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Undergraduate Student Retention: Using Leader Member Exchange as an Organizational Change Driver

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by

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Abstract

University student retention is one of the most studied enrolment management concepts in academia, with large amounts of theoretical and empirical research that has influenced campuses around the world (Astin, 1993; Habley, Bloom & Robins, 2012; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 1987). Although the considerations surrounding student retention are many and complex, the definition of retention is fairly straightforward. Berger, Ramirez, and Lyons, (2012) defines retention as "the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission through graduation" (p.5). This organizational improvement plan will discuss student retention in the context of a problem of practice at a Canadian university. Specifically, how a medium-sized research intensive university in Ontario, Canada can increase student retention from the first to second year of undergraduate study. The organizational improvement plan is framed using Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames model and an approach for organizational change is considered using Leader-member Exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Keywords: student retention theory, retention model, leader-member exchange theory, LMX, competing values model, distributive leadership.

Executive Summary

Undergraduate student retention has been a widely studied issue in academia

(Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987) and the literature has focused on

a wide variety of approaches, from developing models that outline student departure

(Tinto, 1987) to developing solutions across the academy for student success (Swail,

1995). The problem of student retention is the locus of this organizational improvement

plan. This paper will discuss the organizational context behind a problem of practice at a

mid-sized Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) focused Canadian

university, specifically, the problem of retaining students from first to second year of

undergraduate study. A leadership-focused vision for change identifies some of the

hurdles that this university is dealing with, and considers three major components–

academic advising, first year programs, and learner supports– as a way of categorizing

and unpacking the university's retention problem. These categories are used to identify

functional gaps between the present and desired state of student success. There are

various change drivers that may lead the university towards an improved state of student

retention and success, and symbolic senior leadership. As well, leveraging existing

leadership roles using Graen's leader-member exchange theory (1976) is presented as a

cogent theory for understanding the dyadic relationships that form between leaders and

followers, and how these relationships can affect change across the academy. The

university's readiness for change can be diagnosed using Holt et al.'s (2007) four factor

model for change readiness, and ultimately facilitated through leader-member exchange

(LMX).

Chapter 2 discusses LMX as a theoretical framework for driving change in

student retention at the university. In the context of organization improvement, academic

advising, first year programs, and student supports are analyzed further and three

solutions are presented for moving the university towards a desired state for student

retention: 1) encouraging LMX to drive ad-hoc change within business units and

Faculties, 2) developing intentional communications that relay retention data and using

LMX to rally the academy around ideas for improving student retention, and 3) building

a centralized plan that is facilitated through LMX.

      The option of developing a centralized plan is developed and strategic change is

evaluated across the three major areas of proposed change. The proposed change plan is

evaluated in the context of ethical considerations and operational feasibility.

      Chapter 3 presents a change implementation and action plan that presents eight

goals:

Goal 1: Focus advisors on the early student lifecycle and develop an early warning

system.

Goal 2: Move toward a coordinated proactive advising model by 2020.

Goal 3: Invest in training and professional development of key advising staff.

Goal 4: Develop role clarity for advisors and centralize non-advisor services.

Goal 5: Connect learner support activities to the early warning system.

Goal 6: Enhance program utilization and service efficacy.

Goal 7: Develop a remedial pathway for students who are otherwise required to

withdraw.

Goal 8: Link orientation and learning communities directly to the classroom.

      The eight goals are discussed operationally, as well, a strategy for communicating

these changes using a leader-member exchange model is presented. Next, a plan for

assessment and evaluation of the proposed change is discussed, aligning with the

operational considerations outlined in the strategy. Finally, next steps such as leader

mobilization using a LMX model and tactical planning for the eight overarching goals are

discussed as areas where future development can take place.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Problem

Organizational Context

This organizational improvement plan focuses on an anonymized mid-sized university in Ontario, Canada. The university is a STEM- (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) focused institution that is primarily undergraduate with a diverse student population. Although the university offers non-STEM programs such as business and social sciences, it can hardly be deemed a comprehensive university, as it lacks liberal arts and humanities offerings. The institution is also a commuter school, with a residential population of under two thousand; most students travel some distance to attend classes.

As a relatively young university, the institution has a history of being nimble and innovative. Its core mandate was to be market driven, and educate graduates fit for the modern economy and provincial workforce. This legacy has allowed for the growth of a very flexible and entrepreneurial attitude among the faculty and staff, and an organizational culture that is resilient to change. This resiliency is a result of many hurdles–rapid growth, government debenture, infrastructure and capacity building–that more established universities are not currently facing. Notwithstanding, the accomplishments of the university are enviable. One of the fastest growing institutions in provincial history, it became a Top 50 research university in only the fifth year of existence, and is an innovative leader in many unique academic disciplines. Moreover, the institution's culture of rapid change and nimbleness has attracted a large amount of faculty members who are established, mid-career academics. With very few late-career professionals, these often young academics make up a large portion of the academy (over 400 employees), and deliver an energy to the institution indicative of an academic

workforce beginning the tenure track progression. On the academic support side, the

institution has over 200 employees at similar career stages: generally mid-career or

earlier in their tenure. In many cases, employees at the university are in their first career,

fostering a strong sense of loyalty, while at the same time creating a culture that is at

sometimes unmindful of the broader workplace. Notwithstanding, this institution has a

youthful energy in both the academic and academic support divisions that has contributed

to a culture of change resiliency, vitality, and agility.

Vision, Mission and Values

The university has vision, mission, and value statements that reflect the unique

role of a STEM-focused education and its impact on its students, the community, and the

world. The organization aspires to be a leader in education within a 21st century context,

where demand for science, technology, and professional practice is continually

increasing. The university's mission focuses on concepts such as market-driven academic

programming and research, community involvement, and experiential and life-long

learning. However, one thing is noticeably absent from the vision and mission

statements–the concept of student success.

One could argue that the concept of student success is implied in the university's

mission, but it is not explicitly stated. This is perhaps due to the culture of change

resilience that exists, as the university has historically focused on the development of

itself as an entity, and has not spent as much time focusing on development of its

students. Whether an honest oversight, or an omission that is symptomatic of the

university's rapid growth and development, the recent internal focus on student success

and outcomes has been the focal point of academic leadership. Both the Provost and Vice

President Academic have made student success the fulcrum of their strategic direction for the university.

Organizational Structure and Leadership Approaches

Broadly speaking, the university is structured into two major areas–academic staff and academic support staff–where the former carry out the core mandate of teaching and research and the latter support these initiatives. Functionally, the senior leadership consists of a President and Vice Chancellor with three Vice Presidents, a Chief Financial Officer, and General Council/University Secretary. The most senior vice president is the Provost and Vice President Academic, responsible for setting the strategic academic direction of the university. All Deans, as well as support functions (e.g., planning and analysis, University Registrar, information technology, student life, and Human Resources) are under the purview of the Provost. The Vice President Research, Innovation, and International is a cross-functional role responsible for the university's research function in conjunction with the academic units. This position also sets the strategic direction for internationalization–academic cooperation, international enrolment, and mobility–across campus. The Vice President External is responsible for the university's advancement, alumni, and external communications and marketing efforts, as well as being the lead for government and community relations. Finally, the University Secretary and Chief Financial Officer are responsible for the legal and finance divisions, respectively.

What is perhaps not illustrated by title alone is that the Provost has functional responsibility for a large majority of university employees, whereas other members of the senior leadership team play important roles with specialized portfolios that often work in

conjunction with the core academic divisions. This makes the role of the Provost

incredibly important to how the academy is directed strategically across the central

responsibilities of teaching and research. Appendix A shows the organizational structure

for the office of the Provost.

   Currently, the Provost and his divisional leaders involve much of the campus

community in discussion and action planning, which is in line with the liberal concept of

distributive leadership (Gronn, 2002; Zepke, 2007). This model has allowed for faculty

and support staff to have the individual freedom to make decisions and test hypotheses

without having any formal requirements imposed from senior management. As a result of

this distributive leadership model, sometimes there is more distrust from faculty on

central administration's ability to guide the university to an end goal. This is evident in

the amount of choice that faculty currently have to make decisions on how to best tackle

a problem within their academic disciplines. Even though problems are often identified

and championed by the university centre, faculty members are able to pursue their own

interests in defining and solving the problem. This level of intentional freedom, a core

tenet of liberalism, is present across the academy.

   In the university's liberal ideological environment, there exists an inclusive

organizational structure for distributed decision making. As discussed, there is certainly

an organizational hierarchy at the university, but senior leadership allows for the various

experts across the academy to have a leadership role in solution development.

   The institution's liberal lens facilitates an inclusive approach to problem solving

and enables the current leadership model to build on the skills and expertise of faculty

and staff to develop a framework for achieving success. In this respect, the university

emulates the skills approach to leadership, as well as servant leadership (Northouse, 2016). These leadership styles have created an inclusive community of social constructivism, but have also fashioned an ad-hoc environment for solution development that lacks central coordination and strategic direction. Because of this ad-hoc solution development, the communication of initiatives and ideas is often left wanting, and silos have developed among those who take action, and those who are looking for direction on how to assist.

Leadership Culture

Leadership culture at this university is complex and does not fit easily into a single style of application. Various styles such as the skills approach, (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000) servant, (van Dierendonck, 2011) and distributive leadership (Gronn, 2002) all intertwine to create a leadership model that is as complex as it is robust. Perhaps most dominant is the skills-based leadership approach, a style that is deeply established in the institutional culture. Often individuals who are in positions of leadership have developed skills capabilities that are directly correlational with their assigned work and performance. The academy seems to invest in individuals who wish to develop their skills in order to achieve a high-level outcome. As Mumford, et al. (2000) display in their skills-based leadership model, workplace experiences can assist in leadership development, and in the case of this university, individuals that have developed certain expertise in various academic and support areas have been entrusted with the leadership of projects and workgroups across the institution.

A second leadership approach that is both complimentary to skills-based leadership and reflective of the liberal culture is servant leadership. The university has

fostered a type of stewardship of ideas that has allowed for key tenets of servant-based leadership–authenticity, responsible morality, and transforming influence–to be present in the university leadership culture (Sendjaya, Sarros & Santora, 2008). This servant leader culture is evident in various ways, but at the core is the concept of stewardship. Perhaps stewardship is a core belief of the institution's leadership culture because, as a new university, much of the institutional change is driven from the university centre. In more established universities, often the academic units champion change in their respective enterprises, whereas in this situation, the university's rapid growth has forced the Faculty units to focus on more mission-centric initiatives like research, teaching, and learning. However, as central administration's role in the academy is to support the academic mission of Faculty units, a servant leadership approach has formed in an organic, and almost necessitated fashion. Administration, support staff, and academic leaders have crafted a culture of egalitarianism, which Northouse (2016) describes as a core underlying philosophy to servant leadership. It is not uncommon to see senior academic staff and administrators working collaboratively alongside junior staff members in a true distributive fashion.

In summary, the liberal values of this university has combined with various leadership styles–distributive, skills-based, and servant-based–to create a culture that works toward the mission and vision of the university in an open and egalitarian fashion. However, this same culture is also responsible for a loose approach to problem solving, and has created an environment that is at times strategic, but often lacking the top-down direction and communication that is needed for broad-based problem solving across the academy.

Leadership Position Statement

Individual leadership value and belief systems can differ significantly across the modern leadership landscape (Stogdill, 1974). In fact, the numerous theoretical and practical approaches to leadership, styles that can both compliment and contrast each other, are testament to this divergence in attitudes. These various perspectives can leave many leaders to question which approach, if any, is the most appropriate or influential style. To adapt multiple leadership styles and philosophies, we must select carefully some of the best approaches that fit a leader's personal identity and moral value system. The author's leadership values are grounded in practical ethics, a concept of applied ethical reasoning introduced by Peter Singer (1979).

In the context of Singer's practical ethics, leadership decision making is the ability to apply moral judgement to find an acceptable course of action in everyday life. To this end, leadership ethics form the guidelines for integrity and moral fairness in the way in which leaders, including the author, must behave to achieve outcomes that have strong ethical integrity.

Practical ethics, however, is simply the moral lens in which we may view leadership; the underlying belief is that leaders are responsible for just and fair decision making by virtue of their position. This lens informs numerous values that assist in the application of ethical leadership, and ultimately influences one's personal leadership traits. Indeed, all individuals have specific traits that differentiate them from others, and the same belief is true for people in a position of leadership. Northouse (2016) identifies many traits—intellect, emotional intelligence, self-confidence, sociability, integrity, etc.—that are attributed to trait-based leadership. In effect, leaders must exhibit these traits and others, to become successful influencers of people, but how leaders are

grounded in their moral value system can influence leadership style even in those who share similar traits.

The leadership position used in this organizational improvement plan focuses on the assumption that people in positions of leadership exhibit certain traits that can be leveraged to employ a distribution of authority and practical, ethical decision making. First, the author aligns with Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) in that successful leaders have specific attributes that need to be recognized as part of determining a leadership position. Leaders with characteristics such as the aforementioned traits recognized by Northhouse (2016) can be mobilized to conduct organizational change in a distributive and ethical environment.

Peter Gronn (2002) recognizes that distributive peer leadership can be effective at allowing members of a large group to share leadership accountabilities, depending on the situation and subject matter expertise. This doesn't mean that leaders will stop leading, but rather that there is a shared accountability for leadership among people in formal management roles and those who are non-management. The concept of distributed leadership is congruent with the author's views of society, because it is believed that we can play to multiple strengths to achieve a more thoughtful and developed outcome. The adage, two heads are better than one, is the simplification of this worldview. By using distributive leadership we allow for the expertise of many people to combine into a mutual effort to achieve a single goal.

This leadership philosophy is also grounded in practical ethics that informs the distinct traits we enjoy and employ in a leadership capacity. These traits are the tools that

allow for positive human relationships that ultimately permit the utilization of multiple

talents to achieve a common goal.

Leadership Problem of Practice

The ability of an institution to retain students to graduation is a key problem in

educational leadership, and affects many aspects of an institution's ability to operate

effectively. This problem particularly affects higher education leaders, as retention is so

widely integrated into the various facets of the academy. Consequently, leadership must

understand fully the context of these issues in order to navigate the academy towards a

solution. This organizational improvement plan discusses student retention in the context

of a problem of practice at a Canadian university. Specifically, how can a medium-sized

research intensive university in central Canada increase student retention from the first to

second year of undergraduate study?

With a variety of factors contributing to challenges in student retention at this

university, it is important to contextualize that the problem stems from various aspects of

cognitive and non-cognitive challenges facing students (Swail, 2004). The inability of

students to persist to graduation affects student success, the university's reputation, and

institutional operating finances. One of the most challenging aspects with trying to

increase student retention is the ability of leaders to mobilize the academic and

administrative units to affect change across the academy. Campus-wide discussion has

informed stakeholders, but a coordinated effort to develop an institutional strategy has yet

to materialize. And although retention is everyone's problem, it easily becomes nobody's

problem by virtue of the massive scope of the issue; thus the time is ripe for

organizational change.

Currently a gap exists between the current reality of the university's ability to organize strategic direction for student retention and the ideal scenario of a well-coordinated and integrated strategy for student success. Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols (2016) maintain that when developing a change vision, sometimes leaders can be trapped by the context of the organizational vision. Although this university's vision clearly articulates the need to inspire students, it fails to recognize arguably the most important characteristic for student persistence—namely, student success. In reality, success is the underlying driver of any university retention problem; if students are successful, you don't have an issue.

To move towards increasing student retention, the university must work with an integrated plan that would allow for greater coordination of how faculty, administration, and support staff manage retention initiatives. This plan must set attainable and measurable goals for developing and implementing student success initiatives, but more importantly, the change management plan must be collaborative and constructively communicated with the campus community. Ideally, the notion of student success would move from the awareness of a systemic problem to a performance-measured responsibility within the university. Indeed, the focus on student success could even be incorporated to the institutional mission.

