, C. (2001). Stakeholders Matter: Techniques for their identification and management. Department of Management Science, University of Strathclyde.*

developed by Ackermann and Eden, 2001

and shown in Figure 8), which helps to

determine basis of power. For example, an

individual or group may be able to provide

support for the change, or they may be able

to slow or even stop its progress. This

diagram provides a framework for

considering the bases of the individual or

group's interest in the topic of student

mental health. This is done by considering

each stakeholder's interests and goals, their

possible bases of power including support mechanisms as well as the negative power bases, and

by connecting these dimensions to other key stakeholders to spot trends.

The results of this process for UC indicate trends that relate to power. Some members will be important to this change as their approval and support for the project will be required for implementation. There are also trends that relate the bases of interest to the skills and training of potential stakeholders. These individuals will be crucial in the creation and implementation of the program itself. Finally, as per the working definition of stakeholder groups, students will be in receipt of the resiliency program, thus requiring a voice in the program development. Further, it is important that they are motivated to receive this information for this project to be successful.

This diversity of power and interest warrants the creation of three stakeholder groups: an Advisory Committee, a Working Group, and a team of Student Champions.

*The advisory committee.* The Advisory Committee is the first of the groups created and will include representatives from the various departments that supervise peer-led support (i.e., Registrar's Office, Dean of Students, Academic Dean, Library, Finance, and Campus Ministry). Faculty work with students closely in their role; therefore a representative from the faculty group is included. A community mental health specialist may be helpful in providing an objective perspective of the program and in identifying any areas of concern. Finally, it is important to include the student voice on this committee. This Advisory Committee will play a crucial role in ensuring that the plan aligns with the strategic direction and vision for the college. They will also be able to provide feedback and guidance on the project work plan, and help to identify areas where other work occurring within UC may complement and/or overlap with the work of this change initiative. Finally, they can advise on the dissemination of knowledge, resources, and outcomes that derive from the project. This final point is an important part of the re-freezing process, and will be helpful in determining any future roll-out and/or follow through that may extend from this project.

A successful first meeting of this advisory group would address:

- a) alignment of all with the change vision/understanding of mental health;
- b) agreement to pilot a resiliency training program, and;
- c) allocation of representatives from the various departments to form the Working Group, whose goal would be to develop and implement a resiliency program.

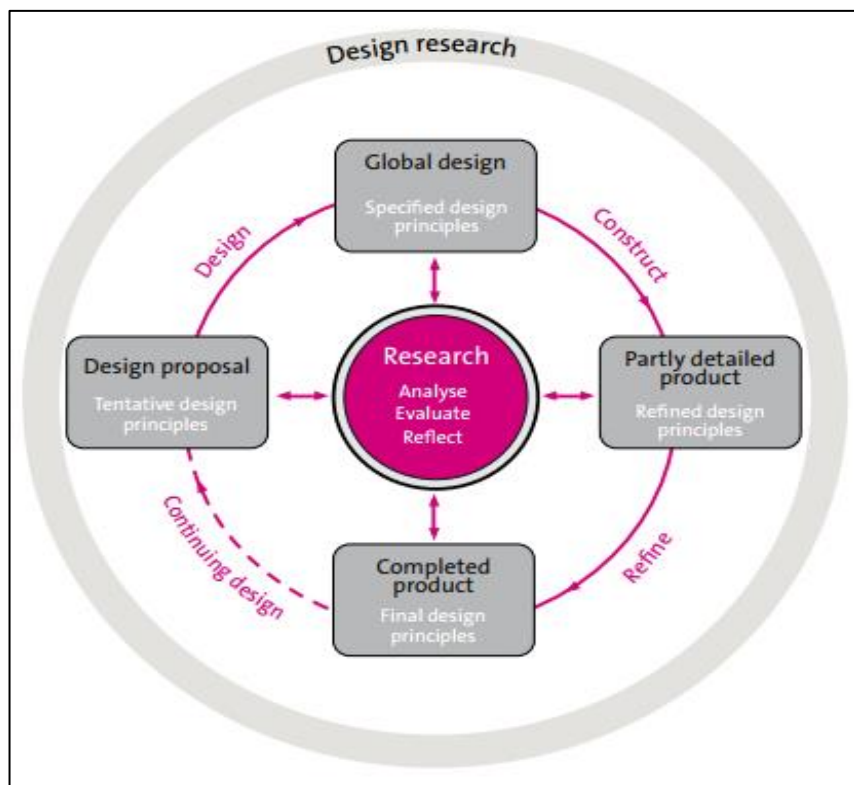
This step may present a challenge as the alignment with a common vision was identified as an area of concern in the Gap Analysis in Chapter 2. Also of note is the concern of strained resources as outlined by the Change Readiness measure in Chapter 1. It will be important for the project lead to be prepared to address these potential concerns.



