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## Student Persistence and Success

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Running head: STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND SUCCESS

WESTERN UNIVERSITY

Student Persistence and Success

By

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AN ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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# STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND SUCCESS

## Abstract

Organizations of higher education are under increasing pressure to provide and validate student attrition data, particularly for funding sources and accreditation bodies. Simplistic attrition formulas comparing the number of students admitted to a program to the number of students graduating in the traditional program length problematizes both students and the organization. Approaches to student retention in higher education have evolved to focus on increasing student enrolment numbers, and subsequent funding often depends on this information. However, in taking this strategic, neoliberal approach, organizations fail to address the multifactorial nature of student attrition and the supports needed to maximize student success. This organizational improvement plan provides an alternative approach to the complex issue of student attrition by focusing on student persistence using decolonized and strength-based language. This plan calls for culturally congruent education, particularly important to an organization seeking to decolonize in light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) *Calls to Action*. This organizational improvement plan addresses a gap at a remote Canadian college; namely, the absence of a student and persistence plan and the need to reconnect the organization with its mission of supporting student success. Connective leadership is pivotal to this cultural change, particularly for its relationship focus and shared leadership approach. This leadership style can unite College departments to work collaboratively through professional learning communities, to support student persistence. A detailed monitoring and evaluation plan can yield the necessary data for continuous quality improvement, with the ultimate goal of increasing student success, resulting in potential long-term societal and economic benefits.

Keywords: Student attrition, student retention, persistence, student success, connective leadership, decolonization, strength-based, social justice, feminism.

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## Executive Summary

Student attrition is a complex concept with significant consequences for an organization of higher education. This organizational improvement plan engages differently with the traditional concept of student attrition, using strength-based language, and focusing instead, on student persistence and success. The context of this organizational improvement plan is a small, remote Canadian community college (College X), and the problem of practice is the need for a comprehensive student persistence and success plan. Absence of a plan has raised questions about College X's ability to support students, its minimal program entrance requirements, as well as, the College's reputation within the province.

Student attrition is often calculated by comparing the number of students who enter a program of study to the number of students who graduate. This simplified methodology ignores the multiplicity of factors contributing to student attrition, and problematizes the student by creating an assumption of an inability to complete the usual course of study. This approach to calculating attrition also problematizes the organization. This is the current problem for College X, wherein, one of its programs is required to create a mitigation plan to address perceived high attrition rates.

As a signatory of the *Indigenous Education Protocol* (Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2017), College X has embraced opportunities to gain truth and engage in reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This motivation to decolonizing education, as well as, the drive to respond in a fulsome way to accreditation recommendations, speaks to the readiness for change within some college departments. Change from a larger College perspective is somewhat more challenging due to the impending shifts in vision, leadership, and infrastructure. Considering College X's historically divided and insular approach to program planning, delivery, and student

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support, cultural change is needed. Furthermore, the current approach to measuring student attrition is deficit-based and perhaps, even colonizing.

The proposed solution for this organizational problem of practice is to develop a student persistence and success plan. A model that considers all factors that impact student success (student, environmental, academic and professional), informs this plan. This model also focuses on the provision of culturally congruent education, establishing and building relationships, as well as, strength-based and socially just approaches to student recruitment, advisement, pedagogy, and thus, persistence. It focuses on persistence rates rather than attrition.

Implementation of supports such as faculty advisors, a community of practice with Indigenous members, as well as detailed and consistent data collection, are key elements of this plan. A detailed monitoring and evaluation plan with both qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches ensures ongoing quality improvement.

One of the greatest leadership lessons learned through this organizational improvement plan is that hegemonic approaches to calculating and addressing student attrition must cease. A timely, connected and collaborative leadership approach is poised to assist the organization to implement a transparent communication plan regarding change, welcome concerns and collaborative solutions to resistance, and address ethical issues as they arise, particularly as it relates to decolonization. This plan encourages the organization to support student persistence, not in spite of their culture and circumstances, but because of it. Furthermore, it places the responsibility for student persistence and success upon all departments, faculty, and staff, as well as, community members and students. This maximal collaboration can improve student outcomes and lead to organizational success. Student attrition and reduced institutional credibility are inevitable consequences of inaction.

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### Glossary

**Attrition:** Students who do not complete the program of study for which they registered.

**CASN:** Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing; national accrediting body for schools of nursing.

**Cultural congruence:** Practices congruent with the values, beliefs, traditions, practices, and lifestyle of the learner (Jeffreys, 2010).

**Faculty:** Employees within higher education, primarily engaged in teaching students and academic scholarship.

**Persistence:** The ability of the student to continue in his/her course of study until graduation, despite obstacles and challenges.

**Regulatory body:** Professional association with regulatory responsibilities to protect the public and advance nursing excellence (Canadian Nurses Association, n.d.). Provincial and territorial governments delegate these bodies to self-regulate according to professional legislation, including responsibility for approval of educational programs.

**Retention:** The number of higher education students who persist from year to (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008).

**SRS:** Student Records System; storage of student demographic data, grades, etc.

**Staff:** Employees within higher education whose roles are non-academic and largely focused on student services (i.e., registration clerks, admissions officers, tutors).

**Stakeholders:** Individuals, communities, groups, and governance bodies who are/may be impacted by changes within college programs.

**Student success:** The ability of the student to complete a program of study, with the requirements to obtain meaningful employment, and reporting a culturally congruent experience.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Higher education organizations are increasingly responsible for collecting, analyzing and reporting student attrition and retention data. The need to decolonize academia, in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) (2015) *Calls to Action*, places a necessary focus on how institutions of higher education support Indigenous students to persist until graduation. Absence of a student success plan and the inability to consistently, and accurately, calculate and understand student attrition and retention is a problem of practice (POP) for College X. This organizational improvement plan (OIP) provides an in-depth exploration of the multifaceted and complex nature of student attrition, and offers a unique and strength-based approach to student persistence and success.

Organizational context has a considerable impact on student success. This chapter briefly describes the broad political, economic, sociocultural contexts of College X, as well as, factors that shape the organization and its leadership. A critique of the concepts of attrition and retention and proposed alternative perspectives, shape a strength-based and socially just approach to student persistence and success. A personal leadership position and theoretical approach, as it relates to the problem of practice and organizational context, is described to increase understanding of the leadership style needed to guide change, and realign College X with its mission.

### **Organizational Context**

College X is a small, remote Canadian institution. A long-time advocate for adult basic education and literacy development for community members, College X offers a variety of trade, certificate, diploma and degree programs over several campuses. The College's mission is to

support student success, particularly the success of local citizens. The student body is small; approximately 20-30 students annually, per program, with an annual registration of approximately 800 students across campuses. Considering the number of Indigenous people in the province, the college's mission and values reflect the importance of education that respects Indigenous cultures and is closely aligned with local economic development. College X is a signing member of the *Indigenous Education Protocol* from the Colleges and Institutes Canada (2017), in response to the TRC (2015) *Calls to Action*. The TRC has specific implications for higher education in the province as it relates to the history of Indigenous people, and the impact of colonial practices, including the oppressive practices of educational institutions, on Indigenous communities, their culture and health.

With a historical, albeit successful, focus on adult basic education, the College has earned a reputation as being a center of high school upgrading, despite the advent, and success, of many diploma and degree programs. The siloed nature of programs across multiple campuses mean faculty and staff identify more with their specific program than with the College itself, creating what Phillips Macdonald (2013) calls “silos of pride and prestige” (p. 156). There is little collaboration between departments, on most issues, most notable being student persistence and success. Particularly concerning is that the Student Services Department, which is the first point of contact for new applicants, as well as the location of core support services, does not consistently collaborate with programs, nor are they consulted, to support student persistence. Human resource turnover is high in this department, largely due to inefficient organizational structure and processes, and is a contributing factor to the lack of collaboration.