Framing the Problem of Practice

Historical Overview

The university's retention issues are largely a first year problem, with one-fifth of students failing to persist to second year. These students leave the university for various reasons, but a majority are suspended or are dismissed for failing to achieve satisfactory academic standing. Figure 1 shows that, over a seven year period, the number of students who are suspended or dismissed is continually greater than those who withdraw for other reasons. These failures do not always reflect cognitive or academic issues as they are likely due to a myriad of variables such as financial hardship, long commute times, and work or dependent responsibilities. In fact, the university's student enrolment profile is unique, and in many cases, issues surrounding student retention are atypical of retention norms.
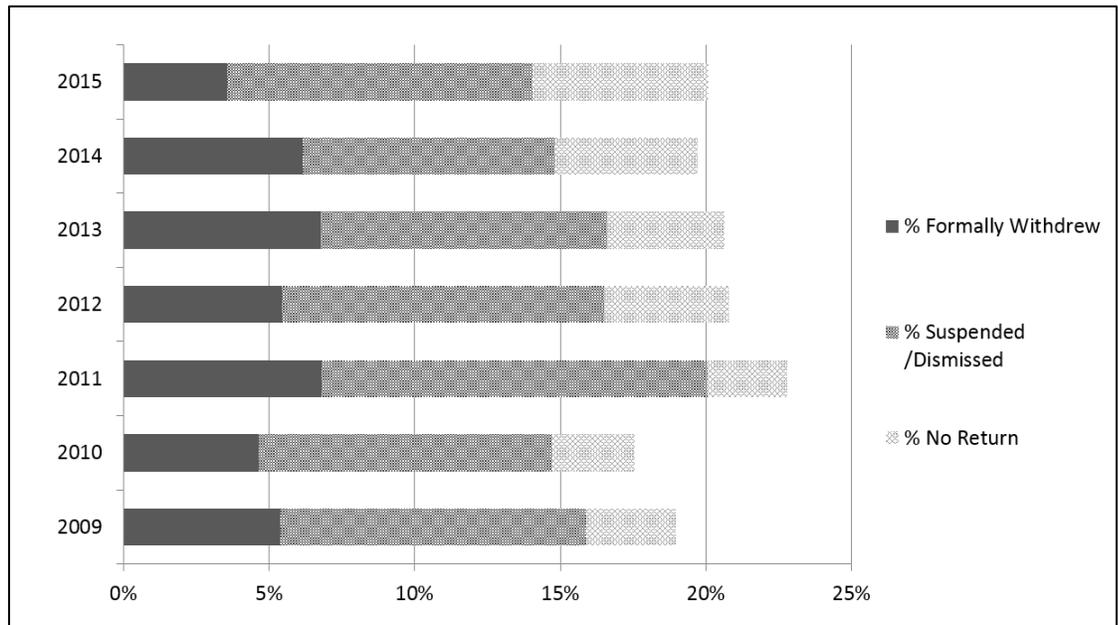
Figure 1. Undergraduate first year leavers by reason for departure, 2009-2015.
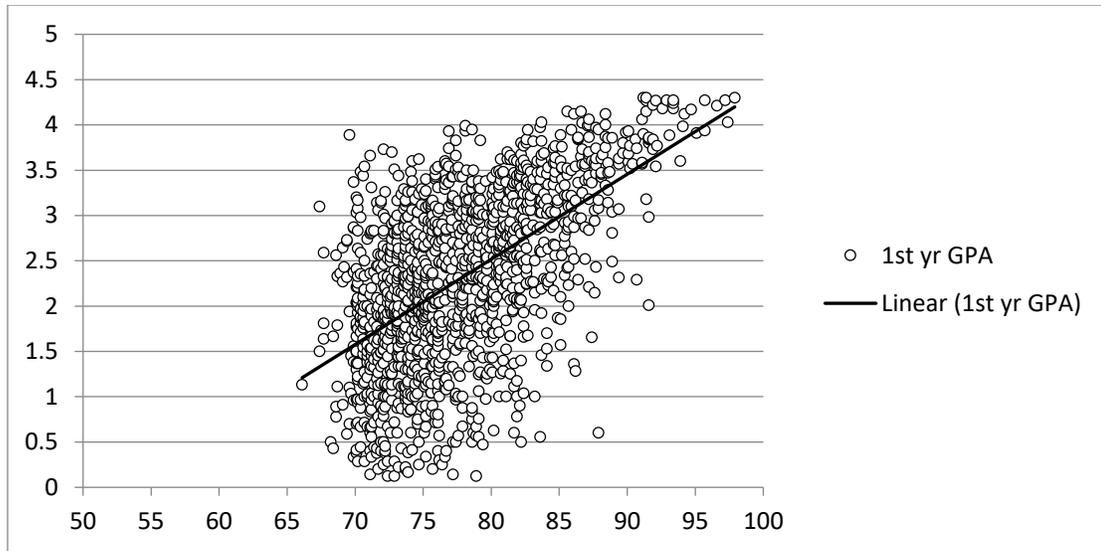
Figure 2. Linear regression model of HSGPA and first year academic standing.

Normally high school grade point average (HSGPA) is a basic predictor of student success, and as a university's aggregate HSGPA increases, so does retention. Across the province of Ontario, for instance, the Consortia for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) has shown that universities with a higher admissions average typically retain students better than those with lower admissions averages (CSRDE, 2013). However, this university has been experiencing the opposite effect, with a steadily increasing HSGPA and a decreasing retention rate. In fact, the regression model in Figure 2 displays HSGPA and academic performance in first year and shows very little association between high school grades and undergraduate success until HSGPA reaches greater than 87%.

Although the grade distribution of early leavers has a slightly higher percentage of students, between 70% and 79% when compared to the university's total enrolment, the reason for leaving cannot be tied to HSGPA alone. However, students with the highest HSGPA (>87%) all reach clear academic standing, and so the correlation between

HSGPA and undergraduate persistence is stronger with students presenting the upper

strata of secondary school grades.

Perhaps one of the reasons that average secondary school grades are not a strong

predictor of student success at the university lies in the changing characteristics of

undergraduate students in Canada. As participation rates have increased significantly in

the past two decades, societal influences effecting students have also changed. In

particular, a steady flow of immigration into major centres such as the Greater Toronto

Area (GTA) has brought a wave of undergraduates who are new Canadians or who are

the children of new Canadians. These students have grown up with the extra challenges–

financial, social, cultural, and language barriers–accompanied with establishing a family

in a new country. Also, the university's students seem to have heavy competing

commitments to academic study. The 2014 National Survey on Student Engagement

(NSSE) shows that almost half of the institutions' first year students (45%) reported

financial pressure and the need to work as a major obstacle to academic success. In fact,

53% of this university's first year students reported working a part-time job compared to

the provincial average of 19%. Similarly, only 23% of respondents reported living on

campus or in a nearby apartment compared to the provincial average of 43%, illustrating

the high number of students commuting to campus. Although these factors are

undoubtedly affecting student success, the problem is further complicated by the fact that

the university retains fewer students who are from the institution's home region than

students who live in areas further from the university.

The NSSE data that shows financial pressures and work as a major obstacle is a

telling indicator of the financial difficulties connected with undergraduate study today.

With the advent of the Ontario tuition grant in 2012, financial assistance rates increased, and some 85% of the university's students now receive some sort of financial assistance. A final factor that underscores student time and financial commitments is the high proportion (42%) of first year students with dependent responsibilities–9% higher than the provincial average. In short, despite the high number of students who fail to persist at the university, the circumstances surrounding academic performance are far more complex than the cognitive ability of the students.

Retention Theory

Various retention theories have been the foundation for much of the empirical research conducted in the academy over the last 30 years (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987). In particular, the often-cited Tinto's (1987) work *Leaving College* presents a theoretical model developed in the late 1970s and early 80s of student departure that posits the main reason students fail to persist is lack of integration with the academy. Tinto's longitudinal model of institutional departure (see Figure 3) displays a variety of external factors that influence students' goals and commitments upon entering university. When connected with institutional experiences, these combined factors result in a level of integration with the academy and ultimately the outcome, or the students' ability to persist. It is important to note the factors in Tinto's model, as they display the various considerations that exist when exploring student persistence. Specifically, Tinto applies three factor groupings–academic system, social system, and external community– when categorizing aspects of his retention model.
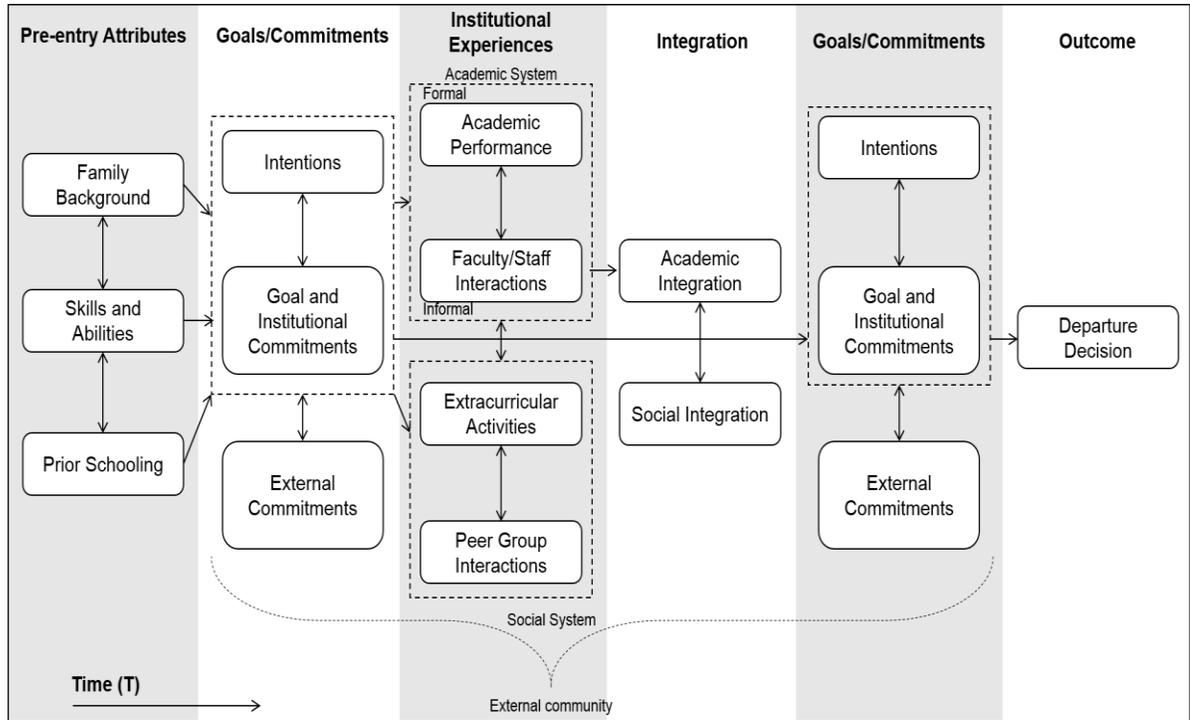
Figure 3. Tinto's longitudinal model of institutional departure. Adapted from *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (1st ed.), by V. Tinto, 1987, Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto's model shows the true complexity of retention, through the diverse set of factors in these three categories, and how they may ultimately impact student success. In short, to understand fully the issues surrounding an institution's ability to retain students, it is important to look beyond the academy.

Swail (2004) presents a model that takes the work of Tinto and others and simplifies the influencing factors of retention into a geometric model (see Figure 4). Like Tinto, Swail centres his model on the student experience, but has three main categories– cognitive (10 factors), social (14 factors), and institutional (5)–that combine to form the main influencers of student persistence.
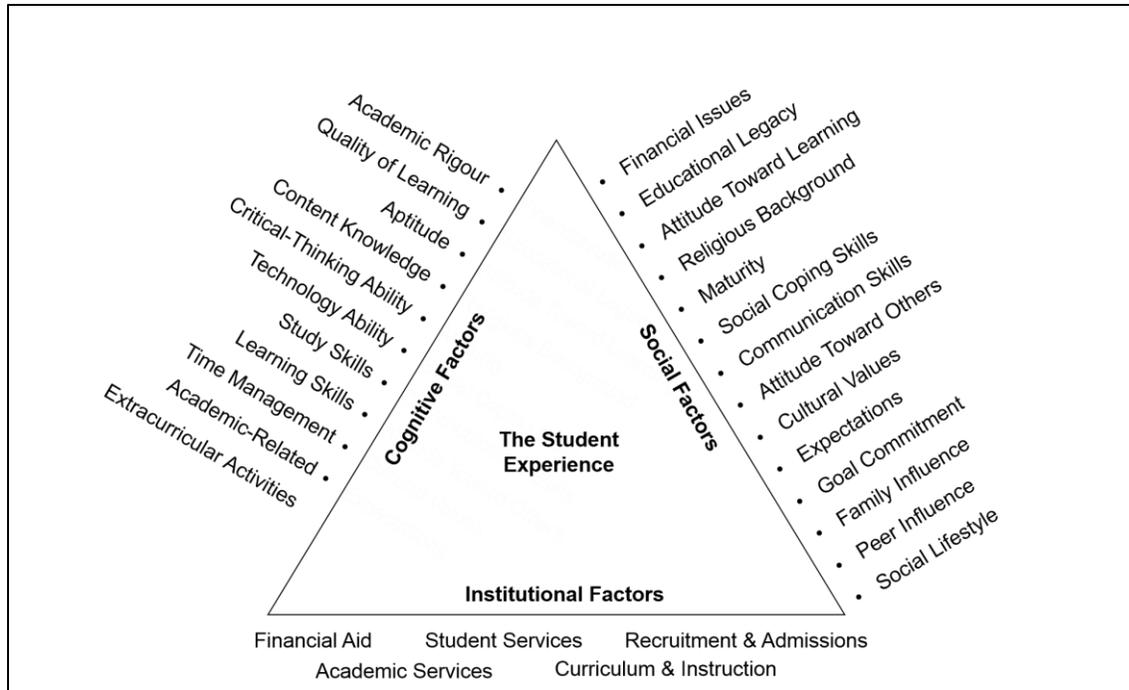
Figure 4. Geometric model of student persistence and achievement, adapted from *The art of student retention: A handbook for practitioners and administrators*, W.S. Swail, 2004, Virginia Beach, VA: Education Policy Institute.

Swail's model attempts to take the theoretical constructs of previous retention models and move to one in practice. Finding equilibrium in the three factors affecting the student experience can assist institutions in developing retention strategies that are committed to achieving student success both socially and academically.

Both Tinto and Swail identify student success factors that reach beyond the academy, and in practice would be differentiated from one institution to another. As social demography and institutional factors are unique to each institution, it is important to build retention strategies that reflect institutional realities. The three factors that surround the student experience–cognitive, social, and institutional–are an interesting way to conceptualize retention literature, as many empirical studies can be categorized according to Swail's equilateral model (Stokes, 2013).

Further Framing

Swail's (2004) model identifies that institutional factors are the primary way in which the academy can influence retention issues—because they have control over these—but we must first regard the problem from the various lenses that exist across the organizational culture. One way to consider the university retention problem is through the four frame model of Bolman and Deal (2013)–structural, human resource, political, and symbolic–which can frame organizational behavior. These frames can help contextualize these retention issues across the broader academy, help categorize the factors that shape the problem, and also frame the political, economic, social, technological, and environmental (PESTE) factors associated with this issue. The following section layers Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames over the elements of a PESTE analysis to contextualize the problem.

Structural (Environmental Factors)

Bolman and Deal's structural frame maintains that organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives, and this is certainly true of our current case study: a university that was founded to be a market-driven educational institution providing global citizens for the Canadian economy. To achieve this the university has divided its labour into both Faculty and staff units, and further subdivided these areas to reflect disciplinary or functional expertise. Overtop these divisions the aforementioned hierarchical arrangement works as the formal management structure.

As the university is growing rapidly, these structures have had to change and adapt to an organization in growth mode. In an effort to build effective structures that fit with the organizational realities, there have been frequent changes over the past decade. For example, as Faculties grow, structural mechanisms have been put in place to manage

work overlap and redundancies. Divisions and units that started off small have, in some

cases, grown tenfold, and require new structures to manage the people associated with

them. Even salary administration has been restructured three times in the last decade.

Accordingly, growth and change has allowed for some structural deficits, and to deal

with these issues the university is in an almost perpetual state of restructuring. This has

taken its toll on the people within the academy, and has created the need for a sound

human resource strategy.

Human Resources (Social and Economic Factors)

The university administration certainly recognizes the necessity to serve the needs

of its employees, but the desire to make a great workplace environment is in some

respects controlled in part by government legislation. Many of the mechanisms identified

in Bolman and Deal's (2013) human resource frame to motivate the workforce–

remuneration, workplace incentives, and social events–are controlled or outright

disallowed by governmental public sector restraint measures.