Though goal-directed conversation is important, Collins (2005) notes the positive impact that “people-first thinking” can have. As such, it is crucial to understand the challenges of student mental health from the perspective of the Advisory Committee as it will provide valuable information and help create buy-in. This people-first approach can also create an environment of positivity, urgency, and exploration which is crucial to the *unfreezing* process. The development of the Advisory stakeholder group, and the vision for a successful first meeting is in line with the adaptive approach to leadership, described in Chapter Two. To help ensure the continued interest of this committee, follow-up will be important and can occur in a method and at a frequency determined by them.

**The working group.** Representatives from personal counselling, pastoral counselling,

Figure 9. Design Research Process



Retrieved from  
<http://downloads.slo.nl/Documenten/educational-design-research-part-a.pdf>

career services, financial counselling, academic advising, and learning skills will all be crucial to the development of this new program. A faculty member from the pedagogy committee will also be a valuable contributor. Time will be needed for these individuals to attend a total of 8 weekly meetings, six hours of independent curriculum

development, and three hours of review (adapted from information posted by the Higher Education Research Institute [Hurtado, Eagan, Pryor, Whang, & Tran, 2012] and expanded to include time for collaboration). This work should occur over the course of two months to develop the curriculum. Additionally, one full workday will be needed to pilot the project with Student Champions. The training/implementation of the plan will occur at the common training, an event already attended by many of these individuals. As such, there would be no net loss of time in this instance.

### **The Change Process / Plan**

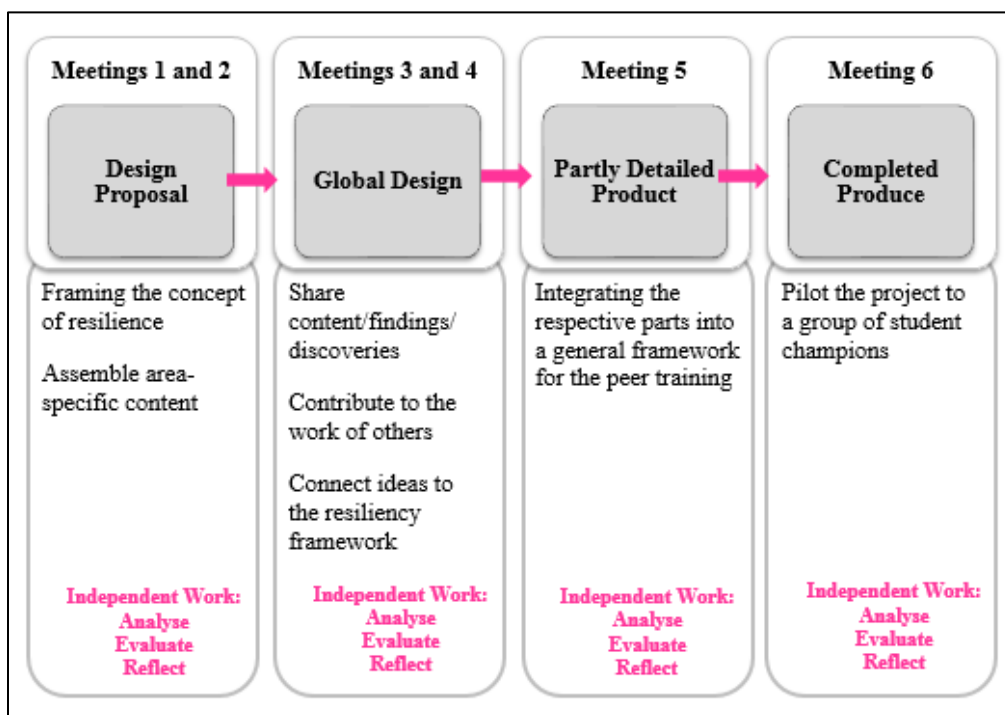
The change process will be driven by the Working Group of this project. As per the meeting with the advisory committee, eight meetings will be scheduled to plan and implement this curriculum. These eight meetings will follow the research design process outlined by van den Akker, Bannan, Kelly, Nieveen & Plomp (2013) and can be seen in Figure 9. The authors describe a system where a project starts with a design proposal including tentative design principals and gradually expands through four phases until it results in a completed product. Each meeting is designed to support the members of the Working Group to the next phase of the model. This process is intended to be adaptive and consultative, thus connecting nicely with the approaches to implementing this change, and providing the opportunity to monitor the program throughout each stage of its evolution.