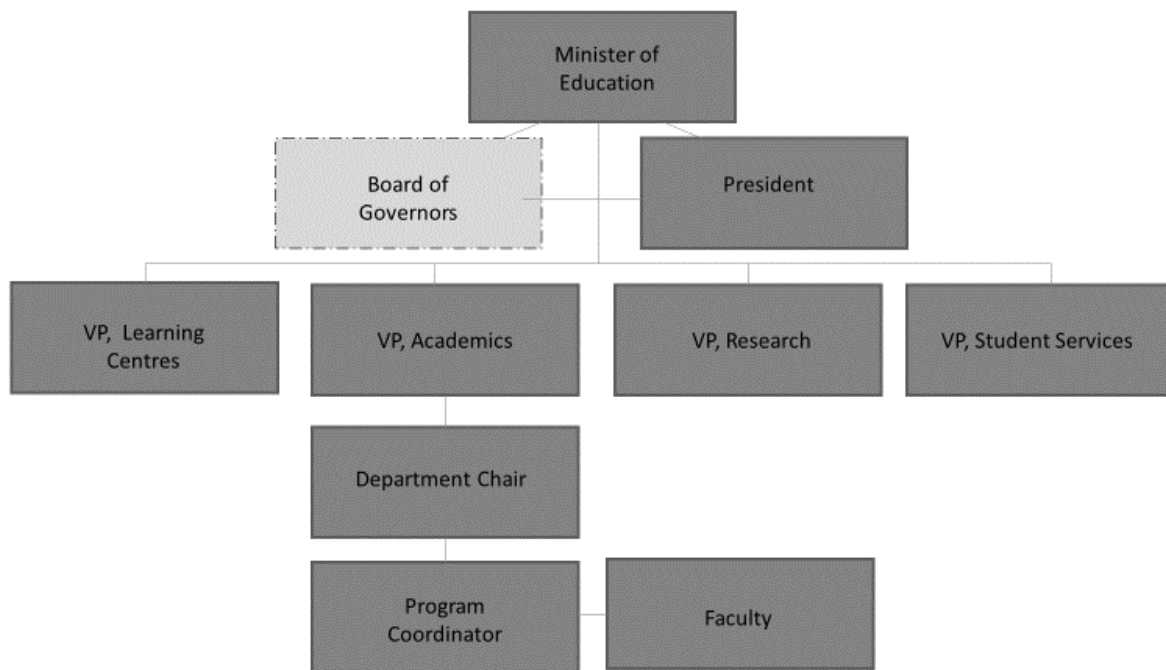
A recent government review of College X has publicly identified what many faculty and staff have felt for some time—that College X has lost its sense of identity. College X has a

history of diverse programming, and last-minute program cancellations and additions, in response to funding, political or economic trends, and registration numbers. The College is considered an institution that offers “something for everyone” (Consulting Company, 2018, p. 5). Some view this flexibility positively, while others feel it reflects a lack of vision.

College X struggles to establish its legitimacy within the province and is anecdotally perceived as a homegrown, last resort for education. The largest campus in the provincial capital is actually a shared rental space in an ailing, low-income apartment building. Absence of a freestanding campus detracts from the college image, particularly among high school students who judge the potential for quality higher education by the exterior infrastructure. Institutional image is a determinant of an institution’s ability to increase student persistence (Ayuk & Jacobs, 2018), and perceived to have a greater impact on student satisfaction than the quality of organizational service (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009). The Office of the President and Registrar’s Office is decentralized to a smaller community with significant implications for organizational efficiency. The government review has perpetuated questions about aspirational identity in terms of who the College is, in relation to who, and what, it is not (Phillips Macdonald, 2013), comparing it to colleges and universities in more urban centers. From a leadership perspective, the College is largely a precedence follower rather than an initiator of change. Despite the success of many programs, college leaders frequently feel the need to defend its legitimacy and market it as a quality choice for post-secondary education.

College governance is a state of complexity. College X is described as an arm of the government, when in actuality; it is an unwritten tricameral system with an institutional model of governance. Figure 1 outlines the current organizational structure of College X. While college legislation mandates a board of governors (BOG), the BOG typically functioned as a rubber

stamp for decisions made by the education minister, upon which the president would act. The BOG is temporarily suspended, in response to the government review (shown in Figure 1). Each academic department has a chairperson who manages its programs, and reports to a vice-president. The vice-president of learning centres is responsible for the multiple satellite campuses. The Program Coordinator role is a modified faculty position and reports directly to the chairperson. Senior leadership is precarious, and presently in flux.



*Figure 1.* Organizational chart of College X. By K. L. Durnford, 2019

A recent government mandated, external review, called for a complete restructuring of the college to a university, with a bicameral governance structure that operates at a distance from the government. The review criticizes College X, and ultimately the government, for its fluctuating programming, lack of infrastructure, multiple campuses, decentralized structure, and inconsistent accountability framework (Consulting Company, 2018). Coercive isomorphism



resulting from the external pressures that accompany government policies and regulations (Austin & Jones, 2016) has contributed to college system inefficiencies, such as lengthy consultation for funding and belated implementation of a student records system (SRS). The current SRS is an antiquated, paper-based data system, dependent on a handful of office staff to enter student information, from demographics to course grades. Faculty, program leaders, nor department chairs have access to the SRS. Missing data and mistaken entries are common. Years of consultation with government departments has finally resulted in funding for a new SRS. Further example of government influence is found in the SRS implementation committee, with limited involvement of the staff and faculty who will utilize the system.

The provincial government provides base funding for higher education, while many College X programs receive third party funding from local industries and organizations. The budgetary process within College X's institutional model of governance is largely based on the vision of the provincial government rather than higher education leaders. Lasher and Greene (2001) encourage a link between strategic planning and budget processes; however, there is a clear disconnect within these processes at College X. Policy development and approval is a blend of program, departmental, college, governmental, and audit influences, allowing for the distinctiveness of each program, often subject to its own professional or disciplinary regulations, but further dividing programs from the larger whole.

This organizational improvement plan (OIP) will address student persistence and success within Department A. Department A offers certificate and diploma programs in health-related fields, and an undergraduate nursing program. One health diploma program is offered at a smaller campus; all other programs are offered at the provincial capital campus. The nursing program is subject to annual review and full approval, every four years, by the provincial,

professional regulatory body and is also accredited by the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN), and thus must meet accreditation standards. Accreditation adds to organizational complexity with its standards, reporting requirements and timelines. These requirements affect the accredited program with implications for the entire institution. Data collection, collation and accreditation report writing are the responsibility of Program Coordinators, with little to no involvement of senior leadership or the Registrar's Office, and rarely are accreditation findings shared outside the program under review, unless financial support is required. External reviewers of the nursing program, as well as CASN, raised questions regarding absence of a plan to address student attrition. Thus, the timing of this OIP is critical.

### **Leadership Position and Lens Statement**

The undergraduate nursing Program Coordinator role, assumed by the writer for many years, is a faculty position with added responsibilities of program coordination, faculty support and mentoring, student advisement, data tracking and analysis. There is great potential to effect change in this position, albeit largely within the local program. The Program Coordinator role is quite insular, from a leadership perspective, with collaboration mainly between other coordinators within the same department, rather than other departments and campuses. The Program Coordinator has no budgetary control, but has some financial influence through advocacy. While the Program Coordinator role is somewhat central to the program, faculty members collaborate regularly on issues related to curriculum and student performance, identifying possible solutions and resources. A faculty of fewer than 30 means increased opportunity for collaboration, innovation, and close professional and social relationships. Power is equalized among department faculty, autonomy and initiative to be involved in curriculum and

evaluation, and quality improvement initiatives is high, and relationships are highly valued by both faculty and students.

The need for a unified philosophy and plan for student persistence and success calls for a poststructural feminist approach. While all forms of feminism are concerned with gender relations, emancipation, and relationships, it is the poststructuralist perspective, with roots in equality and social justice (Tisdell, 1998), which offers the most insight for student attrition and persistence. The core tenant of gendered relations may create a misconception that feminism considers only women's ways of knowing rather than, in actuality, being concerned with emancipation of all who experience oppression. Key themes of leadership and social justice are found in educational feminist work (Blackmore, 2006). Poststructural feminism has important implications for college leaders as it invites exploration of potential sources of organizational and pedagogical oppression; a difficult, but necessary step in the journey to supporting student persistence. Feminists are interested in exploring discourse, not for its actual meaning, but from the perspective of what makes discourse powerful (Diamond & Qinby, 1998). Considering the language related to attrition and the labels applied to students who struggle in their educational journey, language can negatively affect the student, as well as, the organization.

Deconstruction of categories and binary opposites (Tisdell, 1998) are key elements of poststructural feminism, and an important step in exploring this organizational problem. Poststructural feminism offers a lens through which to examine the function and effects of structures and language (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000), and how dominant discourse can trap us into particular ways of thinking (Davies, 1990). For example, language such as "drop-out", "struggling student", and "at-risk student," should challenge one's worldview. Weedon (2004) stated that words do not have meaning in and of themselves, but only as they are culturally

created. Butler (1997) critically explored the politics and power of speech. Binaries of student success and attrition, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, full-time and part-time, returning and continuing students, forces educational leaders to examine assumed truths about educational trajectories. In using such language, one might question whether the student is viewed as a pathology; in turn, raising questions of power and equality. Ethical leadership that fosters emancipation, explores and reduces power inequities is needed within College X, and are essential values of the writer's leadership perspective.