Despite the challenges that exist with creating a positive workplace culture based

on employee needs, there is certainly an attitude within the university that members of

the community need each other's differences, talents, and expertise to succeed.

Simultaneously, there has been no shortage of opportunity for personal and professional

growth. In fact, most employees have been able to find meaning in their work, and are

pleased with the type of outcomes the academy has been able to achieve. This is

evidenced by the fact that the institution is one of the only universities in Canada that

does not have a staff union and by the quick assent into research prowess within its short

history. This culture of commitment has created an environment where there is

tremendous opportunity, but also tremendous workload, as the university strives for greatness, often some individuals are required to manage multiple portfolios that would be split between two, three, or even more people at an established university. An opportunity to learn and advance quickly, but with a significant workload burden, and one that is not without political posturing.

Political (Political and Technological Factors)

The fast-paced environment of a university in its teenaged years has led the way for various factions and interest groups across the academy. These groups are often in their infancy, and thus struggle to figure out their true purpose and position within the university power structure. For example, there are unionized faculty that work alongside non-unionized staff, as well as a poorly stratified middle management where some high-level administrators struggle to get the attention of low-level working managers. All these groups have a self-interest at heart, and they act as the push and pull factors against the university administration as decisions about resource allocation, program prioritization, and strategic direction are made. Suffice it to say that in most cases these factions fail to look at the university as a whole when they are jockeying for resources or position, something that ultimately hurts the academy, and, by association, the self-interest factions themselves.

The scarcity of resources is a problem faced by every publicly funded institution, as the current provincial government struggles to control their debt-subsidized spending. In the case of student retention, the lack of resources does not simply imply human resources, but technological resources as well. Where many universities have developed customer relationship management (CRM) software suites, or in some cases enterprise

systems dedicated to retention, the university lacks both of these tools, creating a

disadvantage for managing student communication and developing an early alert system.

In fact, the university shares a student information system with a community college, a

cost cutting measure from the early days of inception that has continually hindered

technological innovation as both institutions need to undertake a consultative process for

even the simplest change to administrative computing systems.

The political posturing that is resultant from resource scarcity is often associated

with self-preservation over actual institutional interest. A culture of negotiation has

emerged that has in some respects polarized the Faculty and administrative units at the

university. This posturing has become engrained in the workplace culture and has

ultimately created a symbolic power structure across the university.

Symbolic (Other Political Factors)

Bolman and Deal's (2013) symbolic frame attempts to explain how individuals

make sense of their own reality. Although not connotatively negative, symbolism is

perhaps an unfortunate reality within the university's culture. Often the meaning of a

simple action can be interpreted as a huge factor in the institutional culture. The internal

promotion of a star employee can be interpreted as the administration's disregard for fair

competition, or the layout of a new building that has desperately needed student service

space can be seen as undermining the research mission of the university. Of course, these

interpretations can be considered in other ways and even reversed, allowing for a

discontinuity to exist across the university.

These multiple interpretations or uncertainty has caused many faculty and staff to

fabricate their own understanding of a situation or practice without understanding fully

the true outcome of a decision or strategic direction. This has created a set of "heroes and villains" across the university, as well as a culture of symbolic pre-conceptualization that can be both beneficial to those who wield their populism well, and detrimental to those who have been branded a rogue player. Finally, it is through the actions and norms that exist in the previous frames–structural, human resource and political–that the symbolic frame embodies the workplace culture at the university. A culture that can be both united but at times factional, yet still allowing for a large group to meet a common goal of research, teaching, learning, and student support.

Leadership Connections

The leadership philosophy of the university and the author are not dissimilar in that both value and practice liberal distributive leadership. Additionally, the author considers practical ethics to be an overarching philosophy that must be applied to this approach. However, in the context of the university's student retention problem, this leadership philosophy as it is currently employed, has failed to affect appropriate solutions for the academy. As mentioned earlier, there are many reasons for this perceived failure, and these can be contextualized through the four frames model of Bolman and Deal (2013). The next section will discuss this conflict between philosophy and practice will be a major factor in addressing the problem of retention.

<center>**Guiding Questions and Challenges**</center>

The issues surrounding student retention are many and complex, from one's cognitive ability and academic preparedness, to personal, social, societal, and institutional factors that hinder student success, (Swail, 2004). No two universities share the same student demographic, staff composition, institutional focus, or culture, so problems facing student retention are distinct at each institution. Indeed, the first questions that this

university must answer are, what are the unique factors present that affect student success, and how do they compare against some of retention research that already exists? The challenge here will be to both identify these unique factors, but also attempt to understand how they interact within the greater university context.

Secondly, the university must explore why, despite continued efforts to engage staff and faculty, there remains a lack of coordinated and strategic motivation and mobilization across campus to deal with the problem. One of the challenges that exists for the university is the perceived lack of control that central administration has over influencing how faculty members manage retention solutions. As tenure track and teaching faculty both fall under a collective bargaining agreement that is very explicit in how teaching duties are administered, and because course delivery is a matter of intellectual property for instructors, there are some barriers to implementing across-the-board strategic change in retention practices. Moreover, there is a challenge in managing the expectations of desired outcomes of both faculty and administration. Both groups will view retention issues from markedly different lenses, and finding a common ground for improvement outcomes may be difficult. In fact, because of the dichotomous outlook between the two groups there may be room for a differential goal set for those who are dealing with retention issues on the frontline in the classroom, and those who deal with policy and procedure in the boardroom.

Finally, and perhaps most glaring, is that this project is not focused on primary research, and any possible solution will not be tested, but rather will be a product of data-driven decision making and previous empirical research. This makes the challenge of creating detailed assessment and evaluation models an imperative for developing possible

improvements. In short, these questions and considerations can form the foundation for exploring a change vision for student retention in the context of moving towards a more desirable future state.

Leadership Focused Vision for Change: The Success Gap

With a variety of factors contributing to challenges in student retention at the university, it is important to contextualize that the problem stems from the various aspects of cognitive and non-cognitive issues facing students (Swail, 2004). As we have discussed, student retention issues affect many aspects of the academy such as the university's reputation, and institutional operating finances. The university has yet to develop a formal strategy for dealing with the retention problem, so some students still fail to persist to graduation, and the institution bears the brunt of the middling student success.

As there is a gap that exists between the university's strategic planning for increased retention and a formalized integrated student success plan, the university needs to move toward a more structured approach to solution development. Further, the university has not included student success as a tenet in the mission or vision of the institution, and as Cawsey, Deszca & Ingols (2016) maintain, the fact that this is absent from the institutional vision could actually be a hindering factor to moving toward a desired state. A vision for an integrated plan that would allow for greater student success is ultimately the foundation that the institution needs to work towards.

Priorities for Change

The third national survey entitled, *What Works in Student Retention* (Habley, Valiga & McClanahan, 2004) is a US study that polled over 1000 higher education institutions about retention practices and their impact on student success. The survey lists

three categories– academic advising, first year programs, and learner support–that are responsible for the greatest contribution to retention efforts in four-year public universities. As these areas are grossly underdeveloped areas at the case study university, they will act as the framework for identifying priorities for change.

Academic Advising

Academic advising has been shown to have a positive impact on student retention from the early days of retention study (Habley et al., 2004; Noel, Levitz & Saluri, 1985). Since the connection between strategic enrolment management and retention in the 1980s, many models have been presented that show the critical link between academic advising and student persistence (Beal & Noel, 1980; Habley, 1981). Over 30 years later, academic advising is seen as a critical part of any modern retention strategy and, as Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) outline, there is much empirical evidence to support the role of advising in student retention. In essence, a strong undergraduate retention plan must be aligned with a strong academic advising strategy.

The current university academic advising structure presents a challenge for the development of a robust student retention strategy on many levels. The current structure is disconnected between Faculties, devoid of a consolidated institutional driven advising strategy, and lacks professional development opportunities for staff in the context of developing institutional best practices. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges for university advising is the reactive nature of the current advising efforts. In the US, many academic advising offices are proactively meeting with students based on course performance to address issues before they become too serious (Gordon et al., 2008). The

transformation of the university's advising structure into a strategic and proactive student retention mechanism should be at the forefront of institutional student success priorities.

First Year Programs

According to Habley et al.'s (2004) definition, first year programs can take the form of academic supports such as preparatory or remedial programming as well as social supports like first year learning communities or advising and academic coaching that is integrated into the first year of undergraduate study. Currently the university has some ad-hoc programming being run by various Faculties and departments, but there lacks a central coordinated strategy that structures programming across the academy. Also, programming is often optional, and often sees the most participation from the university's strongest students, or the weakest students who have been suspended. This service model neglects helping the students who could benefit from programming the most; those who are average students who need assistance in mitigating situations of academic jeopardy. To this end, the university lacks a triage or early warning system to identify properly the true supports needed for students. The development of a system for identifying at-risk students and the coordination of first year programming to support learners in academic jeopardy is a second priority for retention planning.

Academic Supports

Learner support is another example of a retention best practice (Habley et al., 2004; Tinto, 1987), and it can act as a proactive academic assistance strategy for students who opt-in to programming. As well, it can be part of a multi-layered remediation track for students who have been identified as academically at-risk. The university's Student Learning Centre (SLC) delivers multiple academic supports. Learning specialists are

available to assist with issues surrounding numeracy and literacy, and a robust peer tutor network is also available, effectively increasing the SLC's reach into the student population. However, in a similar fashion to first year programs, without early warning systems to identify academically at-risk students, the SLC is only able to deal with students who seek out their services, or students who have been recommended in an ad-hoc way. Moreover, the current support staff do not have the ability to adequately serve the full student body. First, the SLC does not have academic subject specialists in disciplines such as chemistry, biology, or information technology, subject areas that affect a huge cross section of undergraduate enrolments. Secondly, the current staff compliment to student ratio is 1:1250, making it impossible to offer supplemental instruction to the broader campus community under the current delivery model.

Resourcing the SLC to deal with all university disciplines, while developing better ways of directing at-risk students to the SLC must happen in concert with a strategic overview of the service delivery model. Further, connecting students receiving remedial support and supplementary instruction with academic advising and coaching would allow for a more holistic approach to developing a complete learner support strategy.

Change Drivers

To achieve fully an organizational culture change for retention, we can look at various groups–senior leadership and student success leaders–and their individual contribution to driving organizational change.

Senior leadership must ignite the discussion across the university, so that the work done by those facilitating organizational change can be recognized in the context of the

broader strategic direction of the university, and the academic plan. To this end, the campus needs to understand the increased dedication to solving the problem, and the gaps that exist from the current to desired state. The role of senior leadership is symbolic: to set the stage for the change vision and clearly articulate this to the campus community.

The second change driver consists of individuals who will champion the change across the academy. These individuals will be trait-based leaders who are approached for their abilities to persuade, collaborate, and lead change across the campus community. By using a leader-member exchange (LMX) model (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), leaders charged with championing change can build high-quality relationships with campus stakeholders to achieve a more well-informed, reciprocal approach to strategy implementation. This will ultimately allow for more organized distributive leadership, and greater campus participation and appreciation for the required change. Although this approach will take a great deal of time due to the number of high quality interactions needed to build a partnership in change, a LMX approach will form the foundation of an organizational change model for the problem of student retention.

Readiness for Change: The Retention Imperative

When the university was founded, much of the strategic attention was placed on new enrolments to build a sustainable intake that would move the university from a start-up to a viable institution. However, as the institution moved into its adolescence, it became clear that lower retention rates required a continued front-loading of new enrolments to compensate for student attrition in upper years. Continually increasing new enrolments made it difficult for the university to increase student quality, and senior management was keenly aware that a greater number of students than the provincial average were not achieving academic success. This awareness led many across the

academy to start discussions around the imperative of student retention. On the surface, it would appear that the university is in need of reform, but measuring its actual readiness for change is an entirely different matter.

If we view the university's change readiness through the categorical outline of Holt, Armenikas, Field and Harris' (2007) change readiness model, it is clear the academy is prepared for change. Holt and his colleagues developed an instrument for assessing change at the individual level, as they believe that most change actions are conducted by individuals in an organization. The model presents four factors that focus on the employee's attitude toward change: appropriateness of change, management support, change efficacy, and if the change is personally beneficial. These categories are used to guide 42 specific questions that represent a factor analysis that can be used to gauge change readiness. It is beyond the scope of this organizational improvement plan to administer these questions to ascertain the university's readiness for change by polling the faculty and staff. However, by using these factors as a lens for reviewing the state of the university, a position for change readiness can be developed.

Appropriateness of Change

The university has a strong case for the appropriateness for change. Student retention and success define the academy's reputation and can improve operating finances across university divisions. Contributing more graduates to the provincial marketplace and developing citizen leaders also fits within the university's mission. However, and perhaps most importantly, retaining more students across the academy using proactive measures should make most employees' jobs easier. Instead of trying to salvage students who are experiencing academic jeopardy, the university can proactively

work towards ensuring students don't enter a risk situation to begin with. This will allow

for an environment where success measures are more proactive than reactive.

Management Support

Developing better tactics for student retention has been made a priority across the

entire management spectrum at the university. Top decision makers such as the president

and provost have put their full support behind finding a solution, and this has trickled

down to middle and frontline management. Most leaders across the university would

name retention as one of the top two priorities in the university's academic plan, and

there is clear signal form all levels of management that retention is an important focus.

Change Efficacy

Perhaps the area that needs to be developed most is change efficacy. Staff are not

afraid of the changes required, and understand that change will be beneficial to the

university, but most don't know what types of change are truly needed to achieve results

in student retention. Notwithstanding, staff are generally aware that they have the skills

necessary to carry out the change once the strategies and adjustments are decided on and

implemented across the broader academy.

Personally Beneficial

The outcome of retaining more students would have a huge impact on how

individuals see benefit from change. Most apparent is by dealing with student

engagement barriers, students in the classroom will be more engaged, making for more

enjoyable interactions with the professoriate. As well, the increased revenue generated by

students will actually contribute to furthering retention strategies, as more supports could

be funneled to the classroom or to student development supports. Ultimately, increased

revenue would allow for a more coordinated approach to how staff perform their jobs, resulting in increased job satisfaction.

In short, this university is ready for change, and will be able to adapt to the various outcomes delivered by the change drivers. As discussed in Chapter 2, by using a strong framework for conducting organizational change management, the academy can move from a state of readiness to one of action.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed the organizational context behind a problem of practice at a Canadian university, specifically, the problem of retaining undergraduate students from first to second year of degree progression. The chapter explored a leadership-focused vision for change, and considered three major components–academic advising, first year programs, and learner supports– to the university's retention problem, and the gaps between the present and desired state. To achieve the desired state, we have considered change drivers, specifically symbolic senior leadership and leveraging existing leadership roles using leader-member exchange theory (LMX). Finally, the university's readiness for change was developed using Holt et al.'s (2007) four factor model for change readiness.

In Chapter 2, we will discuss using LMX as a theoretical framework for driving change in student retention at the university. The chapter will analyze further the three major areas that have been identified for change in student retention, and build solutions for implementation across the academy. Finally, considerations surrounding the ethics of the proposed solutions will be discussed in the context of this organisational improvement plan.

Chapter 2: Planning and Development

Theoretical Framework for Leading Change

There are various models for leading change in organizations, but this university requires a model in which individuals can self-actualize to achieve an end goal. As the campus community is in constant flux, both from the normal progression of the academic cycle and the constant change in people and responsibilities, a theory for change that is dynamic as well as one that takes into consideration the importance of interpersonal relationships in the academy is required. Some popular models such as Nadler and Tushman's congruence model (1989) may suffice in framing the retention problem at the university, but lack the appropriate focus on the importance of human interaction in the change process. Although outlining a complete conceptual framework of organizational variables, the congruence model sets people as a participant in the change process, but not the focus of change itself. Stacey's complexity theory (1996) gets closer to the heart of the importance of human interaction as the true locus for change, but posits that intentional feedback loops can lead to self-organization. Unfortunately, despite intentional feedback that has attempted to connect the individual to the organization's strategic mandate, this type of self-organization has yet to materialize.