**The change process in action.** Figure 10 shows how the model for design research will be implemented. The first two of the eight meetings will frame and define the concept of resilience, as described in Chapter One. The faculty member from this group will provide information about pedagogy and curriculum development. After this, members of the Working Group will be asked to individually spend two or three hours to assemble content from their area

of speciality that will contribute to the larger resiliency framework and bring this information back to the next group meeting. They will be asked to consider how the resiliency framework can be used to describe the area in which they work. This question can be posed at their weekly department meetings and can be considered throughout the week.

At the next two meetings, members can share content/findings/discoveries. Discussion

Figure 10. The Model for Design Research in Action



*Note. Expanded from Van den Akker, et al. (2013). Educational design research: An introduction. [Adobe Digital Editions version]. Retrieved from <http://downloads.slo.nl/Documenten/educational-design-research-part-a.pdf>*

will include how each area can contribute to the work of others. Curriculum design and any areas of concern will be discussed. After this, working group members will take the discussion and feedback and develop their sections of the training. Independent work and consultation across respective departments will facilitate the development of content relevant to student mental health supports. Implementation of the information provided by the faculty member will be important in utilizing this time

will include how each area can contribute to the work of others. Curriculum design and any areas of concern will be discussed. After this, working group members will take the discussion and feedback and develop their

effectively. The fifth meeting will focus on integrating the respective parts into a general framework for the peer training.

Possible challenges to this group effort, including knowledge sharing and mobilization, are discussed in Chapter Two. The team leadership approach is crucial in ensuring ongoing input and participation from members. It is anticipated that promoting the sharing of information across a team, and providing opportunities for formal and informal discussion and feedback will increase individual motivation, team cohesion, team consensus, and satisfaction (Bergman, Rentsch, Small, Davenport, & Bergman, 2012).

*The group of student champions.* Once the Working Group feels confident with their curriculum, a pilot presentation can occur. After this pilot session the third group of stakeholders, the UC's Student Champions, will provide feedback regarding how the program will be received by student leaders. These student stakeholders include orientation leaders, peer mentors, residence advisors, student council, and campus tour guides. Another two meetings of the Working Group to utilize the feedback will then finalize the curriculum. In addition to providing feedback and the opportunity for a pilot of the curriculum, the Student Champions will be vital in the process of monitoring and evaluation, discussed next.

### **Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation**

Given the sensitivity of the topic of student mental health, the process of monitoring and evaluating any project with this focus is paramount. First a description of the current information available about student mental wellness at UC will provide a baseline understanding of current students. Second, additional data may be needed to improve or enhance this baseline understanding of students at UC. Next, monitoring will occur throughout the process of curriculum development. For this, the process used in the design and development of the