It would be remiss to discuss feminism within the context of this leadership vision without discussing Indigenous feminism particularly considering the geographical and political context of College X. Indigenous feminism reminds us that issues related to student success cannot be addressed without exploring the impact of colonial practices (Suzak, 2015), and the value of culture and identity (Green, 2017). These factors are foundational to the adapted and proposed definitions of cultural congruence and student success in this organizational improvement plan. This philosophical perspective will allow College X leaders to view processes and policies using an anti-oppressive lens, ensuring that the student persistence and success initiative does not privilege one group of learners over another, and advocates for transformation of oppressive practices that continue to jeopardize student success.

Connective leadership, with its origins in highlighting the differences in behaviors of male and female leaders, appreciation of diversity, understanding of shared power (Lipman-Blumen, 1992) and ethics (Lipman-Blumen, 2017), reflects the feminist perspective: "Connective leadership also integrates and creatively revitalizes individualism with a crucial female perspective, that is, seeing the world as a total system of interconnected, uniquely important parts, rather than as independent, competitive, isolated and unequal entities" (Lipman-

Blumen, 1992, p. 187). Leaders currently find themselves in the “connective era” (Lipman-Blumen & Leavitt, 2009, p. 225), sandwiched between interdependence and diversity of people, systems, and organizations. This statement accurately represents College X’s complex and diverse higher education environment. Connective leadership was recommended some time ago for 21<sup>st</sup> century nursing leaders due to the interconnectedness of the health care environment, as well as, for its focus on nurturing the strengths and contributions of others, fostering emancipation, and building leadership at all levels (Klakovitch, 1994). While nursing education is distinct from nursing in the immediate health care environment, there are similarities that make this leadership approach relevant for this OIP, and congruent with the writer’s current and future-oriented approach.

Lipman-Blumen’s (1996) connective leadership model has three leadership approaches, or achieving sets: direct, instrumental, and relational, each with specific leadership strategies. The direct set focuses on accomplishing the tasks and includes intrinsic, competitive and power strategies. The instrumental set maximizes interactions with others, empowering others through social networks and personal persuasion. The third set, relational, focuses on contributing to the goals of others through collaborative, contributory, and vicarious strategies that involve helping and mentoring. The connective leadership model recognizes that while individuals may gravitate towards one set, a variety of styles and approaches can assist leaders to navigate contextual complexity.

Many characteristics of connective leaders resonate with the writer, in particular, the importance of interpersonal connections, the value of collaboratively working toward a vision, strong ethical perspective, authenticity and dedication, accountability, a sense of community (Lipman-Blumen & Leavitt, 2009), and self-reflection (Kezar & Wheaton, 2017). College

leadership is essential to maximizing student persistence and success, not only by individual programs and services, but also by the college as a collective. Connective leadership can bring services together over the shared goal of student persistence and success. A spirit of collaboration, rather than competition, or inaction altogether, can mutually benefit the College and its students. A direct approach can address and communicate the necessary tasks required for student success. The direct style is one that does not come naturally for most female leaders (Kezar & Wheaton, 2017), and the writer is equally as challenged with this approach. However, this style has definite possibilities for task completion, and use of power and competition may help the organization establish legitimacy in the field of higher education.

### **Leadership Problem of Practice**

Canadian postsecondary institutions face many contemporary challenges. Some of these challenges include responding to the TRC (2015) *Calls to Action*, as well as answering to stakeholders, governance bodies, and the public regarding student attrition. Student attrition data, as often reported, simply identifies the number of students entering and leaving a program. Such basic reporting and analysis leave the perception that the institution, or the student, is at fault when a student "drops out", ignoring the complexity of attrition and persistence. The process of truth and reconciliation has led to an understanding that supporting Indigenous students involves building relationships. However, many faculty and staff are uncertain how to build these relationships. Others question the pedagogical approaches needed to support culturally congruent education. Furthermore, absence of student data prevents program leaders from identifying areas of challenge; thus, data analysis is incomplete and success planning inefficient. The problem of practice for this organizational improvement plan is the need for a comprehensive student persistence and success plan.

The POP addresses incongruence with the institution's mission to support student success. While many students successfully graduate, program leaders and the College as a whole, cannot report accurate student data, nor can they use this data to address student attrition. Multiple campuses, separated by programs and distance, mean varied approaches to student success, instead of a unified, college-wide process. Inconsistent and incomplete reporting and program evaluation translates into an inability to describe how the College is meeting its mission. Implementation of a student persistence and success plan would allow for a collaborative and congruent organizational approach to student success. Through connective leadership and a poststructural feminist perspective, the writer, as a leader within Department A, is in a unique position to effect change.

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

As a leader within Department A, the writer is required to report and analyze student attrition data, using simplistic formulas often developed by non-educational leaders. In light of the TRC (2015) *Calls to Action*, and the College's mission of supporting local citizens, Program Coordinators are questioned about the number of Indigenous students from registration to graduation. These data are often unavailable, largely due to the antiquated SRS, as well as uncertainty as to what data would provide the necessary information. Thus, attrition analysis is challenging and does little to inform student success beyond the individual program. Subsequently, accreditors and professional regulatory bodies, perceiving deficiencies within the nursing program of College X, have requested a plan to "mitigate" student attrition (CASN, 2015). A variety of political, economic, social and technological factors impact and inform the POP, particularly language discourse, economics, and decolonization. Understanding these factors is critical to the development and enactment of a holistic student success plan.

### **Attrition and Retention Discourse**

Creating a student persistence and success plan begins with understanding the discourse of attrition, retention and persistence. The most commonly used definition of retention is the number of students who persist from year to year with their original cohort (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008). Loss of students from the original cohort is attrition (Day, Paul, Boman, McBride & Idriss, 2005), alternatively defined as departure or delay in completion of program requirements (Tinto, 1993). This means that a student who stops-out (Hoyt & Winn, 2003), or takes a break for personal or academic reasons, but later returns, is considered a loss to the program, often labeled drop-out. These definitions are problematic, especially for College X, which allows students the freedom to move from full to part-time studies to meet their personal needs. Astin (1997) reported over twenty years ago that most students take five to six years to complete a four-year degree. In fact, it is suggested that extended completion times reflect institutional flexibility (Thomas & Hovdgaugen, 2014). Others calculate attrition as the percentage of students who graduate within 150% of the scheduled completion time to graduation (Barbé, Kimble, Bellury, & Rubenstein, 2018). Yet, attrition continues to be calculated based the length of the program. Standard attrition formulas leave the assumption that institutions with lower attrition rates are perhaps better than those with higher rates (Astin, 1997; Martinez, Borjas, Herrera, & Valencia, 2015), or that their students are better qualified for the rigor of academic life. Thus, it can be assumed that attrition is commonly viewed as negative rather than an anticipated (or necessary) aspect of the post-secondary experience for some students.

Regardless of the language used, students continue to stop-out of academic programs. Attrition factors have been classified as situational (i.e., life factors such as family commitments, time and finances), institutional (i.e., quality of the organizational service, availability of



resources), and dispositional (i.e., individual factors such as, confidence and health) (MacKeracher, Stuart, & Potter, 2006). The reasons for leaving are varied and include: academic failure, personal and family concerns, finances and employment pressures, and ill health (Cameron, Roxburgh, Taylor, & Lauder, 2011; Day et al., 2005; Mulholland, Anionwu, Atkins, Tappern, & Franks, 2008; Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008), lack of self-efficacy and intent to persist (Luke, Redekop, & Bugin, 2015), as well as, poor attendance, and ineffective study habits (Jeffreys, 2012). Factors contributing to attrition, as noted in the literature, are found in Table 1.