The leader-member exchange theory (LMX) recognizes the importance of human interaction, specifically those that happen between leaders and followers (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Lunenburg, 2010). The theory promotes a one-size-fits-one approach to the way in which leaders can interact with their teams, and at its core, recognizes that people are not simply change agents but often the operative element that needs changing within an organization. LMX can work with various type of change, as the theory allows for leaders and followers to dialogue and build rapport in the change process. Whether the

change is anticipatory, reactive or even radical, LMX allows for a continued feedback loop between leadership and staff. What is more, the theory calls for a deep connectedness and trust to be developed in the change process, which may further cement the relationship and understanding of stakeholders in the change process, specifically if the leader closely embodies the organizational identity (Eisenberger, Karagonlar, Stinglhamber, Neves, Becker, Gonzolez-Morales & Steiger-Mueller, 2010; Kim & Organ, 1982).

The LMX theory grew out of an earlier concept called vertical dyad linkage theory (VDL). The core tenet of VDL is that dyadic relationships formed between individuals create two types of groups. In-groups are formed when there are expanded roles and negotiated role responsibilities between leader and followers, whereas out-groups were those individuals who did not work beyond their formal job role and description (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). Essentially in-groups and out-groups create a separation between the highly-motivated achievers from those employees who do not want to take on extra tasks and responsibilities. These groups are largely fostered by the relationship between the leader and the follower. As followers work with their leaders to negotiate tasks and find reciprocity in their relationships, they enter the in-group. Followers that are unable to have the same high-quality dyadic relationship with their leaders become the out-group.

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991) maintained that leaders should look to build trusting relationships with members in order to maximize the leader's in-group. Leaders could then develop other meaningful relationships with individuals outside of their domain of responsibility in order to create high-quality reciprocal partnerships with other areas

within the organization. Graen and Uhl-Bien's subsequent work (1995) outlined this

relationship-building exercise in a three-phase model that outlines the development and

maturation of the partnerships in high-quality leadership making. Table 1 outlines this

process from the beginning stages of low quality and scripted exchanges to the final

partnership phase, where roles are negotiated and exchanges are high quality.

Table 1

The Relationship Development of Leader-Membership Exchange Interactions in Time

	Phases in Leadership Making		
	Phase 1	**Phase 2**	**Phase 3**
	Stranger	**Acquaintance**	**Partner**
Roles	Scripted	Tested	Negotiated
Influences	One way	Mixed	Reciprocal
Exchanges	Low quality	Medium quality	High quality
Interests	Self	Self and other	Group
	Time ———————————————————→		

Note: Adapted from "Relational Based Approach to Leadership: Development of a Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory of Leadership Over 25 Years: Applying a Multi-Level, Multi-Domain perspective," by G.B. Graen and M. Uhl-Bien, 1995, *Leadership Quarterly*, 6(2), 231.

LMX may be used as a theoretical framework for understanding change at the

case university, because it can manage the human interaction factors that are deep-rooted

as problems within the university's structure. LMX creates organizational units where

members are connected to either an in-group or an out-group, depending on their affinity

with the leader and interpersonal characteristics (Graen, 1976). These groups can work

as a way of optimizing member participation in developing coordinated solutions to a

problem.

In Chapter 1, we discussed the disconnect between the university's faculty and their willingness to self-actualize on the retention problem. Most faculty members will understand easily that there is a retention problem, but few will be able to see themselves as part of the solution, and few will have an ability to visualize solutions outside of their narrow scope (Stokes, 2013). However, when solutions are implemented by the university centre in areas where faculty members see it effecting their day-to-day work, or when failure to consult fosters feelings of exclusivity, change mobilization can falter, and out-groups can grow.

What is more, when an identified change agent fails to include those who are less self-initiating, it becomes difficult to continue to mobilize change across a stakeholder group. This can result in a dead-end effect, and stakeholders who want to feel as part of the solution are left out of the exchange (creating the out-group). By using the formal organizational structure of the university, and certain identified leaders, we can develop a mechanism for including and consulting the campus community in a strategic and intentional way. Using a leader-member exchange solution development can have a tremendous cross-campus impact on stakeholder participation (perpetuating the in-group), ultimately leading to a more inclusive and constructive approach to organizational change management. The challenge to this type of approach is that it takes time, and individuals in leadership roles and their teams have to spend the face time necessary to gain participation from campus stakeholders. As we will discuss in the following sections, these temporal challenges will be a factor in developing sustainable solutions in student retention.

Critical Organizational Analysis

In Chapter 1, we discussed the university's readiness for change as viewed through the lens of the change readiness model presented by Holt et al. (2007). The attitudes of the university community are poised for change, and an LMX framework can assist in ensuring that change is developed through relationships instead of being imposed on the broader academy. While LMX is the model that can be used to lead change across the academy, we need to look to other frameworks for diagnosing the major gaps that exists between the current and desired state of student retention. We have discussed three distinct priorities for change–academic advising, first year programs, and academic supports–that have hindered the university from realizing a desired state of student retention, and within these problem areas we must analyze the competing values and priorities that have led to an undesirable state. We can view some of the current gaps in optimal practices by using Quinn, Hildebrandt, Rogers, and Thompson's (1991) competing values model, whereby internal and external forces compete alongside aspects of flexibility and control. This model will be applied to our current problem areas of focus.

Academic Advising

As viewed through Quinn et al.'s (1991) competing values model, we can see a challenging situation of low control and an absent external focus. According to Habley, Bloom and Robbins (2012), academic advising, as assessed by the national (US) survey administered by American College Testing (ACT), recognizes seven models for academic advising split into three categories – Faculty-only, centralized, and shared models. The university's current Faculty-only model represents the least used model (7%) of all participating institutions.

Our case study university's advisors are housed fully within the institution's faculties, and there exists a large variation of duties performed by advisors due to a lack of central coordination. In some cases, advisors are assisting with scheduling and clerical duties, limiting their ability to spend time with students, while other faculties have structures that result in hugely divergent advisor-to-student ratios. Perhaps most importantly, the university advisors in all faculties are left with a large portion of their workload assisting with non-academic concerns, such as scheduling, admission and transfer credit issues, course withdraws, and even mental health concerns. These extra duties ultimately place a strain on what is a very under resourced area of the university. Although there is currently no apparent research that presents an optimal student-to-advisor ratio, Habley (2004b) notes that a 300:1 ratio is a best practice among advising professionals; conversely, the university's institutional ratio is currently 600:1. What is more, Faculty-based advising needs are often forced to conform to pre-existing human resource structures to ensure the appearance of uniformity across campus. This results in increased student-to-advisor ratios in the case of program-specific models, and structures that do not meet the requirements of the disciplines within an academic unit. Not only do advising units lack flexibility and control in their workload, there also exists a void in professional training and practice. A majority of the university advisors lack any formal training in their profession, largely a product of the rapid growth of the university and the need for immediate human resources. Virtually none of the advisors hold a graduate level education, and there is little external focus on the part of the academy to develop this important group of people.

First Year Programming

The university is largely devoid of first year programming. With the exception of

a three-day orientation event and a peer mentorship program, there exists little in the way

of organized and intentional first year learning communities that are grounded in

formalized programming and learning evaluation. In the context of Quinn's model, the

factors affecting the development of these types of programs are largely internal to the

student development unit. The unit has not prioritized these types of programs and has

not worked closely with faculty stakeholders to review external need. In fact, perhaps the

most striking problem here is that all of the external collaboration is often forced on the

Faculties from the student development office. The office fails to recognize that they are

providing a service to the academic units, and thus the Faculties feel like they are not

being respected or listened to with respect to program consultation and collaboration.

This lack of consultation is not out of malicious intent, but rather stems from the

evolution that student development offices have gone through in the last few decades.

Despite still providing a service to the various university academic units, these offices

have increasingly been staffed with highly educated professionals whose academic

discipline is higher-education programming. This expertise can sometimes become

muddled with the service role that student development offices are expected to play, as

student development staff look to share their knowledge and expertise with the desires

and expectations of the academic units.

Academic Supports

As we discussed in Chapter 1, the academic supports at the university are, in

many cases, ad-hoc, and are not connected to any type of early warning mechanism. For

example, if a student were to require help for mathematics at the student learning centre (SLC), there is no feedback loop that exists to inform advising units and other university supports to ensure a holistic approach to program success. Quinn's competing values model can help us understand another unbalanced situation, where the environment has low flexibility and high external pressures hindering an optimal situation.

The university's student development office delivers multiple academic supports. Learning Specialists are available to assist with issues surrounding numeracy and literacy, and a robust peer tutor network is also available, effectively increasing the SLC's reach into the student population. However, without early warning systems to identify academically at-risk students, the SLC is only able to deal with students who seek out their services, or students who have been recommended in an ad-hoc way. In 2016, the SLC writing, physics, and math specialists assisted about 10% of the student population through appointments and workshops, with the median usage being two visits. Writing was by far the most utilized service, specifically English as a second language writing, which accounted for about a third of all appointments in the SLC. Perhaps most importantly are the types of students that use the SLC services. Almost 25% of total appointments came from students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program; a discipline with an 88% admissions average and an institution leading retention rate of 95%. Thus it seems that the SLC is not only servicing students who need basic assistance, but also students who are looking to improve what are likely already strong grades. Moreover, the one-to-one service model employed by the centre in unsustainable, with staff only available to work with a small fraction of the student body. Finally, the student learning unit is largely left to its own internal devices, and there

exists a trust gap between the service providers and faculty. Faculty members feel that the office, which is housed in a non-academic unit, has no business delivering academic support services. Moreover, the learning support services does not support every discipline on campus, and does not have specialist for courses such as chemistry and biology that have high failure rates.

Solution Building

There are various possible solutions to the problem of low student retention, but one of the most important aspects of developing a solution is faculty engagement. A retention plan that addresses the aforementioned problems cannot be successful without strong support from the university faculty. Not only are faculty members delivering undergraduate education, they are also on the front line of student success, often in a position to recognize symptoms that may constitute early warning, and can in turn recommend advising, first year programming, and academic remediation. Tinto (2012) notes that in most universities, specifically commuter schools, the classroom is often the only place where learning and student engagement exist. With the university's strong commuter student base, the classroom experience becomes an important touch point (and perhaps the only touch point) of student success. The complex mechanisms available for student academic support, social and cultural transitions, as well as financial supports are not always well understood by faculty members. The university does not have a mechanism for managing communication effectively across various sub-divisions, often resulting in possible student assistance falling through the cracks even after a student's needs have been identified. Better communication as applied through relationship building in an LMX model and continued dialogue through Faculty councils and departmental meetings can ensure that retention issues are kept at the forefront.

Secondly, through LMX, we can begin breaking down barriers between faculty and support staff by building strong professional and interpersonal relationships. As we have discussed, the 2004 survey *What Works in Student Retention* identified three major factors–first year transition programs, learner support, and academic advising–that contributed to retention success across hundreds of US institutions (Habley et al., 2004). All of these retention mechanisms are delivered by support staff, but are ultimately less effective unless they are integrated into academic life, making the faculty and support staff relationship a solution imperative.

Academic advisors, for example, have the ability to assist students outside of the classroom with issues pertaining to everything from academic progression to workload; a strong staff-faculty connection can ensure that instructors can follow up if needed, and allow faculty members to continue with support mechanisms in the classroom.

Solution 1: Status-Quo, and Encourage LMX

Despite the lack of strategic coordination of current retention solutions, there are actions being taken across the academy to improve the state of student retention. These initiatives have had some success, as retention rates are slowly climbing from their low point of 79% in 2014. Accordingly, one solution to the retention problem is simply to allow these organic and ad-hoc solutions to continue to incubate in the Faculty and service units, and encourage greater leader-member exchange. As LMX is connected to positive attitudinal shifts and higher performance in staff members (Graen, Novack & Sommerkamp, 1982; Nystrom, 1990) simply using the model to increase desired behaviors and relationships in members could have an overall positive affect on retention solution development. Essentially, as attitudes and commitment toward the organization

are increased, so will the strength of individual decentralized planning toward retention. This type of interpersonal shift effectively creates broader LMX in-groups, and allows for more coordinated approach to designing solutions (Dansereau, Graen & Haga, 1975; Lunenberg, 2010). Members who connect with the leaders who are encouraging new exchanges become the individuals who are tasked with perpetuating new ideas on student retention and leading change on campus.

This status-quo approach to addressing the problem, while encouraging LMX, comes with the added benefit of low financial and social costs. Financially, this solution requires no changes to human resources and relies on the existing organizational structures to continue to build solutions to the student retention problem. An interesting factor when considering this direction is that it does not radically change the power structure across the academy. Faculties would have total autonomy to continue to drive change, and prioritize the types of initiatives that they have considered. An LMX approach may actually enhance the quality of these Faculty-based initiatives, as motivated in-groups are formed in response to the problem.

Notwithstanding, this status-quo method does not come without possible issues. Perhaps most notably is that by allowing for ad-hoc solution building to continue in the Faculty units, the university risks duplicating or even cannibalizing the various independent efforts being developed. A lack of central coordination also allows for differentiated priorities to be set by the Faculties, which could also come in conflict with developing a cohesive path toward student retention and success. An approach that could mitigate some of this lack in coordination is to have retention data communicated from the university centre through an LMX model.

Solution 2: Communicate and Share Data Through LMX

Allowing Faculty and academic support units to continue to have the freedom to test hypotheses for student retention may be desirable, and some central data coordination communicated through a leader-member exchange could allow for a more harmonized approach to solution building. This solution would not specifically require Faculties to develop retention action plans based on central oversight, but each unit would work with the university centre to understand better the problems facing retention, in order to help mediate solution development. Currently, Faculties are largely conducting their own investigations into retention problem solving and this results in ad-hoc, and at times, conflicting, approaches to retention initiatives. For example, some Faculties have duplicated efforts, or have developed retention initiatives that require summer enrolment which decreases access to other student development services on campus. The university could leverage the existing student success committee (SSC) to investigate the relevant data on student retention and take an inventory of what retention programming already exists. Moreover, this group could develop further metrics for identifying early warning markers of students in academic jeopardy in an effort to identify the characteristics of those who make an early departure from the university.

The SSC's responsibility would be to gather and mine the data, but also to act as leaders (alongside existing formal leadership) in a leader-member exchange model. Gernster and Day (1997) have identified that LMX can be responsible for increased role clarity, and essentially that is what this solution would look to accomplish. Role clarity surrounding retention solution building would be stimulated by an LMX approach that provides a constant communication on retention data that can help guide solution

building. In short, increased role clarity and understanding of retention issues in the

broader university would be an improvement over a status-quo model in that Faculty

autonomy would exist, but with a clear and consistent message from university

leadership. This environment would foster better-quality leader-member exchanges, as

members would develop a more detailed understanding of the issues, and would have

broader influence across the academy as solutions were developed. Members would be

aware of their own Faculty's self-interest, but there would also be awareness of other

Faculties' retention issues as well.

Similar to the status-quo solution that we discussed previously, this secondary

option would have the benefit of being cost effective, by leveraging the existing structure

of the SSC, and simply re-prioritizing the committee's role to become the communication

driver at the leadership end of a leader-member exchange. However, this option would

take more time. For SSC leaders to share retention data and dialogue possible priorities

for developing solutions, more time would be needed to navigate the complexities of the

data being shared, and to foster fully an understanding of the best possible return on

investment.

Another factor that would need to be reconciled with this option is a slight

increase to the workload of the institutional research office. Much of the data that would

need to be collected to inform an early warning system for retention–grade performance,

mental health, financial need, etc.–is available to the institutional research office, but

priorities would need to be put in place to ensure that retention research becomes a

primary focus for the division. Notwithstanding, the increased time and small amount of

added human resource costs outweighs the status-quo option if the outcome of a centrally

driven data-hub is a more coordinated approach to student retention solution building.

The increased coordination could allow for less duplication of efforts, and fewer conflicts

with individual initiatives. Of course, this solution still lacks a truly coordinated

approach, as Faculty units would carry on developing internal solutions, and the

university centre would simply act as a resource in coordinating the cross-campus

understanding of the problem. To approach the problem from a strategic perspective, a

more pro-active method governed by a LMX model could be used.