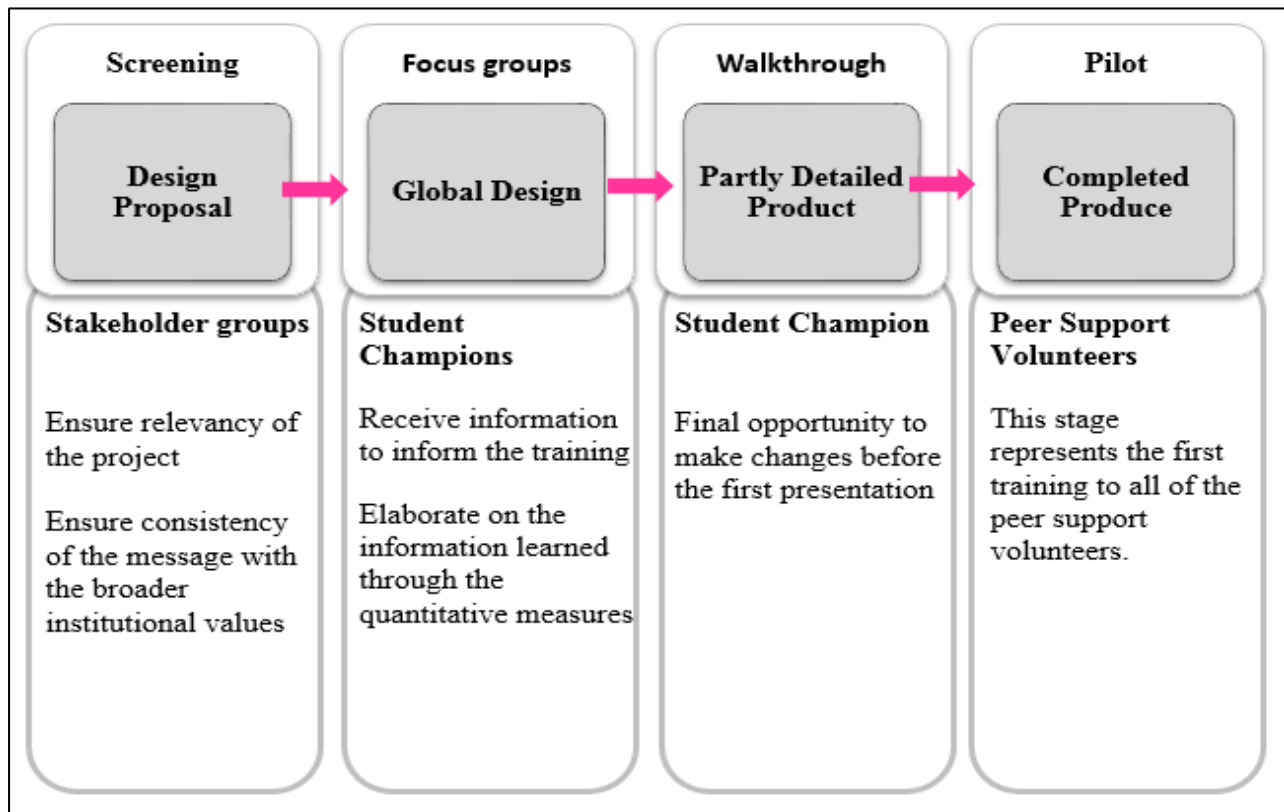
curriculum (van den Akker et al., 2013) is utilized throughout the monitoring and evaluation process.

**Baseline information.** To gauge the effectiveness of this change, it is first important to determine students' current level of resilience, their understanding of mental wellness, and their knowledge of available services prior to the delivery of the program. As outlined in Chapter 2, UC conducted a review of mental health on campus. This review determined that the stressors experienced by UC students are similar to those reported in the literature review in Chapter 2. Though they did not have a common understanding of mental health, UC students articulated a desire for more informal supports where they could connect with other students, and an increase in the visibility of the formal services that are already offered. This review also uncovered that many students were seemingly unaware of many existing supports, even across groups of student leaders who felt knowledgeable about the amenities on campus. Additionally, UC has retention measures and information about service usage that are not direct measures of resiliency, but contribute to the overall understanding of health on campus (this information will be available to the Change Team).

Baseline resiliency information is currently not available, but the Brief Resiliency Scale described in Chapter 2 can easily be administered as students are registering in courses. This information would allow for a direct comparison of student resilience before and after engagement with the peer support leaders.

**Monitoring the change process.** In the Change Plan/Process section, the model that was used to guide the development of the curriculum includes several checkpoints that will be useful for ensuring that the project is developing on schedule and is fulfilling its intended purpose. This model builds-in opportunities for screening, focus groups, walkthroughs, and an opportunity to

Figure 11. The Model for Design Research Monitoring and Evaluating



*Note. Expanded from Van den Akker, et al. (2013). Educational design research: An introduction. [Adobe Digital Editions version]. Retrieved from <http://downloads.slo.nl/Documenten/educational-design-research-part-a.pdf>*

try out, or acutely implement the curriculum and gauge its success (van den Akker, et al., 2013).