Table 1. *Factors influencing student success*

Student Factors	Environmental Factors	Academic and Professional Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographics (age, gender, race, ethnicity, language)</li> <li>• Prior education experience</li> <li>• Family educational background</li> <li>• Prior work experience</li> <li>• Enrolment status</li> <li>• Cultural values &amp; beliefs</li> <li>• Self-efficacy &amp; motivation</li> <li>• Accommodation needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial status</li> <li>• Financial support</li> <li>• Family emotional support</li> <li>• Family responsibilities</li> <li>• Child care arrangements</li> <li>• Family crisis</li> <li>• Employment responsibilities and hours</li> <li>• Social supports</li> <li>• Living arrangements &amp; transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study skills</li> <li>• Study hours</li> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Class schedule</li> <li>• Academic services</li> <li>• Faculty advisement &amp; relationships</li> <li>• Professional events</li> <li>• Membership in groups</li> <li>• Encouragement by classmates</li> <li>• Peer mentoring &amp; tutoring</li> <li>• Accommodation services/policies</li> </ul>

Records kept by the writer and other Program Coordinators identify many similar attrition factors in College X. However, data are inconsistently collected and reported. The recent government review of College X identified student attrition by program and reported the numbers of students leaving the province for post-secondary education, perpetuating the public perception of College X as an “institution of last choice” (Consulting Company, 2018, p. 13). While beyond the purpose of the external review, the report failed to address the complex needs of students, (particularly Indigenous students), further simplifying student attrition. Furthermore,

the report failed to address attrition rates of students who leave the province, which may also be high due to the lack of social supports. This incomplete picture paints College X as the problem and raises the issue of college legitimacy—a historical concern for colleges who struggle to substantiate their value and contribution to higher education (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Legitimacy arguments aside, Hatch and Garcia (2017) state that persistence data has little value in the absence of student perspectives of their higher education experience.

Indigenous students have significantly higher attrition rates (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012; Gregory, Pijl-Zieber, Barskey, & Daniels, 2008; Rigby, Duffy, Manners, Lathan, Lyons, Crawford, & Eldridge, 2010), largely attributable to personal, social and health issues stemming from residential schools. A deficit approach, or the belief by institutions that students, or their circumstances are weaknesses, impacts the persistence of Indigenous students (Mackay & Myles, 1995). This research, albeit dated, remains relevant, as reflected in College X's inability to identify and discuss attrition rates and specific challenges faced by Indigenous students, as well as the common perception that because a student is Indigenous, he or she will have less success. Persistence encompasses more than just graduation numbers. The experience of the learner within the institution requires careful assessment.

A sense of belonging (Tinto, 1993), and the level of engagement between the student, the institution, and other college staff (Jeffreys, 2012) are important to student success. Jeffreys (2012) stresses the relevance of cultural congruence to student success. This concept is particularly applicable for College X, with its diverse student population. Cultural congruence, originating in health care (Leininger, 1991), refers to practices congruent with the values, beliefs, traditions, practices, and lifestyle of the learner (Jeffreys, 2010). Particularly relevant is the fact that cultural congruence is measured by the recipient; in this case, the student. Jeffreys' (2012)

retention model, designed for nursing students, is robust and holistic in nature, thus generalizable to other post-secondary programs; however, cultural congruence is not a central tenant of the model. Cultural congruence should be considered in measures of student, and thus, organizational success.

### **Political and Socioeconomic Factors**

Student attrition affects the economy. Every student who leaves a program poses a cost to the institution (Educational Policy Institute, 2004; Johnson, 2012), though this is challenging to calculate within College X, attributable to the absence of a robust SRS. College X, like many other Canadian institutions of higher education, are facing financial cutbacks during uncertain economic times. However, education has many financial and non-financial benefits. Improvements in health as well as overall community life results from education (Paulson, 2001). Yet, Canadian Indigenous people have lower levels of education than non-Indigenous Canadians (Calver, 2015). It was postulated that if Indigenous people obtained the same level of education by 2017 as non-Indigenous people obtained in 2001, gross domestic product would have increased by over 70 billion dollars (Sharpe, Arsenault, & Lapointe, 2007). This goal has never been achieved. Educational disparities for Indigenous people have implications for the individual, the community, and the economy (Pidgeon, 2016), further highlighting the relevance of this POP. Reliable data are needed to identify the number of Indigenous students, their successes, and struggles, to allow College X to meet its mission and commitment to local economic development.

The TRC's (2015) *Calls to Action* are dramatically changing educational culture in Canada. Indian Residential Schools were government-mandated schools designed to remove Indigenous children from their families and communities to sever connections to language and

culture, and assimilate into mainstream Canadian culture (Hackett, Feeny, & Tompa, 2016). These church-run institutions, which began in the 1700s, operated until 1996 when the last residential school was closed (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008). Residential schools subjected over 150,000 Indigenous children (Barkan, 2003), not just to attempted eradication of their cultural identity, but also discrimination, racism, physical and sexual abuse (TRC, 2016). Trauma resulting from residential schools leaves subsequent generations of Indigenous students facing a myriad of challenges not faced by non-Indigenous students, including poor mental health, violence and abuse, health disparities, lack of positive cultural/ethnic identity, and a lack of familial and social supports (Battiste, 2013; TRC, 2016). The attendance of a family member in residential school correlates with the likelihood of poor perception of physical and mental health, increased risk of suicide (Hackett et al., 2016) and poor coping with daily stressors (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2014).

Oppressive Canadian assimilation policies, such as residential schools, separated Indigenous people from their families, culture, and language (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015). Complicated funding policies have left Indigenous communities lacking in many services, including secondary education (Moffitt, 2016; Pidgeon, 2008). A lack of teachers in rural and remote communities means students often cannot access the necessary courses to meet basic educational standards, including college entrance requirements. Success in higher education is influenced by primary and secondary school experiences (Barbé et al., 2018). Many students fail to disclose their Indigenous ancestry when they enter post-secondary education, due to a history of mistreatment by such organizations (Cote-Meek, 2014; Moffitt, 2016). To be successful, students must feel the institution will respect and preserve their culture.

The province's multicultural landscape leaves some college faculty and students questioning why the increased attention on Indigenous students. Some feel it is inappropriate to identify Indigenous students, that perhaps this further stigmatizes individuals. This is an example of the microaggressions that perpetuates assimilation and encourages diverse students to blend into mainstream culture (hooks, 2015). A social justice perspective would benefit all students; however, attention to other groups, at the expense of Indigenous peoples, ignores their struggles (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015). To decolonize, states Battell Lowman and Barker (2015), we need to recognize decolonization as a practice rather than a goal to be achieved (p.114). The authors further explain how some Indigenous people may not simply understand a discrete object, such as a tree, or the water as separate entities; they must be collectively understood. The writer's intention is not to trivialize nor misappropriate in suggesting this concept could help explain the interconnection between student attrition and persistence factors to student success. We perpetuate oppression when we are unable to accurately report student numbers, nor discuss the support services and resources needed for the success of Indigenous students.

Social justice, used as a philosophical perspective in nursing practice and education (Gottlieb & Benner, 2013), is directly linked to decolonization. Social justice involves: creating healthy learning environments; seeing, and valuing, contextual factors and interconnections that impact an individual, and developing an individual's resiliency and courage (Gottlieb & Gottlieb, 2017) through relationship building (Saleeby, 1996). A socially just educational system views students as "vibrant and rich sources of resources, rather than bundles of pathologies to be remedied or rectified" (Smyth, 2012, p.13). The two main attributes of social justice are equitable service distribution and the existence of non-oppressive, helping relationships (Matwick & Woodgate, 2016). Identifying past and current inequities is thus, essential to social

justice (Adserias, Charleston & Jackson, 2016). Tuck and Yang (2012) caution that decolonization is not synonymous with social justice; however, social justice is needed to achieve decolonization (Shultz, 2012). Practices, policies and behaviors grounded in equality and reconciliation, and not just implemented for the sake of checking the decolonization box, are necessary and arguably, inherent socially just interventions. Moreover, study of the factors that contribute to student attrition, reveals that student persistence is strongly influenced by the social determinants of health (Barbé et al., 2018). Social determinants of health is a social justice concept at the core of many health-related programs (including Department A), raising awareness of the multiplicity of factors that impact one's attainment of health. It is time for higher education to place this concept at the core of its attrition and student persistence analyses.