Solution 3: Development of a Central Action Plan, and Lead Through LMX

In the academy, where academic freedom is held sacrosanct, (Poch, 1993) it

would be difficult to impose a direction on an individual Faculty for the purposes of

solving the retention problem. However, the university's central administration could act

as a pivot point for implementing solutions that would benefit the entire university,

without restricting the Faculty units' ability to troubleshoot on their own. As we have

discussed, according to Habley et al. (2004), there are three main areas that are

considered to have a high return on investment–academic advising, first-year

programming, and academic supports–that can form the main focus for a centralized

strategy for student retention. The aforementioned Student Success Committee could

again be leveraged to champion the implementation of the strategy, and for evaluating

and managing progress on these three important areas. The SSC could be resourced to

carry out an action plan across the academy with the endorsement of senior leadership.

With a leader-member exchange model, the SSC can play a leadership role in driving

strategic solutions in cooperation with the academic units, specifically focusing on the

three identified areas as a priority. The following will detail solutions that could be driven centrally:

Academic advising. By adopting a shared model for academic advising, university advising could be augmented to have a triage central services unit to deal with registrarial and non-academic issues. This would allow for advisors to have more time to move towards a proactive advising model, which recommends students to campus supports and remedial mechanisms if required. Another central solution is to create an advising strategist position, an individual that would be responsible for formalizing advising strategy across the university. This coordinating position, considered essential in advising structures (Gordon et al., 2008), would ensure advising theory and best practices are implemented, and act as the central hub for analytics and assessment behind the implementation of a wider advising strategy. As the majority of non-program issues that advisors deal with are related to registrarial processes, central advising could fit well within the office of the Registrar. Moreover, the client service hub already located in the office of the Registrar, would make for a natural destination for students in need of assistance.

Some Faculties have a need to use faculty members' service time to assist with advising duties due to the accreditation requirements of certain programs. A shared model with a triage unit at the university centre would allow for the advanced program-specific advising cases to be sent to the Faculty advising units, thus increasing the advising horsepower at the Faculty level.

A further step to alleviate the pressure on Faculty advising units is to ensure they report into a faculty member with an administrative appointment. Although most

Faculties have advisors reporting to associate deans, or program chairs (in one case,

advising reports directly to the Dean), some faculties have advisors working under

administrative managers, resulting in advising staff inheriting various tasks that

ultimately take away from student contact hours. Under a shared advising structure

between the office of the Registrar and the Faculties, it will be important to ensure all

Faculty advisors are reporting into to an academic staff member, so that they can address

better the academic needs of their students. What is more, an academic-based reporting

structure will ensure that the academic needs of the Faculty are met while allowing for

overarching advising strategy and development to flow from the central advising unit.

Finally, a shared advising structure will assist in connecting the advising unit with

other university services areas that can assist with non-academic transitions. Both first

year transition services and learner support are two examples of supports that can be

connected through the triage unit housed in the central service hub.

Learner supports. The university already has some learning supports that could

be effective in assisting with student retention, but as we have discussed, the SLC and

other student development units currently lack a service model that could assist the

students who actually require remediation. For learner supports to function correctly,

early warning systems can assist in identifying the type of SLC supports that are needed.

Moreover, for students identified as at-risk, early remediation should be mandatory for

continuance in their program. If mandatory remediation were endorsed, the SLC could

certainly continue to offer assistance with numeracy, literacy, and study skills, but would

also need to focus on supporting subject areas that have high failure rates. Table 2

outlines the courses that have high failure rates in first and second year. In many cases,

these courses affect multiple degree programs, and would be the subject areas most in need of support if early warning mechanisms flow academically at-risk students toward the SLC.

Table 2

First and Second Year Courses with a High Failure Rate, by Degree

	Degree						
Course	**BSc**	**BA**	**BEng**	**BHSc**	**BScN**	**BCom**	**BIT**
BIOL 1010U	X			X			
BUSI 1450U						X	
BUSI 2150U						X	
BUSI 2160U						X	
CHEM 1010U	X			X			
CHEM 1800U			X				
CSCI 1030U	X						
MATH 1010U	X		X				
MATH 1020U	X		X				
PHY 1010U	X		X				

With the development of an early warning system, the SLC must be a central part of early assistance strategies, and has the potential to reach a far greater number of students. Early and increased traffic to the SLC will create new conditions, and the following issues would need to be addressed:

1) Certain high failure course areas–biology, chemistry, finance, and computer science–do not have dedicated SLC specialists for remedial support. These areas would need

to be reviewed if early warning systems were sending students to the SLC for

mandatory remediation.

2) With current staffing compliments it would be difficult for SLC staff to handle a large

influx of students on a one-to-one basis. Different support formats could be explored

to ensure an increased volume of students could be accommodated.

3) If peer tutors were used as part of an early warning intervention, workload would

need to be evaluated.

First year programming. Once a student becomes enrolled at the university,

student engagement strategies take the place of the non-academic relationship that was

fostered during the recruitment phase. Student engagement is an important support

mechanism that can be nurtured by the academy, and facilitated directly through student

services. In the context of institutional retention efforts, many studies have tied the level

of student engagement to academic success and persistence to graduation (Astin, 1993;

Braxton et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kuh et al., 2008; Tinto, 1994). Astin's

(1993) student involvement theory lists the most important forms of student engagement

as peer collaboration and student-faculty interaction, marking student involvement inside

and outside of the classroom as important factors to student success. In short, the

connection between institutional culture and classroom activities is of paramount

importance to student retention, and creating opportunities to foster linkages to the

classroom has been shown to be a sound practice for increasing student success (Kuh et

al., 2008). These links with programming such as orientation, peer mentorship, or first

year learning communities become even more important in the retention context, as the

university's high commuter-student base results in many students' classroom connection

being their only connection with the university.

If the university's commuter-school identity results in a classroom-only

experience for many students, the classroom must be treated as one of the primary stages

for linking our retention strategies. Student supports cannot continue to be separated from

the teaching and learning aspects of the campus. Consider an average undergraduate

student who attends class regularly, but also has a weekly 10-hour commute to campus

and works a modest 15 hours a week at part-time job. With over 45 hours of

commitments before any sort of social activities or studying, is it likely to assume that

they would not be eager to negotiate their way through the gauntlet of campus supports

without some sort of connection to the current classroom routine. Moreover, today's

student is, at times, reluctant to seek out supports due to the low academic efficacy

associated with failure (Ryan, Gheen & Midgley, 1998). Indeed, some students may even

question the positive outcomes of using support services, instead looking for more of an

immediate outcome through negotiation with faculty and teaching assistants. If student

engagement strategies were integrated into the classroom, commuter students would

access them in the place where they're most likely to be when on campus.

Much of the retention literature speaks to the importance of connecting student

life and student supports to academic life on campus (Kinnick & Ricks, 1993; Habley,

Bloom & Robbins, 2012; Schroder, 2013). At the university there are many coordinated

efforts that are congruent with common retention best practices. Summer orientation

programs, first year transition, and peer mentoring initiatives are all well established at

the institution, however there is a disconnect between the initiatives happening at the

university centre and programming being offered by Faculties and other service divisions. In some cases, Faculties or administrative divisions are running parallel programs at the same time as the central units. Perhaps even more concerning is that sometimes these initiatives are done totally independent of the student development experts on campus. These are only a few examples of the vast inventory of supports offered to students (see Appendix B for a complete list), and whether they are offered by a Faculty or student development services, student engagement strategies are rarely connected to the classroom. Indeed, initiatives like student orientation, or mental health supports could be discussed at the beginning of a lecture or tutorial session to nurture such a linkage. As we have discussed there is a great need to foster student-to-student and student-to-faculty engagement to the academic experience, but at present, academic staff often function independently of the student development professionals. Faculty must be prepared to foster both learning and develop linkages that foster student involvement within the greater university community.

      Benefits of the central option. The central plan option would allow Faculties to continue working on custom fit internal solutions for student retention while at the same time having a powerful central strategy that would address the overarching issues facing the entire university. It would also provide a strategic framework for affecting change in student retention, while allowing for more focus on central initiatives. Additionally, this approach would provide the academic units the flexibility to work on peripheral problems as needed. This option would take the most amount of time, as leaders use the LMX model to build high-quality partnerships with faculty and staff to ensure buy-in and participation. As Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991) suggest, leaders could focus on the

inclusion of all members in an effort to build a single in-group where roles are negotiated and interactions are highly reciprocal and constructive. The membership can then feel a sense of inclusion and motivation when tackling a problem that has been identified as a key priority by the university and have a clear focus for action. It would also take time to develop role clarity in the context of a central strategy, however, with a clearly identified set of roles, LMX can assist in developing increased role perception (Snyder & Bruning, 1985) and better objective performance (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982) ultimately building towards an integrated strategy that can have university wide assessment measures and metrics.

A centralized strategy may cost more, as the strategies that we have identified would be implemented across the whole university opposed to one Faculty. For example, a Faculty which was managing a few early warning metrics for the purposes of early academic intervention might be a manageable assignment for one individual, but managing an early warning system across an entire university could become a monumental task, as detailed factors and combinations of factors are identified that affect retention. Further, institutional-wide strategies would come with added costs to the existing information technology infrastructure as formal student management systems are evaluated for tracking students' academic progression. Finally, the plan calls for a change to the current university structure with the creation of a centralized advising unit. With the addition of the advisor coordinator position and at least one central advisor, the university would have to incur some nominal cost, however this could be managed slowly and through attrition if necessary.

Solution Analyzing

All three of the solutions presented have a number of factors in common. Perhaps most important is that campus-wide communication can be identified as a major factor in developing retention strategies, and in all cases LMX can be an effective theoretical framework for generating change. Secondly, all of these solutions respect the autonomy of the academic units to develop their own solutions, but to varying extents, where the second and third option impose increasing amounts of central coordination.

These three solutions may also be accomplished in varying degrees of time, with the third option requiring the most planning, and discussion across the university. We will discuss measuring change effectiveness of both LMX and the presented retention solutions at length in Chapter 3; and while all of these options can realize some sort of measurable result within the short term, the third option is the only solution that presents a measurable centralized approach to coordinated change. As we have discussed, this approach would likely take the most amount of time to initiate, and is demonstrably the most complex, and most resource intensive. Notwithstanding, the central coordination option is the better approach to affecting change, as it represents the only option where there can be dedicated and strategic direction across all academic divisions.

This option can be developed across the academy using a leader-member exchange model, and in fact, the three overarching goals can be viewed temporally through the LMX phases of leadership making. Table 3 shows possible short-, medium-, and long-term goals for student retention initiatives alongside the corresponding LMX phases of leadership making.

Table 3

Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Goals of a Centralized Retention Strategy in the LMX Phases of Leadership Making

	Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long -Term
LMX Phase	**Stranger**	**Acquaintance**	**Partner**
Academic Advising	• Gap analysis • Advisor needs assessment	• Advisor training • Standardized workloads • Decrease student-advisor ratios	• Developmental advising • Proactive model • Early warning system
Academic Support	• Student usage profile • Support efficacy assessment • Awareness campaign	• Increased student participation • Developed service model • Tracking and analysis	• Integrated student development • In-class programming • Proactive referral
First Year Programs	• Program efficacy assessment • Segmentation analysis	• Increased faculty participation • Program segmentation • Assessment model development	• Faculty-Admin partnership • Remedial programming

The centralized strategy is the strongest option for affecting real change in student retention. The two alternative solutions were ultimately not chosen because they represent incomplete options compared to the strategic breadth offered in a centralized strategy. While it would add even more time to solution implementation, it is possible to conceive that the first two options could represent a phased or laddered approach to eventually achieving the central strategy option. However, in the interest of time, and as LMX presents a sound mechanism for communicating change through its own temporal model, option three will be developed in this organizational improvement plan for the purposes of change implementation and evaluation.

Leadership Approaches to Change

Adopting the option of developing a centralized retention plan and moving towards a leader-member exchange model will require significant change to the

university; specifically the existing leadership and members of the SSC. First, a centralized strategy must be reviewed by the SSC, further developed and refined, and, in Chapter 3, we will discuss the strategies and goals of the change implementation plan. Perhaps most challenging will be the transition of leaders to a leader-member exchange model. It is important to note that adopting LMX does not require existing leaders to abandon their leadership style, as studies have shown that LMX can exist alongside other leadership models (Basu & Green, 1997) or in larger systems of casual relationships (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997 and 2005). By showing the value of LMX to leaders and followers, a transition can take place that allows LMX to become an important leadership communication tool.

Some empirical studies have shown the benefit of leader-member exchange on the part of the leader. Duchon, Green and Taber (1986) found members to have greater satisfaction with their direct management using LMX's preceding vertical dyad linkage model. More recently, a study by Schriesheim, Castro, Zhou, and Yammarino (2001) found that LMX provided a more balanced power structure between leaders and members. However, as Gerstner and Day (1997) acknowledge, LMX is especially beneficial towards the attitudes and performance of followers. Thus, it behooves leadership that is transitioning to a LMX model to understand the positive outcomes of LMX not simply for their own benefit, but for the increased benefits it affords their followers. The benefits of LMX to the follower should act as both an incentive to the leadership group but also a powerful motivator for the members or follower groups.

In order for our case study university to adopt fully an LMX approach, leaders will have to adjust their management styles to an interpersonal relationship style. This

may prove difficult for some, as there exists a culture of isolation for some leaders. In fact, there are many people in a leadership position at the university who are relatively unknown to the broader academy. By working with leaders to have them regard their leadership role from a relationship perspective, LMX can slowly be integrated into the various personal styles of leadership on campus.

This transition will need to be monitored closely, as LMX is not without its criticisms. Perhaps foremost is that scholarship has presented little agreement on how LMX can be assessed (Gerstner & Day, 1997). The disagreement in assessment models means that when choosing an assessment framework for LMX, the university must be careful in selecting a tool that fits the unique structures and values of the institution. What is more, LMX can be measured from both the perspective of the leader or member, and the output from this measurement could show one side to be in opposition to the other.

Others have pointed out that LMX can be viewed as having an undesirable effect on followers as it creates a dichotomy of in-groups and out-groups, whereby the in-groups have better exchanges, and relationships (McClane, 1991). Although LMX was not designed to foster an unfair working environment (Northouse, 2016), the chances that some followers could feel that in-groups fostered by leadership may show preferential treatment to these groups is certainly present. Notwithstanding the way in which LMX has evolved, has called into question the structural tension that in-groups and out-groups create. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991) argue that leaders should look beyond the concept of in-groups and out-groups, and focus on building trusting and respectful relationships with all followers. Regardless, assessment of this transition, as we will discuss at length in Chapter 3, will be necessary for both leaders and members of the academy.

As part of the transition, LMX can be used to evaluate the leader-member exchanges that start to grow across the academy. Leaders that develop high-quality networks of relationships can in turn leverage those networks to foster new leader-member exchanges as individuals work together to solve problems. The theoretical underpinnings of LMX provide a model for disseminating a leader-member exchange theory across an organization. The quality of the dyadic relationships that form between leaders and members is, at a very basic level, an assessment of the quality of the LMX model's impact in itself. Essentially, the early adopters of LMX will develop meaningful social interactions and groups to perpetuate the idea of LMX in the organization. In short, as leadership identifies the mechanisms for change, it is the relationships that develop that will ensure their effective operationalization.

Leadership Ethics and Organizational Change

As we discussed in Chapter 1, ethical leadership is a foundation of the author's leadership value system. Specifically, practical ethics requires leaders to make sound and just decisions, in relation to their followers and the organization as a whole. If we apply this notion to our case study university, leaders must affect change with a clear understanding of the impact to all campus stakeholders–students, faculty, staff, and the broader community–and must be respectful to the mission vision and values of the academy. When affecting change, this ethical lens becomes a part of the steps taken in the decision-making process.

The current solution proposal for the betterment of student retention has two major foci; 1) the implementation of a central strategy that addresses academic advising, first-year programs, and learner supports; and 2) the transition to a leader-member

exchange model to manage communications and relationships across the academy. Both
of these efforts have their own ethical considerations that must be discussed before
change management can begin fully.