The structure provides a breadth of monitoring activities that will be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the curriculum and its implementation can be seen in Figure 11. Monitoring of the development of this program will help to substantiate the program effectiveness, and may support the implementation of a resilience program across campus.

The *screening* of the project is built into the implementation plan by the creation of an Advisory Committee and the inclusion of a mental health expert. The individuals included in this committee will help to ensure the relevancy of the project and the consistency with the

broader institutional values. The collaborative structure of the working group meetings will help to ensure that ideas are brought forward and reviewed by the group. It is important to note that this working group includes professionals who work with students in a variety of capacities across campus. The individuals in this group will also help to screen the ideas that will be included in this plan.

The *focus groups* with students will be an important part of the evaluation process, and can also serve as an opportunity to share information about mental health. Utilizing a framework for focus groups entitled *deliberative discussion* ensures a blend of education and discussion (Rothwell, Anderson & Botkin, 2015). In this type of focus group, one professional will provide information about mental health and resilience. This will ensure that all of the participants have a common understanding of the topic being discussed. Another professional will then facilitate conversation about the topic, thus giving the focus group participants the opportunity to share their ideas about the project and about student wellness in a focused and informed way.

The *walkthrough* is an opportunity for the working group and representatives of the target group (i.e., the student champions) to go through the prototype curriculum as a relatively small group. It is important for the change leader to be prepared with checklists to ensure that information is not missing, and to include time for the interviewing and observing of participants/respondents during the presentation. Feedback about the training can be provided to the working group by the student champions, and this information can then be incorporated into the project. This will be the final opportunity to make changes before the pilot.

The walkthrough can also utilize a written feedback form. Although this is not necessary at this stage of program development, a form will be helpful when evaluating the overall change after the pilot of the project. If the feedback form is completed at the time of the walkthrough,

the student champions can provide opinions about the form as well as the program. A written feedback form, including aspects of self-assessment (reflection), leader and peer dialogue, clarification about what constitutes a good performance, and opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance (as suggested by Freeman & Dobbins, 2013) could provide a great deal of information and may be more effective if it is tailored to the student group. Thus, the walkthrough will provide an opportunity to receive student feedback on the overall materials and presentation, and in addition, it will serve as a pilot for evaluation / feedback.

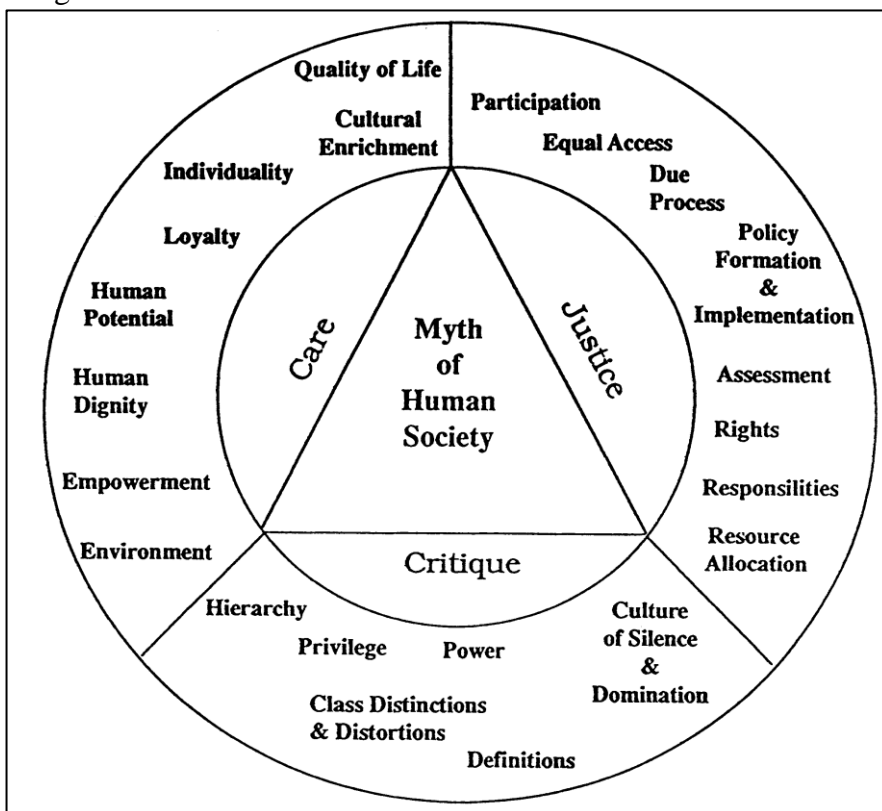
**Evaluation of the change.** The pilot will be the first presentation of the new curriculum to the new group of student leaders. Likely occurring in early September before term begins, this represents the fruition of program development and the final phase of the change process. The curriculum will be delivered and feedback forms will be administered. Following the delivery of this pilot, focus groups and the Brief Resiliency Scale (Smith et al., 2008) will be repeated / re-administered to help determine the effectiveness and pervasiveness of the overall intervention. Perspectives of the different departments can be gained through consultation with the Working Group and Advisory Committee, and will provide indications of the potential success of the project. The final stage of Lewin's framework, specifically *refreezing*, will be discussed in the communication planning phase.