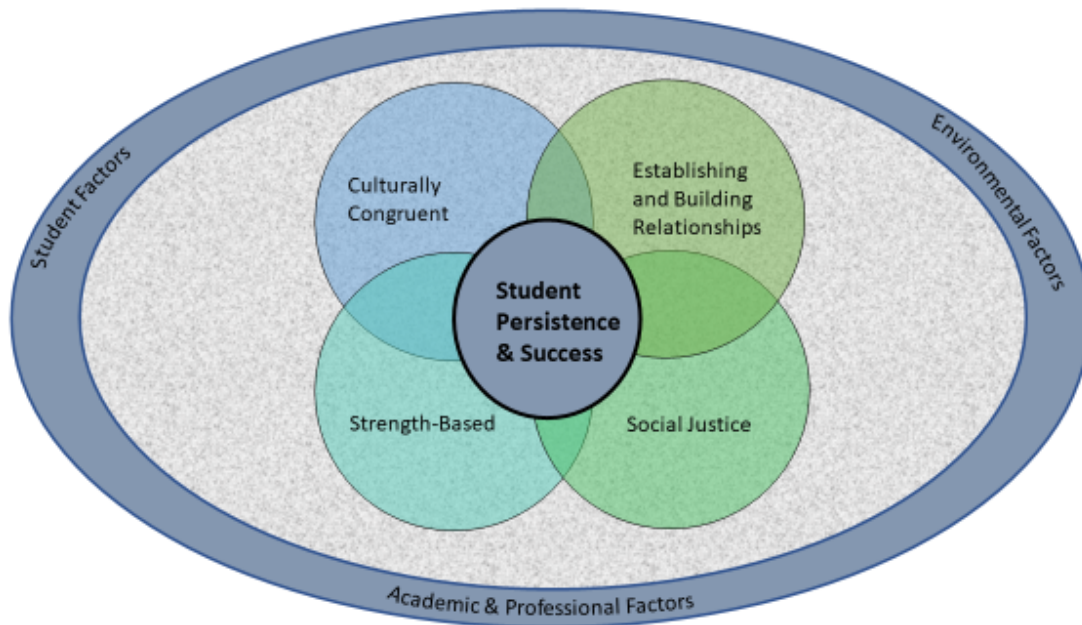
Student attrition is further problematized by heavy reliance on data to measure an organization's success. Institutions of higher education find themselves within an audit culture with increasing pressure from funding sources, as well as accreditation and professional approval bodies, to track student data trends, and analyze numerical data (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011, p. 94). Darrbyshire (2007) states that "the 'audit society' is ultimately not about quality but about control and creating an illusion that all is well within an organization" (p. 36). The problem at the core of accreditation policies therefore is governance, and the assumption that higher education organizations require external monitoring and audit. A further assumption is that self-regulation is not adequate to ensure quality, and that governments and external bodies, rather than academics, are in a better position to evaluate educational quality.

### **A New Perspective of Student Success**

Student success plans are designed to increase recruitment and persistence, lessen attrition, and should ultimately lead to graduation, and/or job securement. Strategic enrolment management (SEM) has gained popularity in student success literature (Henderson, 2017); however, its ultimate goal is increasing student enrolment and persistence for economic benefit. It would be irresponsible for a higher educational leader to disregard the economic implications of student attrition; however, caution must be afforded to linking student recruitment and persistence to budgets. Correlating funding formulas to attrition would further disadvantage students and the organization. Such a neoliberal approach risks repeating colonial settler mistakes if student persistence is attained at the expense of one's culture and language. Furthermore, a persistence and success plan will only be as successful as the faculty and staff who implement identified strategies and policies that support the plan. There have been many successful plans including those focused on cultural competence and pedagogy (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter, & Clapham, 2012), quality control principles (Jenicke, Holmes, & Pisani, 2013), or focused on data collection to predict persistence (Kirby, 2015). While aspects of these approaches could inform development of a success plan, they do not, in their entirety, address the myriad of attrition variables that impact student success within College X. Moreover, these models fail to address the importance of a strength-based and culturally congruent approach to student success.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The proposed model of student persistence and success for College X, considers factors that contribute to attrition, as identified by Jeffrey's (2012) and MacKeracher et al. (2006), and is grounded in a poststructural feminist perspective (See Figure 2). A brief explanation of this model follows.



*Figure 2.* Student persistence and success model. By K.L. Durnford, 2018.

Similar to Jeffreys' (2012) model, Figure 2 highlights the student, environmental, academic and professional factors which impact student attrition (see Table 1). The four interlocking circles in the model highlight philosophical underpinnings needed to improve student persistence and success at College X. As previously stated, a student who graduates, but feels an absence of respect for their cultural identity during their education, did not receive culturally congruent education, and thus, should not be considered a success for the organization. Social justice and a strength-based approach reflect the feminist perspective upon which this model, and leadership approach, are based. Relationships are likewise central to the model—relationships between faculty/staff and students, faculty and staff, and between the organization and the community. Relationships are pivotal to the connective leadership approach, to student persistence (Jeffreys, 2012), to a quality learning environment, and to student achievement (Bishop & Berryman, 2012). Each of the central concepts (social justice, strength-based approach, relationships, and



cultural congruence) impact student, environmental, academic and professional factors. For example, applying the concept of social justice to student attrition calculation and analysis would inform the type of data gathered and policies governing student progression. Well-established and reliable data collection practices, states Nakata (2013), are necessary to supporting Indigenous students. As represented by the overlapping inner and continuous outer circles in the models, these concepts frame ontological and epistemological approaches to student persistence and success.

It is intentional that this model is not called a retention plan, nor mitigation plan, as recommended by CASN. Attrition and retention are metric-focused, mitigation pathologizes, and current approaches to attrition analysis ignore the complex factors influencing student success. Many of these factors are institutionally based and external to the student (see Table 1). Persistence is a quality and a state of doing something beyond the expected or usual time despite difficulties or opposition from others (Merriam-Webster, 2018). Student persistence literature highlights the importance of self-efficacy, belonging and self-motivation to student success (Jeffreys, 2012; MacKeracher et al., 2006; Tinto, 1993, 2017). Use of the term persistence, rather than retention, implies a more holistic recognition of the complex variables affecting, and shared responsibility for, student success.

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

Considering the multiple variables that frame this POP, there are several areas of further inquiry, as well as anticipated challenges. The immediate challenge involves the uncertain future of the college. Restructuring of college governance and an extensive external review has identified the need for a new vision of higher education for the province. Program additions and cancellations, reassignments, as well as significant policy, process and infrastructure changes,

are anticipated over the next several years. The external review briefly addresses student attrition, albeit in a simplistic and problematic form, bringing a sense of urgency to the issue of student attrition and persistence. The proposed pilot implementation of a student persistence and success plan within Department A allows time for monitoring and evaluation (field-testing), providing support for evidence-informed recommendations to senior leadership, and potentially create momentum among faculty and staff to champion for lasting change.

An exploration of student success approaches, nationally and internationally, reveals a plethora of plans grounded in research and evaluation, while others take a more neoliberal or broader path to student success. However, this issue is too important for isomorphism. A student persistence and success plan for College X should address the unique student population, and be seen as an opportunity to alter the discourse around student attrition. Involvement of faculty, students and staff is critical in the development of this plan. Some issues related to data collection may be overcome with the implementation of the new SRS. Further inquiry into the necessary data collection approaches and best practices to support the development and enactment of a student persistence and success plan, is necessary.

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

#### **Current State and Envisioned Future**

The model of student persistence and success, grounded in poststructural feminism and respectful relationships, reflects the mission and values of College X, and has the potential to increase the success of local and Indigenous students. Furthermore, a social justice perspective recognizes the needs of individual students and acknowledges that a universal approach does not meet the needs of all students (Cederbaum & Klusaritz, 2009).

The uncertainty of change and the challenges of supporting student persistence will test faculty and organizational values. While the College has taken a key step in reconciliation by signing the Colleges and Institutes Canada (2017) *Indigenous Education Protocol*, faculty and staff continue to ask for direction and articulation of what this protocol really means, and how they can espouse principles that support Indigenous students. Episodic infusions of culture, ceremonies, and protocols border upon tokenistic approaches to diversity (Jacob, 2012), and do not reflect core organizational values or mission. Emancipatory change to benefit student success requires dialogue with government and stakeholders about the institution's perspective of attrition and a firm commitment to holistic, socially just language and pedagogy.

A culturally congruent experience ensures that the student's culture is more than respected, but incorporated into the educational experience. It is this culturally congruent experience that can transform College X into a destination organization for higher education in the province. College X's values reflect an acute awareness of the legacy of residential schools within the province and the tragic impact of intergenerational trauma on the health and well-being of Indigenous people. To enact this value and align with the mission, the college must increase visibility of decolonizing pedagogy, policies and procedures. These processes cannot be limited to individual programs if the organization is to embody its mission.

External stakeholders, based on superficial data analysis, have noted the absence of a student persistence and success plan. However, college leaders are unable to defend student attrition numbers in the absence of data that highlights the institutional and environmental factors affecting student success. The desired state is for a clear plan for student persistence and success, with a subsequent monitoring and evaluation plan to quantitatively and qualitatively, assess its effectiveness.