Ethics Surrounding Centralized Planning

The centralized retention plan will drive change that impacts students and faculty
members. As current service models are changed and redeveloped, it will be important to
look carefully at the competing demands of university faculty and administration versus
the needs of students. As we have discussed earlier, academic advisor ratios are
comparatively high and the service model of various learner supports and first year
programming do not always assist the students with the most need. As these issues are
modified it will be important to recognize that a change to better impact one student
group may actually be detrimental to another. For example, service-to-student ratios will
easily be decreased if advising and programming staff only focused on students who were
in academic jeopardy through the early warning system. This may be a more effective use
of current resources, but as the service model is currently open to all students it is
arguably unethical to disadvantage higher-achieving individuals from the same supports.

As the central model is implemented it will also have an impact on faculty
workload, and this in turn can lead to ethical dilemmas for leadership. Leaders must
ensure faculty workload is normalized despite the need to have increased student
development programming in the classroom. Moreover, individual faculty members who
will have a choice in providing higher-quality student development supports and
contributing to early warning systems will have to make an ethical choice between doing
what's right for a student despite a possible increase to their own workload. With all of

these changes, the university will have to be careful not to fall into the trap of ethical

egoism, where the concerns of the individual outweigh all else (Avolio & Locke, 2002).

As it is university leadership who will make the types of decisions surrounding program

optimization for advising and learner supports, as well as dictate the change in workload

for faculty, it would be best to regard these decisions from a lens of practical ethics.

Thus, a more utilitarian approach to decision making can be used that weighs the greatest

positive impact for the greatest amount of people.

Ethics Surrounding Leader-Member Exchange

The dyadic relationship development that results with in- and out-groups could be

construed as prejudicial towards those who have less synergy with the leader. As

McClane (1991) suggests, the dichotomous pairing off of in- and out-groups may have

negative impacts on the total member group. However, this implied prejudice of LMX is

certainly debatable; as Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991) recommend, leaders should focus on

developing all relationships. If it is possible for anyone to become part of the in-group,

LMX becomes a more egalitarian model. Notwithstanding, this ethical debate must at

least be recognized as a possible outcome of an LMX transition, and leaders must work to

minimize relationships that exclude individuals in favour of a more balanced approach to

leader-member exchange.

Some leaders may have difficulty balancing the ethical tension that could exist

within a LMX model, and it will be important to ensure the assessment and evaluation

models used for the transition are able to identify areas where leaders are struggling so

that they may be supported during and after the transition. Moreover, leaders should use

their own peer relational dyads to encourage the development of the largest possible in-

group within their units. Peers that witness large out-groups forming can develop

mechanisms for expanding leader-member relationships in order to minimize the

possibility of an ethical conflict.

Finally, transparent due diligence can help leadership traverse possible ethics

issues as they present themselves. Ethical questions can arise all of the time, and are not

limited to the examples given within this organizational improvement plan. The best way

in which to cope with the possibility of ethics issues is to continually question and

evaluate decision making through an ethical lens. When in doubt, leaders should rely on

peer groups and senior management to clarify concerns and allow for an open and

practical conversation on ethical behavior.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 discussed using LMX as a theoretical framework for driving change in

student retention at the university. The chapter analyzed further the three major areas that

have been identified for change in student retention–academic advising, first year

programs, and learner supports–and developed various solutions for implementation

across the academy, ultimately deciding on a centralized action plan led through LMX.

In Chapter 3, we will discuss change implementation and action, as well as a

strategy for communicating change using a leader-member exchange. The chapter will

also focus on assessment and evaluation of the proposed change. Through each of these

areas of change implementation an ethical component can be incorporated into the

development and decision making process. This will ensure transparency in decision

making, as well as contribute to an equitable approach of problem solving.

Chapter 3: Implementation, Evaluation, and Communication
Change Implementation Plan

Chapter 2 discussed using leader-member exchange (LMX) as a theoretical framework for driving change in student retention. Specifically, by developing a strategic direction for three problems–academic advising, first year programs and learner supports–that affect first-to-second year retention rates most significantly at 4 year public institutions (Habley et al., 2004). Chapter 3 will outline an implementation strategy for this plan, and discuss the implications for transition across the various stakeholder groups in the academy. It will outline actions for evaluation and assessment of the plan and provide a set of measures for ensuring the plan keeps consistent with the desired outcomes discussed. Finally, the chapter will discuss communications tactics, specifically how leader-member exchange (LMX) can be leveraged in the context of this organizational improvement plan.

Implementing any sort of transition within the academy will require a balance of the positive and negative factors that can be associated with change. While the overarching change will move the academy in a positive direction for increased student retention, there could be negative factors that result from the adjustments that need to be made to achieve the desired outcomes. Duck (2001) outlines the emotional fallout that can occur from change, where the human factor needs to be considered as part of the change process. Similarly, Gentile (2010) maintains that aspects of change may affect the moral value centres of certain stakeholders, and although this may be unavoidable collateral damage of the change, leaders must work to mitigate some of the negative aspects to the change process.

Managing the human factors in change is perhaps as important as the change itself, and although there are many theories that can assist in organizing change (Duck, 2001; Gentile, 2010; Kotter, 1996; Lewin, 1951), an approach that recognizes both the change and human factors will be most appropriate when implementing this organizational improvement plan. With these factors in mind, a first step in realizing change in academic advising, first year programs, and learner supports is to develop a set of high-level goals and conduct a broad stakeholder analysis for each functional area. The members of the Student Success Committee (SSC) will largely act as the change agents, as the membership is comprised of the academic and divisional leads that have already been given the mandate to manage student retention initiatives on campus. The following section will outline planned goals and outcomes for each key strategy, and the subsequent sections will outline possible emotional and philosophical responses to the proposed change, as well as other possible implementation issues.

Academic Advising

As we discussed in Chapter 1, the academic advising group is largely disjointed, and lacks central coordination and strategy. Notwithstanding, the groups service focus is excellent, and the main goals of this organization improvement plan will be to reinforce this service focus by providing concrete strategic planning for all advising units that addresses some of the challenges–high student-to-advisor ratios, non-advising workload, and lack of coordination–that the advising units are currently facing. To this end, the following goals will be the main focus of the implementation strategy:

Goal 1: Focus advisors on the early student lifecycle and develop an early warning system.

Goal 2: Move toward a coordinated proactive advising model by 2020.

Goal 3: Invest in training and professional development of key advising staff.

Goal 4: Develop role clarity for advisors and centralize non-advisor services.

The first step in developing a more coordinated approach to academic advising will be to evaluate fully the student lifecycle to look for early warning signs that advising units can use to move toward a proactive model for support. Proactive advising (formerly intrusive advising) is an advising approach that blends aspects of advising and counseling, and leverages early and in-program warning mechanisms in an attempt to assist students who may realize academic jeopardy (Drake, Jordan, & Miller, 2013). This type of advising model requires significant institutional student data in order to provide a profile of at-risk students.

The institutional research office can be leveraged to investigate possible signs of early departure such as high school GPA, classroom attendance, and early academic performance. With the hiring of an advising coordinator, the Student Success Committee can set a transition timeframe from the current ad-hoc model for advising towards an approach that leverages student lifecycle data to identify students who are most at risk. The move to proactive advising can be complimented by the third and fourth goal, and the advising coordinator can work on ensuring select advisors receive specific training that explains proactive advising in practice. Moreover, the coordinator can catalogue non-advising duties that are managed by advisors in an effort to increase role clarity, and create a list of duties that could be taken over by a central support unit such as the client services desk in the office of the Registrar.

Learner Supports

Goals for increasing the role of learner supports will attempt to operationalize better the various service models that exist, as well as integrate support activities into the early warning system aimed at assisting advising units to proactively diagnose learner issues. Finally, a remedial program for students who are not captured by support systems will be developed in order to give students an alternate pathway to academic suspension. These goals are as follows:

Goal 5: Connect learner support activities to the early warning system.

Goal 6: Enhance program utilization and service efficacy.

Goal 7: Develop a remedial pathway for students who are otherwise required to withdraw.

Although the existing data already supports that a majority of students who use learner support services are not those who are at risk of academic jeopardy (Stokes, 2013), the SSC can start to evaluate learner support program efficacy to begin a collaborative approach with the service units. As part of this evaluation, the SSC and service units can build a plan that looks to target more at-risk students, and expand the current one-to-one delivery model to small groups and learning communities. After learner support services have been improved to provide service to the students who need the most assistance, the SSC can act as the liaison with the Faculty units to slowly integrate services directly into the classroom. This will allow learner support experts to work with students who identify as having difficulty with certain concepts or who have been identified by faculty members through formal grading or individual discussion.

A final goal is the development of a remedial program that facilitates learning in both the students' home academic discipline, as well as in the study skills and support services available to them. This program should be a collaboration between the university Faculties and learner support services and look to provide students the information and tools to be successful in undergraduate study. Moreover, this program should be a for-credit model that allows students to maintain enrolment and financial aid status at the university.

First Year Programs

Student involvement programs such as orientation, peer mentorship, and extra-curricular programs are important to the transition from high school to university, and as Tinto (2006) suggests, the programs are especially important in the first year of study. However, there can exist a perception by the academy that this type of programming is secondary to the academic nature of a university, and not, as many retention scholars (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Upcraft, Gardener & Barefoot, 2005) would maintain, part of the academic experience itself. Indeed the first year programs offered by the university are often solid and do well to transition students using a high level of engagement, but often with the skepticism of the Faculty units. The single, but ultimately complex goal for first year programs is to instigate involvement programming directly into the academic programming.

Goal 8: Link orientation and learning communities directly to the classroom.

As many faculty members see a student's ability to succeed based solely on their cognitive abilities and/or motivation (Tinto, 2005), it is imperative to link the programing

directly to the classroom to assist students, but also change the culture of the sink-or-

swim mentality that exists for some faculty members.

Transition Management Plan

The eight goals that have been outlined will not come without significant

challenges for implementation, and a carefully constructed transition plan will need to

manage some of the attitudinal and structural tension that may result from the changes.

As stakeholder reactions will likely be varied and difficult to predict, it will be important

to conduct an exhaustive stakeholder analysis (Appendix C) that categorizes stakeholder

groups and identifies possible perceptions and messaging. This analysis will form the

groundwork for disseminating the changes in a cogent ant thoughtful fashion. As we will

discuss in the communications section, part of the benefit of using an LMX approach to

change management is that a significant amount of time and resources will be spent on

relationship building with stakeholders, in order to affect change. This will allow for a

constructive approach to solution implementation, and when subsequent consultations

with stakeholders reveal conflict with the stated goals, there will be an opportunity to

dialogue various approaches to the problem. Notwithstanding, the eight goals represent

the leadership-focused vision for change, and are firm in their outcome, but collaborative

in their approach.

When legitimate employee concerns result from stakeholder consultations and

communications, aspects of the plan can be taken off line in a modular fashion without

derailing the momentum from the rest of the change process. Indeed, it behooves leaders

to consider valid concerns as part of the practical ethics approach to leadership and

change management that we have already discussed. This approach to taking certain

considerations off line can be understood in the theoretical constructs of Lewin's theory

of change (1951), whereby the change that has been suggested in a solid state can be 'unfrozen' for dialogue and discourse, to allow for a more fluid approach to analyzing the particular element in question. Once leadership and employees have developed an understanding of the conflict, and developed solutions to move forward, the change can be frozen, and more stakeholders can be comfortable with the decision.

The Student Success Committee (SSC) will largely be the formal mechanism for engaging the campus community in the change initiative. As each member leads a division that is directly relational to the eight priority goals, the relationship building through LMX will begin with this group of individuals. The SSC members will form network improvement communities derived from the initial stakeholder analysis, and each member will work within their network developing a leader-member exchange that produces high-quality, reciprocal relationships that can dialogue any structural tensions and change conflicts that arise. As each member of the SSC has an important role in this process, the following table gives a starting guideline for who can champion the LMX process within a network improvement community.

Table 4

Proposed SSC Leads for Network Improvement Communities.

SSC Lead	Institutional Network Improvement
Academic Advising Coordinator	Academic Advisors
Director, Learning Innovation	Learner Support Services
AVP Planning and Administration	Senior Leadership
Associate Dean, Academic Quality	Faculty Stakeholders
Registrar	Client Service and Communications Staff
Director, Student Life	First Year Programming Staff
Faculty Representatives	Faculty Stakeholders

Other Implementation Factors

As we have discussed, some theoretical models (Duck, 2001; Gentile, 2010) can help identify the human and emotional side of change and, accordingly, LMX can be an approach to leadership that can mitigate some of the emotional conflict that may arise from change. However, there are other factors that may disrupt the implementation of the core eight goals, and perhaps the most obvious of these is financial costs.

Most of the eight priority goals require some sort of financial commitment on behalf of the institution. For example, the development of an early warning system could have significant cost implications if the university decides to adopt an enterprise software solution. Similarly, investing in training and professional development for advising staff would come at an added cost, albeit a cost that is likely to be heavily front-loaded as the change process ramps up. All of the goals would have some sort of staff cost associated with their implementation, either direct costs such as the addition of a full time advising coordinator, or indirect costs as resources are reallocated and prioritized to achieve the priority goals. In the case of finance consideration, the AVP Planning and Administration could be the SSC lead that has the negotiations on financial priority with the other institutional senior leaders. As the AVP is responsible for allocating the university budget alongside the CFO, this discussion could happen in a similar fashion to the network improvement communities conducted at the unit level.

A second major factor, which we will also discuss in the communications section of this chapter, is time. An institution that is conducting change through a leader-member exchange model must be keenly aware that the effectiveness of LMX is partly predicated on time. This organizational improvement plan is in itself a temporal endeavor, and one

that will likely have a longer transition and implementation phase than other change plans

that the university has experienced. Put simply, to achieve high-quality reciprocal

relationships, the leaders in the SSC will need to spend a significant amount of time

developing communities of practice with invested stakeholders. A quick review of the

SSC membership suggests that this could be a difficult task, and one that should be well

monitored, as the individuals that comprise the SSC have large diverse portfolios, and

conflicting priorities in their typical day-to-day roles. Even those that can accept easily

the time commitment necessary to operationalize a LMX leadership transition will need

mechanisms to monitor and evaluate their own output in the context of the improvement

plan. To this end, the development of short- and medium-term goals that contextualize

the challenges surrounding time and money, and complement the eight priority items will

be developed and refined. Table 5 provides an example of some short- and medium-term

goals associated with each of the eight priority goals.

Table 5

Short- and Medium-Term Benchmarks for the Eight Priority Goals.

Goal	Short-Term	Time (mo.)	Medium-Term	Time (mo.)
Early warning	• Develop inventory of early warning measures • Use predictive modeling to identify students most at risk	6	• Integrate early warning into academic advising structure	18
Proactive advising	• Develop advising strategy for broader university based on proactive advising • Hire Advisor Coordinator position	9	• Introduce proactive advising to advising units	18
Training and development	• Develop internal track for professional development	12	• All advisors complete academic advising professional certificate • Internal academic advisor Master's certificate developed	24
Role clarity	• Inventory of all non-advising duties • Initiate discussions with central client services to move some advising workload	6	• Non-advising workload ported to central client services	18
Learner support early warning	• Investigate inventory of learner support early warning metrics, and integrate with existing early warning metrics	12	• Fully integrated early warning system (advising, student support, and pre-enrolment metrics)	18
Program enhancement	• Review long-range outcomes for all support programing • Surveys and focus groups to measure program efficacy	12	• Program modification based on review and feedback • All programs tied to early warning system	24
Remedial Program	• Begin Faculty consultations and gap analysis • Develop desired learning outcomes	12	• Long range curriculum development • Program to academic governance • Initial pilot program	24
First year programs into classroom	• Modification of programming for connection to classroom • Dialogue with instructors to determine collaboration outcomes	9	• Integrated first year programs into high failure rate classes	18

Of course, there are certainly limitations that exist to this transition plan; perhaps

most apparent is that the plan has yet to take into consideration stakeholder feedback.

However, with sound constructive dialogue between SSC members and stakeholders, it

may be possible to mitigate potential conflict that will arise from initial discussions. The

scope of the plan is another consideration that must be deeply recognized as part of the

transition phase. With such diverse and far reaching goals proposed for success in student

retention, scope creep will be a continual consideration throughout the process. This

organizational improvement plan is focused on developing mechanisms to improve

student retention from first to second year of academic progression, and as such it has

focused on aspects that scholars (Habley, Valiga, & McClanahan, 2004; Pascarella &

Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2006) have identified as priority areas for this subset of the

undergraduate population. It will be difficult not to paint other year levels or student

types with a similar brush, as these populations may well need different approaches to

developing solutions for retention. This scope creep can be kept in check by employing

robust monitoring and assessment guidelines that speak to the eight priority goals. The

following section will discuss monitoring and assessment strategies for this improvement

plan.

Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation

The assessment and monitoring of the change process is an absolute imperative

for any strategic initiative. In the context of this organizational improvement plan, we

will discuss monitoring and evaluations as it relates to the eight priority goals. As there is

some crossover between the goals as they relate to academic advising, learner support,

and first year programming, this section will attempt to synthesize these outcomes in a

linear fashion that follows the student lifecycle. Specifically, the goals will be discussed

within the context of the early student lifecycle (early warning measures), the in-program

phase (advising, learner, and first year supports), and finally, the early departure phase

(remediation). By synthesizing the goals across the student lifecycle, leaders will be able

to account for some of the crossover in the priority goals so that efforts are not duplicated. For example, early warning metrics are a goal that affects academic advising, learner supports, and first year programming, and by discussing evaluation and monitoring in the context of the student lifecycle, this plan can provide a common standard for assessment opposed to multiple evaluation models.

Retention Through the Early Student Lifecycle

Fostering student success must start at the very beginning of the student lifecycle and carry through the students' entire academic progression. Even at the earliest stages of student recruitment, making sure a student has found the right academic and social fit will be an important part of ensuring student success. Once a student becomes enrolled at the university, student engagement strategies continue relationship building that was first fostered during the recruitment phase. Student engagement is an important support mechanism that can be nurtured by the academy and facilitated directly in the classroom and through student life services.

If the university's commuter-school identity results in a classroom-only experience for many students, the classroom must be treated as one of the primary stages for linking retention strategies. Student supports must be more closely intertwined with the teaching and learning aspects of the campuses. There is a greater need to foster student-to-student and student-to-faculty engagement during the academic experience, but as we have discussed, academic staff often function independently of the student development professionals, resulting in a disconnect between the student experience and the classroom. Faculty must be prepared to adopt a distributive leadership approach to both learning and linkages that foster student involvement within the greater university

community. As faculty members take a leadership role in the student experience, they can have increased accountability for student success.

Evaluating and Monitoring the Early Student Lifecycle

Measurement of the student lifecycle basically forms the groundwork for an early warning system at the university. Early warning systems are developed by universities to identify academic and social factors that put students at risk of dropping out. The first phase of a possible early warning is evaluating the incoming factors that affect student success. High school grade point average (HSGPA) can be collected at the point of application and used to determine the likelihood of early departure. Multi-variable regression models can be created that look for the relationship between success in specific courses, and provide direction for possible remediation if early warning measures fail. This data is normally compiled by the Registrar's office, but it is imperative that these predictive models are shared with the Faculty units so that instructors can be aware of possible at-risk students. Moreover, HSGPA can work in concert with other indicators that can be evaluated during the early stages of the student lifecycle.

Various instruments exist, such as discipline-specific diagnostic testing and self-efficacy questionnaires, that can act as pinpoints for assessing academic performance, and the use of these diagnostics is pivotal in the first part of first year. Some Faculties have already begun to employ a methodology for gauging academic success, and these efforts are often conducted based on grades from the first mid-term examination. Opt-in advising appointments are offered to students who are in jeopardy of failing to meet academic standing. When combined with data from students' HSGPA, an early outline of

the academic characteristics that contribute to student failure can be shared with advisors

and academic coaches as the university moves toward a proactive advising model.

Finally, tracking classroom attendance can be another way of insuring students

are receiving the material deemed necessary for student success. The university does not

need to be punitive with attendance tracking; rather, it should use the data collected as

another early warning indicator that can be the catalyst for academic advising

intervention. These four indicators can help the university measure the students' ability to

persist in undergraduate study and ultimately form the bedrock an early warning system.

Table 6 outlines the indicators and measures that can be used in the context of an early

warning system at the beginning on the student lifecycle.

Table 6

Indicators, Measurement, and Data Management of the Early Student Lifecycle

Indicator	Measurement	Data Management
HSGPA	Aggregate average calculation	Multi-variable course regression models comparing high school performance to Year 1 GPA
Initial diagnostic test	Standardized test	Test outcomes assist in assigning cohorts for incoming students
Student self-efficacy	Likert Survey	Self-efficacy and diagnostic results compared and sent to academic advising
Classroom attendance	Student count	Poor attendance will be routed to academic coaches for formal intervention

Leveraging academic advisors and student life services will be an important part

of a developed early warning system. Advisors in particular can act as the active force for

recommending and building customized student support programs once early warning

systems have detected a problem. Academic advisors and academic coaches essentially

form the end stage of the feedback loop driven by the early warning metrics. Student

performance and self-efficacy are used to identify risk, and advisors are mobilized to

proactively address these risks and developed individualized programs of support using

student support services, and if necessary, academic remediation.

The In-Program Phase

Not only is it important to have early warning mechanisms in place to address

academic performance and self-efficacy, but the priority goals also call for the connection

of support to the classroom. As Tinto (2006) suggests, more integrated programing and

developed involvement strategies can assist in ensuring that students feel a sense of

belonging at the university. The Financial Aid office and the various areas of the Student

Life office will be vitally important in recognizing issues of a financial and social nature,

respectively. Initiatives such as increased orientation services or assistance with mental

health and financial wellbeing will be an important part of a robust mid-cycle

involvement strategy.

As we discussed in Chapter 2, the office of Student Life has in place a number of

outcomes-based strategies to help students adjust to their first year of university and

succeed in their academic program that extends from the time of their acceptance through

their first year and beyond. These involve a robust social media campaign, a summer

transition program, through to September orientation, along with individualized

academic, career development, and mentoring/tutoring support through the term, where

students learn about the rigours and expectations of university life. During this time,

students are also encouraged to participate in programming that builds towards campus

engagement to form a broad support network through such initiatives as the peer mentor

program, various involvement fairs, as well as student-driven initiatives in Faculty

societies and clubs. An early warning system coupled with expanded involvement

programming and comprehensive communications for faculty and students can assist first

year students to be better able to adjust to university life and be successful in their studies

(Tinto, 2001; Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2005).

In the case of academic advising, early warning metrics will inform the units'

proactive approach to monitoring student success. Moreover, increased involvement

programming can allow for more opportunities to connect advisors to both the classroom

and to support services, effectively making a continuum of integrated measures that look

to foster student success and retention.

Evaluating, Monitoring and Assessing In-Program Student Supports

There are two main overarching evaluation strategies for advising and student

development supports. The first is monitoring which students are using the services, and

the second is the effectiveness of the advising or student development support. Student

usage monitoring is important because all student development services are often used by

high-achieving students and not by students who are actually in academic jeopardy. Data

should be collected every semester and correlated with student academic performance to

determine if the various advising and support services are assisting students who need it

most. If students who are academically underperforming are not utilizing the services,

academic coaches and advisors can act as the primary contact and possible referral

mechanism to ensure students are supported. This type of data analysis needs to be done

by each individual unit that offers student support, and the information needs to be shared

in a timely fashion to those individuals–faculty, advisors, academic coaches, learning

support specialists, etc.–that are involved in the continuum of student support. This will allow for a more holistic approach to managing student support, and limit overlap that could occur between services.

Secondly, each student development program or initiative, from academic advising to orientation, peer mentoring, and mental health counselling, should have defined program outcomes that are in all cases driven by the goal of providing support that will allow students to succeed in the classroom. Program outcomes should be evaluated by engaging students using surveys and focus groups to determine the successes and barriers of student development program administration. These assessment tools can be carried out by each service unit lead, in order to understand fully the impact of the programing on continued success in the students' academic programs.

Although this is not explicit in the eight priority goals, financial aid support is another service that can be monitored to assess student financial behaviour for retention risk factors. By evaluating student public aid assessments and students' abilities to meet financial deadlines, the university can determine if students are having possible financial trouble each semester. This data can be collected, reviewed, and acted upon by financial aid officers on an ongoing basis. Careful monitoring can allow for an almost real-time evaluation of a student's financial state, permitting for individualized aid packages to be developed to assist in mitigating student financial issues. Table 7 shows evaluation metrics for advising and student supports.

Table 7

Indicators, Measurement and Data Management of Student Support Effectiveness

Indicator	Measurement	Data Management
Student usage rates	Number of students who use student development services and their GPA	Tracked in the student information system, this data can help determine if at-risk students are using the development services
Student service program outcomes	Survey and focus groups	Measure program outcome effectiveness and adjust accordingly
Financial need	Financial aid assessments and failure to meet financial deadlines	Tracked in the student information system, this can act as a trigger for a financial aid intervention

Early Departure and Remediation

Despite an institution's best efforts in developing an early warning system to mitigate early student departure, there will be a subset of the student population that leaves the academy before graduation. These early departures can be as a result of institution action in the form of suspension of dismissal decisions, or because the student is facing other academic, financial or social difficulties.

Another option for students who would otherwise be suspended from the university is the development of academic remediation program. Many US schools and some Canadian institutions are relying on specially designed remedial courses to assist with academically challenging concepts and to impart an appreciation and understanding of post-secondary education (Stokes, 2013). These courses, often dubbed 'university 101', can be offered when early warning systems have identified an issue, or as a way of mitigating dismissal from the university. For a student who is otherwise required to withdraw from the university, completing the program successfully can overturn the suspension, and give students another chance at success.

The development of a university 101 course, or series of courses, could assist

students to achieve their full academic potential if they experience difficulties at the onset

of their program. As our case university is an institution with a high number of students

on financial assistance, a for-credit option would allow for increased financial aid

eligibility and provide a credit load towards full-time study. Moreover, developing

multiple offerings that build curriculum around numeracy, literacy, and student success

strategies could assist students who must otherwise withdraw. The development of a

university remedial program should be segmented to ensure that academic and success

strategies are designed in the context of the students' discipline.

Evaluating and Monitoring Early Departure and Remedial Programing

Although in the case of early departure the institution has failed to retain their

students, specially-designed exit surveys can assist universities in determining the

reasons surrounding reasoning that may not be captured in the mechanism of the early

warning system. Appendix D is an example of an open-ended exit survey that could be

used to determine reasons for a student's inability to persist to graduation. Collecting this

type of qualitative data can help give insight to various departments across the academy.

As suspension, dismissal, and voluntary withdrawal are managed by the Registrar's

office, an exit survey could be administered by front line client services. The results

would then be categorized once per term and sent to the respective stakeholders across

the university.

When a student chooses to opt into a remedial program, it will be important to

track student success rates in order to ensure the effectiveness of the remedial program,

but also in order to identify challenges or competency issues that may exist upon

reintegration to regular undergraduate study. This data will be collected by the

Registrar's office, and housed in the student information system, but needs to be

disseminated to multiple stakeholders. First, course review surveys and GPA can be sent

to curriculum developers and instructors to ensure learning outcomes and delivery

methods are appropriately preparing student for re-entry to undergraduate study.

Secondly, this same information can be given to academic advisors and coaches so that

they may assess any issues with re-entry to normal study. For example, a student that is

successful with a remedial program, but still shows some signs of a lack of understanding

in numeracy could be given a lighter course load, or special math help. Table 8 outlines

measures for early departure and remediation.

Table 8

Indicators, Measurement, and Data Management of Early Departure and Remedial Programming

Indicator	Measurement	Data Management
Reason for early departure	Exit survey	Data collected by client services and disseminated to appropriate divisions.
Remedial program success	GPA in remedial programming and courses and course reviews	Data collected in the student information system and used to craft re-entry conditions as well as ensure effectiveness of remedial programing

Building a strong culture of monitoring will be paramount for the university

retention strategy and this organizational improvement plan. As new student data is

obtained, it needs to be analyzed alongside other assessment tools designed to gauge

student ability and possible risk factors. By creating mechanisms for managing, working

with, and disseminating student data, the university can develop fully an early warning

system aimed at mitigating early departure. This system would be connected to academic advising and student supports that have been integrated well into the classroom, for greater student involvement and participation. Finally, remedial programming that is continually reviewed for its ability to re-enter students to academic study can act as a final mechanism for the university retention strategy.

As the university works towards the eight priority goals across the student lifecycle, the way in which the short-, medium-, and long-term goals, as well as assessment measure outcomes needs to be continually communicated back to the academy. The next section of this chapter will focus on a communication plan for fostering dialogue on the change process for retention and student success to the broader university.

Integrated Communication Plan for Change Management

The recommendations outlined in this organizational improvement plan are many and complex. Each priority goal, as well as subsequent developments, will need to be communicated effectively across the university, and a mechanism for feedback developed to ensure a reciprocal approach to communication. Aspects of this communication plan will rely on the leader-member exchange model, as much of the communication will be conducted in a face-to-face capacity. The following section will discuss three major segments–senior leader, initiative-driven, and committee-based LMX–that will form the structure of a formalized communication plan for change management. These segments will be tied together by a retention initiative website that will act as the pivot point for all stakeholder communications, as well as an area for open and public dialogue on the initiative.

Senior Leadership Communication

Communicating the change initiatives to the university must come from multiple

segments for various reasons. The first phase in the communication plan will involve the

endorsement and continued support of senior leadership, specifically the university

Provost, who holds the responsibilities of chief academic on campus. As Klein (1996)

suggests, messaging from a senior leader will grab employees' attention and carry the

legitimacy of the endorsement of the top level in the organization. The role of the

Provost's communication segment is to introduce and reinforce the ideas of retention

change management to the academy, and to set the high level direction for distributive

leadership empowering stakeholders to participate in solution building. Although this

communication will be the lightest segment as far as frequency is concerned, the

considerations surrounding communication from senior leadership is often the most

complex (Barrett, 2006). As the Provost's role is the leadership of all academic matters at

the university, retention change management should ultimately connect to the Provost's

office. This communication segment will be used for the highest level updates to inform

the academy from a strategic standpoint. The goal of these messages will simply be to

reinforce the university's commitment to change, and to provide semi-regular updates

that are grounded in this commitment.

It will be difficult to use principles of LMX explicitly within this communication

segment, because the time commitment and interpersonal communication required to

foster deep relationships with hundreds of staff is simply not possible at the Provost's

level. However, as we will discuss further in this section, LMX will be used in earnest by

other leaders, specifically the members of the Student Success Committee, and this group

will be able to leverage the endorsement from senior leadership in their dyadic

transactions. Finally, the communication from the Provost will not be reciprocal, as there

will not be a direct mechanism to communicate directly with the Provost's office.

However, as we will discuss further in this section, there will be a forum for open

communication on the change initiative. Table 9 is an excerpt of the senior leader

segment of the integrated communication plan for the first year of retention change

management. The complete segmented plan outlined in a linear structure is available in

Appendix D.

Table 9

Excerpt of the Senior Leader Communication Segment from the Integrated Communication Plan

Communications Type	Messaging	Medium	Timeframe
e -Introduction	Introduces retention priority goals and SSC, invite to Town Hall	Email	Week 1
Introduction	Introduces retention priority goals and SSC	Town Hall	Week 3
3-Month Update	Status updates of short-term goals	Email	Week 16
6-Month Update	Status updates of short-term goals	Email	Week 28
9-Month Update	Status updates of short-term goals	Email	Week 40
12- Month update	Status updates of short-term goals and Introduction of medium-term goals	Email	Week 56

     The senior leader segment of the communication plan is the only formal

communication that is not benchmark driven, but rather, a timed update to allow for a

regular, methodical communication from leadership to reinforce the messaging that is

coming from other university stakeholders. This will complement the other formal

communication segments that will communicate with staff and students on behalf of the retention change initiative.

Initiative-Driven Communication

The second formal communication segment will be developed around the retention initiative itself, and will focus on disseminating important milestone information to faculty and staff, as well as providing a suite of communications aimed at information distribution. As Klein (2006) has posited, message redundancy is a key factor in message retention, and this communication segment will be distributed via various media channels across the university. For example, email communications that disseminate information on goal benchmarking can be sent to the faculty through email distribution lists. This same information can be added to internal websites, sent out through inter-Faculty memoranda, and developed further in professional learning communities or workgroups. Like the senior management segment, initiative-driven communication will be focused on supporting the broader face-to-face discussions that are employing LMX concepts across the university. Notwithstanding, these communications will be more frequent than the senior management segment, but still focused on core deliverables of the change management process.