### **Leadership Ethics and Organizational Change**

Reasons for the importance of review and monitoring of this project have been discussed, and it is for these same reasons that ethical considerations are so important. Starratt (1991) proposed a Framework for Ethical Consideration that is shown in Figure 12, and brings together three theories of ethics and frames them in the educational context: critique, justice, and care.



Figure 12. Framework for Ethical Considerations



*Note. Figure reprinted from Starratt, R. J. (1991). Building an ethical school: A theory for practice in educational leadership. Educational administration quarterly, 27(2), 185-202.*

The first frame reviews decisions through a critical lens, and looks for structural or cultural concerns that could lead to the exclusion of individuals on the grounds of sex/gender, race, disability etc. This lens also highlights politicized decisions such as those that

preserve the status quo. For example, decisions to maintain programs or interventions that are not utilized by students would be of concern when viewed through this lens.

Reviewing the program through this lens of critique will provide suggestions about who is benefiting from this program, who is not, and if anyone is excluded or disadvantaged by the very structure of the program. Though this can help to isolate issues, it provides limited ability to help one see how to reconstruct and govern a system (i.e., it will not likely provide insight into how to resolve the area of concern). Conversely, the lens of justice encourages one to ensure that learning activities are administered within curricular and extracurricular programs to encourage discussions of both individual choices and common good. This is an ongoing process

that can be used to build on the direction that was isolated through the critique lens. Yet what is just for one may prove not to be just for another, so in these instances, the ethics of care become an important lens by which to use to address any remaining ethical conflict. Such a lens must honour the dignity of each individual and a belief in the integrity of UC as an institution that should believe in the good of all people within it.

The Framework for Ethical Consideration can be utilized to review the decisions that have been made about the development of a student mental health training, ensuring that they meet an appropriate ethical standard. If sections of the program are deemed to have ethical concerns, a choice will need to be made about whether the plan needs to adapt to resolve the ethical shortcoming, or if other solutions can be found to ensure that the broader system for supporting student mental health is appropriate.

**The ethics framework in action.** This institutional change requires five key decisions that require ethical review. These include:

1. The decision to select a resiliency framework,
2. The plan to train peer mentors,
3. Selection of the three stakeholder groups,
4. The monitoring and evaluation process, and
5. The intended outcomes of the change.

***The decision to select a resiliency framework.*** The decision to adopt a resiliency framework was highlighted in Chapter One and appears to be ethical when measured using the Framework for Ethical Consideration. The resilience program is intended to empower students, emphasizing skill development rather than being prescriptive or diagnostic in nature. The decision to select resiliency as a framework does not appear to exclude populations of students, nor are these skills likely to cause harm.

***The plan to train peer support.*** When considering the training of peer support volunteers, there are two potential concerns that should be monitored. First, it is possible that students could use their expanded knowledge about wellness to attempt to help their peers address problems that would be more appropriately addressed by a professional. This could be considered unethical. It is important that the resiliency program not be confused with a counselling approach. It should complement existing supports and provide clarity about access to professional support services at UC. The second potential concern is the limited ability of the program to connect with students who live off campus. It will be important to monitor this group of students to gauge the use and success of the program for them.

***Stakeholder groups and Project Monitoring.*** Both the selection of the stakeholder groups and the monitoring and evaluation processes are acceptable when viewed through the three lenses of this ethics framework. Great care was taken to include a variety of voices at all levels of training / curriculum development and the model of stakeholder selection included ethical consideration.