### **Priorities for Change**

There are several priorities for change in this OIP. Considering the threat of non-accreditation for one Department A program, due to the absence of a dedicated focus on attrition, development of a student persistence and success plan is imperative. Accomplishing this goal involves: researching best practices in higher education data collection and outlining the data necessary to better understand student educational trajectories; implementation of the new SRS; holistic assessment of students upon admission to identify support needs; and, faculty engagement as it relates to decolonizing practices and pedagogical approaches to supporting student persistence and success. It is important to emphasize that each of these priorities are rooted in cultural change. For the purposes of this OIP, priorities will center around this cultural change.

**Cultural change.** Analysis of institutional culture is a key step in creating change. Kezar and Eckel (2002) found that change strategies are more successful when they are culturally responsive. Similar to the organizational examples provided by Kezar and Eckel (2002), College X has significant departmental autonomy, and faculty have a high level of self-reflection and desire to be involved in decision making. Learning is highly valued within College X, and is a key change strategy for this OIP, whether in relation to decolonization, or understanding student attrition factors. Deep, second-order change, such as that reflected in this POP, will be guided by social cognition theory, which calls for sensemaking and organizational learning (Kezar, 2014). Sensemaking is important to cultural change, where new ideas cannot simply be incorporated into existing understanding (Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013). Learning how to support Indigenous students, for example, cannot simply be an adjunct to or modification of existing Western practices; a shift is required. Such a shift, through sensemaking, involves finding new

meaning and developing new language (Eckel & Kezar, 2003). Changing language around student attrition and retention begins with understanding that student persistence is a shared responsibility. Sensemaking is an inherently emotional and cognitive process (Maitlis et al., 2013), and conflicting information, particularly over a charged issue such as oppression, leaves faculty confused and seeking to better understand, or make sense of how to accomplish this work. Social cognition theory is thus important to this POP, as it privileges learning and development, and attitudinal change, and can support the leader through potential sources of resistance.

Examination of past and current successes and challenges is necessary for organizational improvement and cultural change. One could argue that student data perpetuates the market driven, neoliberal approach that threatens higher education. Collection of student data requires careful thought and evidence-based approaches to ensure data supports student success rather than gaining the attention of investors, or viewing potential students as customers and human capital (Brown, 2015). Such neoliberal perspectives, warns Brown (2015), perpetuates inequality, increases commercialization, and unethical corporatization of the academy. One primary purpose of higher education data is to provide information to evaluate programs, staff, students, resources, infrastructure, services and systems—all those factors that comprise the significant enterprise of educating young people and conducting research for knowledge. Data collection can also be used to identify and support students and address inequality. However, the reality of governmental accountability and financial frameworks means institutions of higher education must maintain transparency through data collection and publication. Finding a balance between reporting requirements and the moral responsibility to student education has important leadership implications. Superficial, or skeleton, data collection, as currently exists at College X,

certainly does not allow leaders to engage with or understand the student population to maximize success. Using the factors that impact student persistence, as previously outlined in Table 1, as sources of data collection, would support a student persistence and success plan.

### **Organizational Change Readiness**

Despite the social-justice foundation of the proposed student persistence and success model, it is important to acknowledge that this OIP is the result of accreditation and regulatory body recommendations, or reactive change (Buller, 2015). This change is further supported by the recent government review of the college, calling for a new vision of higher education. Proactive and interactive factors (Buller, 2015) drive the change and reflect the decolonizing approaches needed to meet the TRC (2015) *Calls to Action*. Development of a comprehensive student success plan is a second-order change (Kezar, 2014), where values, assumptions, and processes need to be explored to create meaningful transformation, and where resistance is likely.

The change readiness model by Armenakis, Harris, and Feild (1999, 2015), is relevant to this organizational vision for change. This model is framed around five factors considered essential for change readiness, adoption and institutionalization of change: discrepancy, appropriateness, efficacy, principal support, and valence (Armenakis, Harris, & Feild, 1999). Discrepancy means understanding why the change is necessary. Appropriateness means those involved need to feel the proposed change will address the identified gap. Efficacy assesses the individual and group's belief in their abilities to implement the change. Principal support is an understanding that managers and colleagues support the change. Valence addresses the important question asked by those involved in change — 'what is in it for me'? Application of Armenakis, Bernerth, Pitts, and Walker's (2007) change readiness assessment tool, utilized in various

organizational contexts to assess the five change factors, reveals that College X is at a low level of change readiness. This is largely due to a history of poor communication between senior leadership and the government, uncertainty surrounding the external college review, and the historically non-collaborative practice between college departments. In contrast, Department A, where the student persistence and success plan will be developed and piloted, is at a high level of change readiness. Department A faculty recognize that change is needed, as it relates to the TRC (2015), and they are frustrated with the absence of a unified approach to the *Calls to Action*. Many faculty have begun their own truth and reconciliation journey; however, how reconciliation is consistently reflected in classroom and clinical teaching, and program policies, is yet to be explored. Faculty acknowledge the gap between the College mission to support local and Indigenous peoples through education, and feel this change will improve efficiency. While the College itself is at a low level of change readiness, change is needed, and inevitable.

The second stage of change is adoption (Armenakis et al., 1999; Armenakis & Harris, 2001), where change implementation occurs and revisions are ongoing. The development and pilot implementation of a student persistence and success plan within Department A are essential components of adoption. Several strategies can be beneficial within this stage, including persuasive communication, active participation, and management of information (Armenakis & Harris, 2001). Communication strategies are essential to building relationships and overcoming potential resistance, and will be expanded upon in Chapter Three.

Institutionalization is the next step in the change process (Armenakis et al., 1999; Armenakis & Harris, 2001). In this phase, the collaboratively developed success plan will be implemented and individuals will demonstrate a commitment to the proposed change. Armenakis et al., (2015) cautions that institutionalization can be accomplished with compliance; however,

compliance can eventually lead to complacency. This caution is relevant for this organization, particularly if the primary focus is on data collection. Commitment to student success requires continued engagement for sustainability. The relational aspects of connective leadership, as proposed in this OIP, can foster this engagement. While faculty within Department A are largely ready for change, some resistance is anticipated, particularly when personal values and beliefs about faculty-student relationships are explored. Proposed change should link individual values and beliefs with organizational culture (Armenakis et al., 1999), and consistently communicate the relationship between change and organizational success. Collection and analysis of student data, relationship building, and reflection on policy and pedagogical approaches, require engagement of faculty and student services staff, without whom the student success plan will fail to meet the needs of the key stakeholders—the students.

### **Summary**

College X is facing significant, uncertain change. Its longstanding history of secondary school upgrading, lack of long-term vision for higher education, and antiquated data collection infrastructure have caused stakeholders to question the organization's commitment and ability to support student persistence and success. External reviewers are calling for a complete college redesign and leaders await government decisions regarding the future of the college. In the meantime, program accreditors continue to require evaluative data, and call for a student success plan to address student attrition. A model for student persistence and success, based upon the concepts of cultural congruence, social justice, strength-based language and approaches, and relationships, supports organizational change. Program leaders have a significant role to play in challenging and altering discourse around student attrition and persistence. This is an opportune time for College X to diverge from its past isomorphic practices, and become leaders in



decolonizing educational practices, which supports student success. Further exploration of connective leadership as an approach to ready the organization, and ultimately institutionalize change, are expanded upon in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2: PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

As previously discussed, the envisioned state for College X includes a comprehensive, and collaborative, student persistence and success plan. This plan will be more than a means to mitigate attrition. This plan will foster a culturally congruent experience within an organization that values relationships and decolonizing approaches to support student persistence, particularly for Indigenous students. Cooperation among College departments is critical to the success of this plan and starts with a leadership model that values collaboration, goal attainment, and developing the maximum potential of others. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight how connective leadership can guide organizational change and to describe the student persistence and success plan as a viable and socially just solution to the problem of practice. Ethical and relevant change issues within the problem of practice are also analyzed.

### **Leadership Approaches to Change**

#### **Connective Leadership Model**

Before describing how connective leadership can propel the change plan to recapture the organizational mission of student success, it is important to understand the connective leadership model. As previously mentioned, connective leadership has been successfully utilized in nursing and health care (Klakovitch, 1994) and women's leadership (Kezar & Wheaton, 2017; Lipman-Blumen, 1992). An extensive search has revealed an absence of literature applying connective leadership to student persistence and success. Connective leadership, however, aligns with the cultural change identified by this organizational improvement plan, requiring a focus on relationships and inspiring people (Kang, 2015). As previously discussed, Lipman-Blumen's (1996) model has three approaches to leadership: relational, direct and instrumental, each with sub-styles or strategies. All three approaches can be utilized to benefit this problem of practice.

While much of Lipman-Blumen's (1996) model perhaps borders on repetition, it is robust and detailed in its potential to lead change.