Similar to the senior leadership segment, initiative-driven communication will not have a reciprocal component, however these communications will be more detailed and share the successes of group developments. Table 10 is an excerpt of the initiative-driven segment.

Table 10

Excerpt of the Initiative-Driven Communication Segment from the Integrated Communication Plan

Communications Type	Messaging	Medium	Timeframe
Project Intro	Introduces core projects that are ongoing in relation to priority goals with web link to more detailed information	Email/Web	Week 4
Open Forums Invite	Invite to all stakeholders for open forum discussion on projects	Email/Web	Week 5
Project Open Forums	Open Forum for collaboration and discussion on short-term goals	Town Hall	Week 7
Open Forum Recap	Relaying learning from open forum discussions and results of feedback	Email/Web	Week 12
Projects Update	Status updates of short-term goals with 3 month deliverable	Email/Web	Week 17
Projects Update	Status updates of short-term goals with 6 month deliverable	Email/Web	Week 29
Mid-Year Open Forum Invite	Invite to all stakeholders for open forum discussion on projects	Email/Web	Week 31
Mid-Year Open Forum	Open Forum for collaboration and discussion on short-term goals	Town Hall	Week 33
Projects Update	Status updates of short-term goals with 9 month deliverable and open forum recap	Email/Web	Week 41
12-Month Update	Status updates of short-term goals with 12 month deliverable, and introduction to medium-term goal sets	Email/Web	Week 57

The timing of the bulk of the initiative-driven communication segment is set to complement the senior leader segment by following up with more detailed goal tracking the week following a senior leader communication. However, the initiative-driven

segment is benchmark reliant, and the communication is in line with the short- and

medium-term goals established in Table 5. The initiative-driven segment will need to

have its timing adjusted should a short or medium-term benchmark be missed. As this

segment works in tandem with both the senior leader segment and the leader-member

exchange, any change in operational deadlines will need to be scrutinized in the context

of the greater communications plan. In short, although each segment can be viewed

separately, they should always be considered within the context of the combined

communications plan (Appendix D).

Committee-Driven Communications and LMX

As Chapter 2 discussed at length, LMX can be used as a viable framework for

affecting change across the university. As well, one of the core tenets of LMX, which

involves creating high-affinity reciprocal relationships, can be used as an effective

mechanism for communicating change. As Klein (2006) suggests, face-to-face

communication is the most effective way to garner involvement and participation, and

under a leader-member exchange model, this form of communication can be leveraged to

affect change and build commitment at the same time. Each member of the Student

Success Committee will play a pivotal role in using LMX to develop participation and

involvement from campus stakeholders, while being supported by the other

communication channels. To this end, timing of the support communication is critical to

ensure that they are contributing to the broader leader-member exchange on campus.

Each member of the SSC will be tasked with developing communications

stakeholder analyses as they champion the various retention initiatives that align with the

priority goals. This process will be important in developing the network improvement

communities that we discussed earlier in this chapter. These communities will form the

grassroots communications across the academy, and allow for more dialogue,

understanding, and respect of each change initiative. When combined with the more

formal communications channels that we have already discussed, the face-to-face

communications will make for a holistic approach to communicating change

managements.

Communication Supports and Implementation

Implementation of the segmented communication plan will largely be managed

by the university's internal communications infrastructure which sits within the

Marketing and Communications office. The Marketing office will assist with

communications collateral development, as well as ensure any communications relating

to change initiatives for retention conform to the university's brand standards, and best

practice guide for digital communications. The office of the Registrar facilitates all

student-facing communication, and will be an important partner in developing the

communications which will be aimed at students once the SSC starts to affect change on

the priority goals. As these types of communications must come as a result of the

decisions made during the change management process, it is difficult to plan formally in

the same way in which the internal communication plan has been developed.

Notwithstanding, student communication will be an important channel for ensuring

awareness around retention change initiatives.

To ensure a smooth roll-out and implementation where formal communications

can adapt to the fluidity of the change management plan, the SSC can leverage the

existing Internal Communications Committee to allow for collaborative discussion in

managing optimal communications timelines, as well as ensuring that retention

communications are not interfering with other strategic communications from across the

university. With a coordinated and integrated approach, the SSC can work towards a

highly effective communications implementation that supports the change management

process.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 outlined an implementation strategy for achieving increased student

retention from first to second year of undergraduate study. The chapter presented various

implications that could result as the plan is implemented across the various stakeholder

groups of the academy. A total of 8 goals that addressed academic advising, learner

support and first year programs were developed, and a strategy for both evaluation and

assessment were provided in the context of short and mid-ranged goals that track to the

desired outcomes of organizational improvement. Finally, the chapter discussed a long

range communications plan that could be leveraged by a leader-member exchange

model. These processes were developed in a linear format that complement the temporal

components of LMX relationship building.

Organizational Improvement Plan Conclusion

This organizational improvement plan has discussed an iterative process for

affecting change in undergraduate student retention at a mid-sized Canadian university. It

has discussed the organization's specific retention challenges that are in many cases

antithetic to retention norms, making a strong case for individualized retention solutions

that address the institution's unique challenges. With the current leadership climate a mix

of traits-based and distributive leadership, a tertiary theoretical framework, leader-

member exchange theory (LMX), can be used to both leverage the current realities, and mobilize change across the academy.

Insofar as leadership is needed to start the change process, we have discussed three major areas that leaders can focus on that have been shown to influence student success in publically funded 4-year undergraduate programs (Habley, Valiga & McClanahan, 2004). These areas, which include academic advising, first year programs, and learner supports, can assist leadership in focusing on affecting change across student-facing programs for a high return on investment. These three areas can be framed with various lenses, and we have discussed political, human resource, structural, and symbolic considerations that leadership must be aware of to understand fully the problem of student retention (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

By evaluating the problem through the change readiness model of Holt et al. (2007), the organization has been shown to be ready for change, and this improvement plan discussed various solutions to the retention problem using the theoretical constructs of leader-member exchange theory. Not only can LMX be used as a framework for leading the change process, it is also a theory that can be utilized in practice through the solution building and communications planning phases of this plan. Moreover, the theory is one that compliments the existing attitudes and power structures across the academy.

This organizational improvement plan discussed a detailed multi-phased change implementation plan that included eight priority goals that can affect change in student retention in the first year of undergraduate study. Finally, the plan also outlined a detailed monitoring and assessment guideline, as well as a strategic segmented communication

plan that can be used to consolidate the efforts of academic and academic support staff to work towards a common goal of student success.

Although the discussion outlined in this paper is one way to address student retention problems at a Canadian university, it is not without its limitations. Perhaps most significantly is that this paper has not employed empirical research to understand fully the problems surrounding students who depart the academy before graduations. However, the development of an early warning system, one of the eight priority goals, will do well to impart empirical evidence on the developmental and implementation phases of this plan.

Secondly, this plan has focused on three core areas of the student lifecycle, in order to develop solutions that have a high affinity with the problems being experienced by the university. There are likely other areas that could be addressed in order to build solutions for the retention problem and further review of retention literature as well as developing deep understandings of student attitudes at the university are an important consideration for future work. Notwithstanding, this organizational improvement plan could be implemented to have a dramatic impact on a struggling student body, and improve student retention rates at the academy.

Next Steps and Future Considerations

The next steps to achieve success through this plan are to mobilize leaders to start discussion across the academy using LMX to develop highly reciprocal and high affinity relationships to the problem at hand. Indeed, at the time of writing this paper, some of this work has already begun, and leaders have started to unpack the priority goals into a

tactical framework for understanding individual responsibilities and how leaders and key

stakeholders will initiate and communicate change management across the university.

For this plan to be successful it will require engaged leaders who understand the

importance of leader-member exchange in facilitating change management. It will also

require time, as participation and acceptance of change management is truly an iterative

process that involves continuous dialogue and discussion to achieve fully the desired

goals. Perhaps most satisfying is that if these goals are achieved, they will not only help

the university in an organizational and operating capacity, but they will also help more

students to achieve success. Most in the academy would agree that there are perhaps few

goals more worthy than helping learners to develop the tools for success in the academy,

and in life.

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Appendix A
Organizational Structure, Office of the Provost

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                              ┌─────────────┐
                              │   Provost   │
                              └──────┬──────┘
          ┌──────────────┬──────────┼──────────────┬──────────────┐
    ┌─────┴─────┐  ┌──────┴──────┐  ┌──────┴──────┐  ┌──────┴──────┐
    │   Deans   │  │ Planning and│  │   Human     │  │ Student Life│
    │           │  │Administration│  │  Resources  │  │             │
    └─────┬─────┘  └──────┬──────┘  └─────────────┘  └──────┬──────┘
    ┌─────┴─────┐  ┌──────┴──────┐                   ┌──────┴──────┐
    │ Academic  │  │  Registrar  │                   │   Student   │
    │  Faculty  │  │             │                   │ Development │
    └───────────┘  └─────────────┘                   └─────────────┘
                   ┌─────────────┐                   ┌─────────────┐
                   │ Information │                   │Student Support│
                   │ Technology  │                   │  Services   │
                   └─────────────┘                   └─────────────┘
                   ┌─────────────┐                   ┌─────────────┐
                   │Student Success│                 │  Athletics  │
                   └─────────────┘                   └─────────────┘
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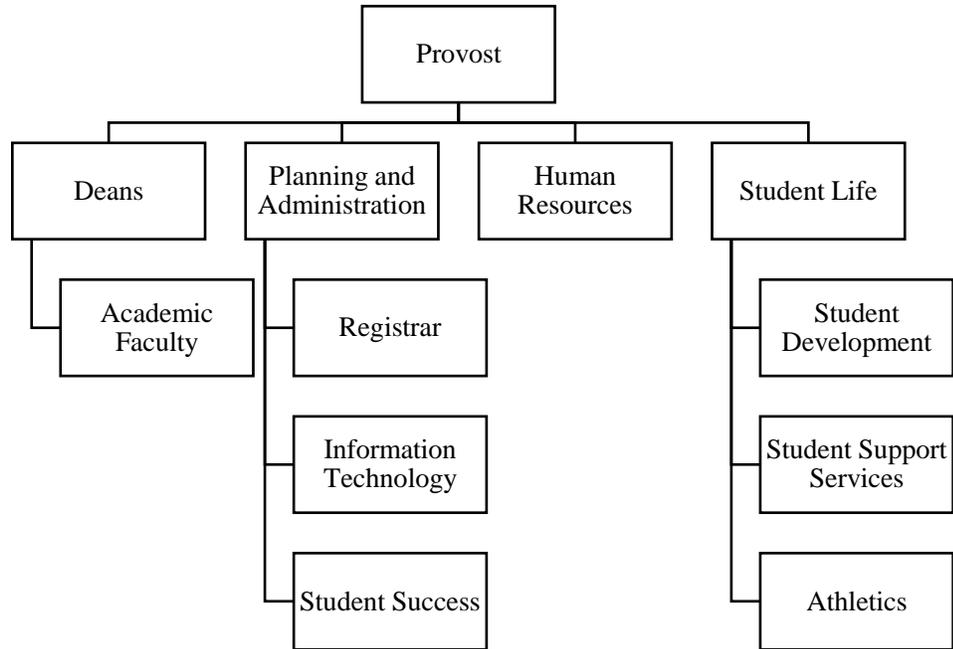
Appendix B
Student Support Services Offered by the University

Academic Services
- Academic Advising
- Teaching and Learning Centre
- Information Technology Services
- Library

Ancillary Services
- Campus Bookstore
- Campus Childcare Centre
- Campus ID
- Campus Safety
- Facilities Management
- Parking

Registrarial Services
- Client Support Services
- Enrolment Services
- Records
- Registration and Scheduling
- Student Awards and Financial Aid
- Student communications

Student Life Services
- Indigenous Services
- Athletics and Recreation
- Wellness Centre
- Health Centre
- Career Services
- Disability Services
- Diversity Office
- On/Off Campus Living
- Student Experience Centre
- Student Learning Centre

Appendix C
Stakeholder Analysis Guide

Stakeholder	Supportive Neutral Resistant Dismissive/ or Destructive	Issues	Strategic Response to stakeholder	Messaging to Stakeholder

Appendix D
Open Ended Student Exit Survey

Q1. What was the main reason for leaving the university

<free form>

Q2. Please explain in detail the circumstances that resulted in your departure from the

university

 <free form>

Q3. Did you discuss your reasons for leaving with any of the members of the university

community listed below?

- Professor
- Academic Advisor
- Registrar's office
- Personal Counsellor
- Career Counsellor
- Financial Aid Advisor
- Friend
- Family
- Other <free form>
- I did not speak to anyone before withdrawing from the university

Q4. Is there anything that faculty or staff could have done to prevent you from

withdrawing or if you have been suspended from the university, to assist you

academically?

<free form>

Q5. Do you feel it is important to complete a degree program and graduate from

university?

- Extremely Important
- Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Not Important

Q6. What do you feel the level of academic challenge and workload expectations were in your program?

- Extremely Challenging
- Challenging
- Somewhat Challenging
- Not Challenging at all

Q7. I feel that I applied myself in my undergraduate program?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q8. Did you live on campus while studying at the university?

- Yes
- No

Q9. If you commuted to the university what mode of transportation did you take?

- Car
- Bus
- Walk
- Other <free form>

Q10. What was your average one-way commute time to the university?

- < 5 minutes
- 5 – 10 minutes
- 10 – 20 minutes
- 20 – 40 minutes
- 40 minutes - 1 hour
- > 1 hour

Q11. How many hours per week did you participate in extracurricular activities?

- < 1 hour
- 1 – 2 hours
- 3 – 4 hours
- 5 + hours
- I did not participate in any extracurricular activities

Q12. How many hours did you work at a job on or off campus while pursuing your

studies?

- < 5 hours per week
- 5 – 10 hours per week
- 10 – 20 hours per week
- 20 – 30 hours per week
- > 30 hours per week

Q13. Are you currently working or studying at another institution?

- I am currently working
- I am studying at another institution
- I am neither working or studying

Q14. Would you be willing to follow up with a university advisor to discuss returning to

the university?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q15. Please describe under what circumstances you would return to the university

<open ended>

Adapted from "Early Departure Exit Survey" by J. Stokes, M. Hewitt, & S. Alvi, 2014,

Internal Report (institution name omitted), unpublished.

Appendix E
Segmented Communication Plan

Segment	Communications Type	Messaging	Medium	Timeframe
Senior Leader	E -Introduction	Introduces retention priority goals and SSC. Invite to Town hall	Email	Week 1
Senior Leader	Introduction	Introduces retention priority goals and SSC.	Town Hall	Week 3
Senior Leader	3-Month Update	Status updates of short-term goals	Email	Week 16
Senior Leader	6-Month Update	Status updates of short-term goals	Email	Week 28
Senior Leader	9-Month Update	Status updates of short-term goals	Email	Week 40
Senior Leader	12-Month update	Status updates of short-term goals and Introduction of medium-term goals	Email	Week 56
Initiative-Driven	Project Intro	Introduces core projects that are ongoing in relation to priority goals with web link to more detailed information	Email/Web	Week 4
Initiative-Driven	Open Forums Invite	Invite to all stakeholders for open forum discussion on projects	Email/Web	Week 5
Initiative-Driven	Project Open Forums	Open Forum for collaboration and discussion on short-term goals	Town Hall	Week7
Initiative-Driven	Open Forum Recap	Relaying learning from open forum discussions and results of feedback	Email/Web	Week 12
Initiative-Driven	Projects update	Status updates of short-term goals with 3 month deliverable	Email/Web	week 17
Initiative-Driven	Projects update	Status updates of short-term goals with 6 month deliverable	Email/Web	Week 29
Initiative-Driven	Mid-Year Open Forum Invite	Invite to all stakeholders for open forum discussion on projects	Email/Web	Week 31
Initiative-Driven	Mid-Year Open Forum	Open Forum for collaboration and discussion on short-term goals	Town Hall	Week 33
Initiative-Driven	Projects Update	Status updates of short-term goals with 9 month deliverable and open forum recap	Email/Web	Week 41
Initiative-Driven	12-Month Update	Status updates of short-term goals with 12 month deliverable, and introduction to medium-term goal sets	Email/Web	Week 57