***The intended outcomes of the change.*** The intended outcomes of this organizational change are deemed ethical in the context of the framework. The goal of the program aligns with the principles of respect, dignity, and empowerment—those same ones of UC. The aim of the program, specifically to provide peer support volunteers with enhanced skills, is consistent with these principles as well.

The responsibility to engage in ongoing consideration of potential ethical concerns is a foundational assumption of this ethical framework. The Gap Analysis described in Chapter 2, specifically the possibility that off campus students may not experience the same benefit causes this change initiative program for these students to be carefully monitored. There may be other

ethical decisions and considerations that occur through each stage of implementation, and decisions that were once sound may need to be reconsidered as the project shifts to fit the needs of the students and institution.

### **Communication Plan**

The communication approach that compliments a shared and fluid leadership style is one where the process of communication is organic and encourages the collaborative development of novel ideas. To accomplish this type of communication effectively, there needs to be a focus on the perception of leadership communication, message comprehension, acceptance, and support for the communication strategy being implemented (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2017).

**Communicating with the UC community.** As described in Chapter 2, there is a great deal of variability in the definition of resilience, and in the definition of mental health. Keys (2002) separated mental health and wellness from illness, and placed them on separate but intersecting continuums. This understanding of mental health is critical to the communication of the peer training program as it helps to specify that this project is focused on a positive message of mental health/wellness and is not intended to specifically address issues of illness. This clarity will help to eliminate conversations and confusion about closely associated topics of mental illness such as accommodations that are not part of the purview of the intended change. The common understanding about the definition of mental health and resilience, and the intended outcomes of the project should be communicated campus-wide as frequently as possible. This will help to foster interest in the change and introduce people to a framework and understanding of mental wellness that can eventually be rolled out more broadly across campus. This is consistent with the behaviours of leadership and communication discussed in Chapter 2.

**Communicating with the advisory committee.** It is important to review the overall vision of the project. As discussed in Chapter 2, the communication plan should respect participants' time by adhering to punctuality for meetings, by only holding meetings if necessary, and by supplementing meetings with emails. The committee will be updated by email about the information gathered in the monitoring process, and an in-person meeting will occur during the unfreezing process, as described in this chapter, prior to the pilot of the project and after the evaluation, to discuss future actions and recommendations.

**Communicating within the working group.** As noted in Chapter 2, it will be important that the communication plan recognize the role of individual contribution and intellectual ownership as it relates to the sharing of information within the working group. Managing the motivation to share information can be complicated, but it will be important to reward and publicly value information that is brought to the group by an individual and reciprocate (Hendriks, 1999; Weiss, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Creating opportunities to share knowledge and celebrating progress in formal and informal ways will foster motivation. Face-to-face and digital avenues for continued communication will be helpful and, as suggested above, the purpose and frequency of meetings must not exceed what group members deem helpful.

**Communicating with students.** Finally, it is important to consider communication with the student population, as this is the group for whom the change is intended. UC has recently conducted a communication survey intended to identify its students' preferred methods of communication. Of the 410 students surveyed, a surprising large return of 408 completed the survey. UC Students indicated that they tend not to use many forms of social media for receiving information. Social media such as Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram are used by 27%, 46%, and

61% of students respectively. Conversely, Facebook and email seem to connect with the majority of students. Eighty three percent of UC students report that they consistently open emails from the institution. Eighty two percent of students have visited the UC's Facebook page, and 86% state that they go to Facebook daily for their own purposes. Marketing of this resilience training and its benefits to the student population will certainly need to include Facebook messaging as well as an email campaign. The Communications Department will be an integral part of the stakeholder team in the development and implementation of a marketing strategy.

### **Next Steps and Future Considerations**

There is an opportunity for this OIP (and the resiliency framework) to be adopted by and expanded across the parent campus. This section identifies next steps and future considerations in the context of the institutional structure, the available research on resilience, and the results of the various leadership frameworks used throughout this OIP.

**Expanding the resiliency model across administrative departments.** One of the intended outcomes of this project is the development of a common language and agreed-upon framework for understanding resiliency and mental health. When considering this framework in the context of the organizational structures at UC, two questions emerge:

1. How can each department help to increase the proportion of students who persevere resiliently from their life stressors?
2. How does each department decrease the proportion of students who persevere with impairment or succumb to stressful events?