### **Relational Approach**

Lipman-Blumen (1996) stated that most leaders tend to gravitate toward one leadership style or strategy; for the writer, there is a natural pull toward the relational approach. Contrary to possible assumptions, this style does not equate with knowing on a personal level, but rather, connects the leader to the goals and visions of others. The relational approach has three styles: collaborative, contributory and vicarious (Lipman-Blumen, 1996). While Department A (where the pilot plan will be implemented) with its small, geographically centralized faculty, is quite collaborative, collaboration must extend to the Student Services Department. Student Service staff are intricately connected to student persistence (Dobson & Conway, 2003; Roberts, 2018). Instead of a competitive approach, where one department feels they are responsible for student success, the connective leader can highlight how intra and interdepartmental collaboration can maximize student persistence and increase organizational efficiency.

The contributory style helps others achieve their goals (Lipman-Blumen, 1996). This approach does not place the leader in an expert, or managerial role, nor does the leader expect thanks—virtues congruent with the writer's personal approach. Reciprocity and personal satisfaction are the driving forces in this sub-style (Lipman-Blumen, 1998). Furthermore, in a time of fiscal restraint, financial stakeholders may be apt to listen to a leader who can relate the student success plan to strategic economic priorities. Complementary to the contributory style is the vicarious style (Lipman-Blumen, 1998) which involves encouraging others, celebrating individual success and their contribution to the larger goal. Creating a community of learning, among all departments, could support mutual goal attainment and shared success.

**Instrumental Approach**

The instrumental approach focuses on connections and shared goals, rather than what makes us different (Lipman-Blumen, 1998). This style involves helping the team identify the strengths of all those involved, and empowering members to use those strategies to meet established goals. Use of persuasion might be necessary for example, if faculty question why they should reach out to students using proactive advising (Jeffreys, 2012) rather than waiting for students to ask for help, or reaching out once the student is experiencing difficulties.

Considerable time should be afforded to coming to know Student Services staff, its formal and informal structures, and departmental culture—creating a shared network. This network, developed through using the social sub-style (Lipman-Blumen, 1996) is essential to the overall change process.

**Direct Approach**

The direct approach, while not a usual style of leadership for the writer, has an important place in this change plan. The power sub-style in particular, involves taking control and organizing tasks and resources (Lipman-Blumen, 1996). The Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing has recommended a student attrition plan; which means future accreditation rests on the action, or inaction, taken on this issue. Approaches to student success have changed over the years—the most significant shift occurring since the TRC's (2015) calls to decolonize academia. Development of a student persistence and success plan may mean exploring policies and approaches that disadvantage some students (for example, late assignment policies). Meetings will be necessary, and committees established to do the work of developing, enacting and evaluating the plan. Data must be collected, extracted and analysed to provide information on the factors that impact student persistence and attrition—this will take time and human resources.

Exit interviews may need to be conducted, even if it adds to personal workload. Political astuteness will be necessary to challenge attrition discourse, and to present the student persistence and success plan as a viable option to meeting the organizational mission. This goal can only be accomplished when all College departments work together rather than in silos. Suboptimization, or the act of improving one aspect of a system at the risk of negatively affecting another (Dettmer, 1998), is one of the reasons for the current limbo state of College X and the critical external review of College administration and processes. The connective leader is in a unique position to prevent further internal disconnect within the College.

### **Framework for Leading Change**

There are many factors influencing, or driving change, for College X. Some of these factors have been previously discussed and include the: current holding pattern of College X administration; uncertain future in lieu of the external review; accreditation and regulatory standards, requirements, and timelines; need to decolonize education and ensure socially-just education for all Canadians; increased stakeholder and public focus on the number and success of Indigenous students in higher education; tightened and reduced budgets due to a downturn in industry; differing organizational cultures among siloed College X departments; and, impending implementation of a new student records system (SRS). The theoretical underpinnings of the change process proposed in this OIP are highlighted in Figure 3.

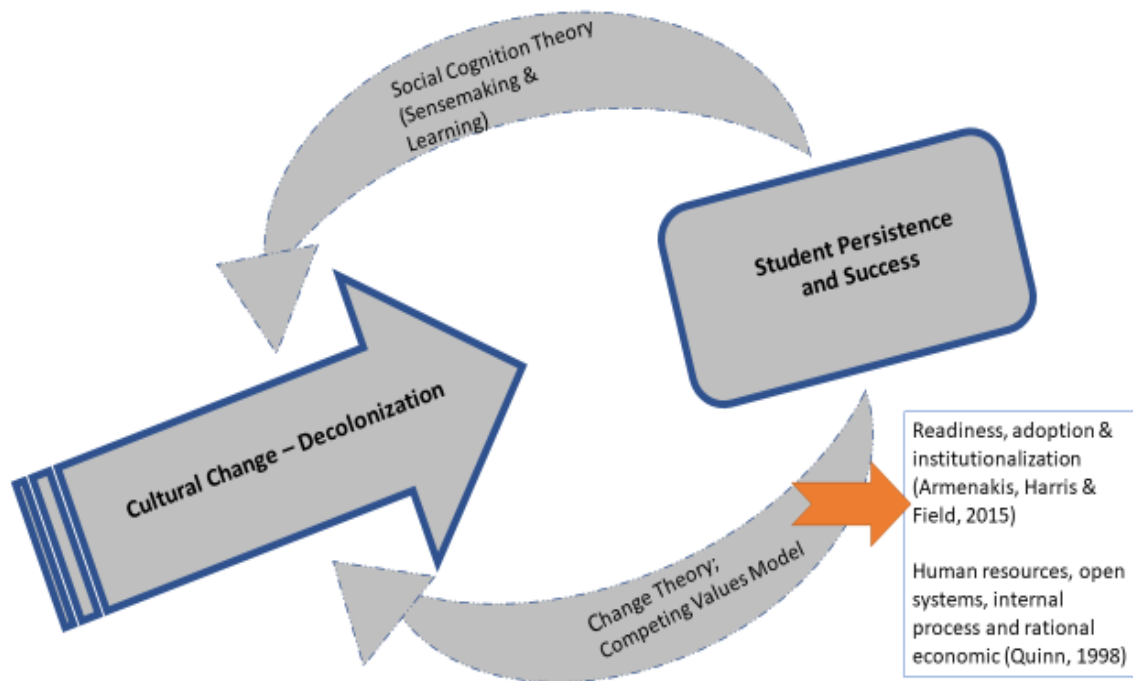


Figure 3. Framework for change. By K.L. Durnford, 2019.

Social cognition theory informs the cultural change (Morgan, 1986), specifically learning and sensemaking. This learning and sensemaking will take place simultaneously with Armenakis et al's (2015) change readiness model, and will guide the development, implementation and evaluation of the student persistence and success plan.

### Change Theory

The change readiness model builds upon Lewin's stages of change and Bandura's social learning theory (Armenakis, Harris, Cole, Fillmer, & Self, 2007; Armenakis et al., 2015), with a greater focus on the importance of investment in and commitment to the change at the individual level. The focus on the five sentiments of change (discrepancy, appropriateness, efficacy, principal support, valence) (Armenakis et al., 2015), as described in Chapter One, ensures readiness for change is assessed, thus increasing the likelihood of adoption and institutionalization. Within the context of College X, the leader must consider the impact of

constant actual or impending change. Considering the deep cultural change needed within this OIP, and the possible increased effort expected of faculty and staff, the leader will want to assess if the organization is ready for and supportive of, such transformative change. It is challenging to measure the degree of readiness within the entire organization at this time due to the complex and temporary structures while the College awaits a decision about its future. Evaluation data from the pilot implementation will be used to engage in change with the entire organization, though not the primary focus of this OIP.

### **Reactive and Proactive Change**

The national accrediting body of one Department A program has essentially mandated a student success plan. Mandated in the sense that the accreditation board recommended an attrition mitigation plan, and failure to meet this recommendation will certainly risk accreditation status. Within this context, change is reactive, or forced (Buller, 2015). Alternatively, this change could also be proactive, where change is vital to avoiding a crisis (Buller, 2015). Accreditation is important from a legitimacy and credibility perspective, and the absence of accreditation could have a significantly negative impact on the College and the local economy, causing more students to seek higher education out of the province.

Additional proactive change includes implementation of the SRS and calls to decolonize education. The outdated and inefficient SRS is unable to support College X in its mission, or meet reporting requirements, and change was required before the system crashed entirely. Stakeholders, such as accreditation and regulatory bodies, were beginning to see the impact of an inefficient system (an issue raised many years ago by program leaders), and reactive change was inevitable. This technological driver of change has particular relevance for this OIP—from exploration of best practices in data collection, to collation of data for the purposes of informing

program planning and curriculum, and ongoing formative and summative evaluation. The new SRS will require, and effect, a great deal of change in day-to-day College business and long-term planning.