Throughout program development, the need to frame each department in the context of resiliency and to answer these questions is paramount. Adherence to this strategic framework for mental health and resiliency support across departments may enhance the cohesion of UC student support services and expose areas for collaboration which may not have been previously

considered. For example, potential collaborations among personal and financial counselling, disability services, academic counselling, etc. may develop as the approach to student success becomes more closely aligned.

**Expanding the resilience model across faculty groups.** Faculty have an important role to play. Though the concept of student mental health may be of concern for some faculty, others may be less interested in the topic, or feel as though the area is outside of their responsibilities.

In expanding this framework across the faculty group, the message about student resilience will need to be reviewed. Though the topic of student mental health may not be a topic of interest for some faculty, the discussion of student engagement may be better received. Though these concepts appear separate there can be a great deal of overlap. For example, the extent to which students feel *emotionally* engaged in school is an important determinant of academic achievement and other developmental outcomes, such as emotional distress, substance use, and depressive symptoms (e.g., Hawkins, Guo, Hill, Battin-Pearson, & Abbott, 2001; Li & Lerner, 2011; Maddox & Prinz, 2003; Wang & Dishion, 2012). *Behavioral* engagement describes variables such as good attendance and on-task behavior in the classroom which predicts strong academic performance and school retention (e.g., Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Wang, 2009; Wang, Selman, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2010). And *cognitive* engagement describes the degree of cognitive effort and predicts effective self-regulated strategies for comprehending complex ideas. Marketing resiliency as engagement will change the meaning for faculty while still offering a consistent academic approach that will benefit to students. As mentioned earlier, the consistency in messages across academic and administrative departments may encourage enhanced collaboration.

**Other considerations.** The various leadership tools used throughout this OIP, specifically the Gap Analysis in Chapter 2, the measurements of change readiness in Chapter 1, and the ethical framework described in Chapter 3, have uncovered areas where the institution could potentially falter in the uptake of this change. It is reasonable that future considerations should include a second review of these areas of concern. First, the structure of the institution presented challenges as many of the areas of student support functioned separately from each other. Consideration of continued communication across these areas will ensure that the adoption of a resiliency framework remains permanent across all units. Second, the Gap Analysis in Chapter 2 noted that some departments have experienced an increase in demand for mental health related issues without feeling the relief of an increase in numbers of staff. Ongoing monitoring will help to determine if the focus on student wellness decreases the demand on formalized services, or if the consistent messaging and increased awareness increases the demand for professional student support. Finally, the ethical framework suggested that students who live off campus may not have equal access to the benefits of the resiliency information provided by this program. The monitoring and evaluation of this program will help determine if additional programming is advisable.

## **Conclusion**

It has been argued that there is a mental health crisis spanning the country and prevalent at UC. Addressing this topic is more challenging than in the past for PSE institutions as the complexity and severity of student circumstances increase, and the ability of these students to cope with life challenges declines (Gray, 2015; Wilson, 2015). As the demand for various types of student support for mental issues continues to grow, institutions search for ways to balance financial realities with student needs.



This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) reviewed the student supports for mental health offered at a small post-secondary institution in Ontario. Like many post-secondary institutions, UC is attempting to manage the strain of a smaller budget while supporting an ever-increasing student mental health need. This OIP explored ways of utilizing theoretical frameworks to enhance various campus support systems and services, while considering practical methods of implementing a planned change. It was argued that perhaps a small change of adopting an agreed-upon training framework for student resiliency awareness and coping strategies would provide UC the ability to have a large impact on student mental health in a cost-effective way.

Finally, there is an opportunity to empower the different administrative and faculty areas within UC to take an active role in bettering student mental health. As I had suggested in the conclusion of Chapter 1, I believe this to be integral for post-secondary institutions as we move forward. Wider acceptance of this change would help to ensure a broader cultural shift to encourage the wellness of students both inside and outside of the classroom. The benefits of resiliency education may even extend beyond the student leaders, and positively impact the staff, faculty, and others within UC. It is envisioned that life on and off campus will improve for students and that they will carry forward the skills for maintaining a healthy, happy, and productive life.

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