The TRC (2015) *Calls to Action* incite proactive change. The *Calls to Action* are social and political expectations, with specific implications for institutions of higher education. Admission and graduation rates of Indigenous students within undergraduate programs at College X are lower than other student cohorts. The assumption made in this OIP is that the significant population of Indigenous people in the communities served by College X, and the failure of Indigenous people to achieve the economic and education advantages of other Canadians (Pidgeon, 2016; Sharpe et al., 2007), should be considered a crisis on a social justice level.

### **Cultural Change and Social Cognition Theory**

The conceptual model of student persistence and success described in Chapter One (see Figure 2) is built upon culturally congruent experiences for the student, strength-based and socially-just approaches to education, and maximizing resources for student success. While implementation of the student records system is a seemingly straightforward example of proactive change, the new system requires understanding the rationale for specific data collection, for example, the Indigenous ancestry of students. Accessing this data may be challenging due to a history of mistrust by Indigenous students of educational institutions and their intent with their personal data (Cote-Meek, 2014; Moffitt, 2016). Faculty and staff must therefore understand the TRC (2015) *Calls to Action*, and subsequently engage in personal reflection and learning. Building relationships with the community to re-establish trust and create understanding regarding the purposes of collecting information is paramount. Faculty and staff



must understand why it is important they know the demographic of their classrooms. This problem of practice is thus a second-order change with considerable contextual influence. The student persistence and success plan will fail to meet the needs of the student if the organization does not go deeper than reactive and proactive change. It is for this reason the organizational improvement plan will focus on cultural and social cognition theories of change.

Cultural theory places significant focus on context and history (Kezar, 2014). Cultural theory also explores complicated power relationships (Schein, 2016), where power rests with governance bodies; yet, decisions regarding change often begins with individuals. In this OIP, power lies in learning and relationships, and thus, largely rests with faculty and program leaders. Actualizing decolonization, a key aspect of the student persistence and success plan, involves exploring assumptions, values, and biases about student support and student success. For many faculty at College X, this has meant viewing students as self-sufficient, autonomous learners, requiring indoctrination to the professional world, where timeliness and requisite skills and abilities are valued. This is neither socially just nor appropriate. Kezar (2014) stated that cultural theory also encourages a shared leadership approach. In a loosely coupled system like College X, a shared approach to change would be beneficial, but not without its challenges, considering geographical and historically siloed approaches to student support. A shared approach with those in higher-level leadership positions, because of their ability to fund and influence change, as well as, those on the front line who would be responsible for enacting the plan, is vital. Learning for faculty and staff is a key aspect to overcoming challenges and building collective self-efficacy for the cultural change, whether in relation to decolonization or implementing and evaluating the student persistence and success plan.

Social cognition theory, also used to address second-order, or deep change, involves sensemaking and organizational learning to facilitate understanding (Kezar, 2014). Sensemaking causes a change in one's current understanding (Maitlis et al., 2013), and involves finding new meaning and developing new language (Eckel & Kezar, 2003). It is a social process where people work collectively (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Sensemaking is relevant to this problem of practice, as changing a long-standing approach to providing student support, based on decolonizing influences, will require individual participation and reflection. Understanding what it means to decolonize may evoke the emotional reaction (Maitlis et al., 2013) needed to institutionalize change. Changing language around student attrition and persistence begins with understanding the impact of discourse and the inherent social justice perspective in the language used. Sensemaking has been combined with poststructural feminist perspectives to examine power relationships (Mikkelsen & Wahlin, 2019), and thus adds to the contextual understanding of College X, its governance, policies and processes. Sensemaking is not only relevant to reflection, but to collective action in making change sustainable (Benn, Edwards, & Angelleppen, 2013). Benn et al. (2013) used sensemaking within the context of communities of practice to create sustainable change in higher education. These models of collaborative learning require further consideration. Numerous and competing values require careful consideration if change is to be sustainable. The next section of the chapter outlines important considerations to balance the organizational needs and envisioned state with the many change drivers, whilst keeping student success at the core.

### **Critical Organizational Analysis**

Organizational analysis of College X revealed many internal gaps and issues. External influences also exist, including governance structures, as well as, the figurative and linguistic

factors that surround student attrition and persistence. As a leader and faculty member of the College for many years, the writer must ensure all issues that contribute to the problem of practice are considered. Focused attention on one particular issue may result in another being insufficiently addressed; and change, regardless of how necessary, will be ineffective and possibly dysfunctional. The student will ultimately feel any negative effects of change in this OIP, which is counterintuitive to the idea of a student persistence and success plan. It is clear that cultural change is needed. To address this cultural change and ensure intentional focus on all gaps and influences, Quinn's Competing Values Model (1988) is used.

### **Competing Values Model**

Quinn's (1988) Competing Values Model, while dated, is considered a valid tool (Lamonde, 2003) to address and balance an organization's need for flexibility and control with both an internal and external focus. This model (see Figure 4), has four key views: human resources, open systems, internal process and rational economic. The human resources view, which aims to balance flexibility with an internal focus, examines how to work with people and groups, creating a positive environment of mentoring, teamwork, and motivation (Buenger, Daft, Conlon, & Austin, 1996; Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, McGrath, & St. Clair, 2011). The open systems view balances flexibility with an external focus, examining how to use power, respond to outside tensions and the consequences of change, as well as seeking resources necessary to keep pace with change (Buenger et al., 1996; Quinn, 2011).

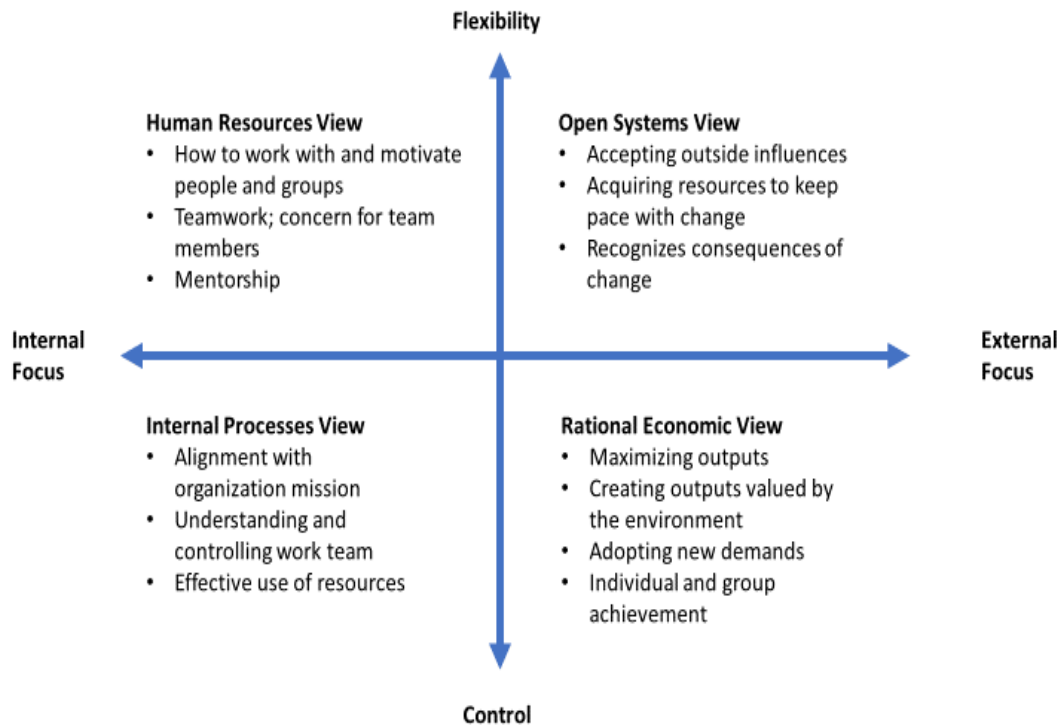


Figure 4. Competing Values Model. Quinn, R.E. (1988). *Becoming a master manager: Mastering the paradoxes and competing demands of high performance*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

The internal process view reflects maintaining or regaining control, where the focus is on aligning the organization mission, making effective use of resources, and internal monitoring and coordination (Buenger et al., 1996; Quinn 2011). The rational economic view examines the need for control with an external focus—in particular, maximizing output, ensuring these outputs are valued by the environment, and adapting to new demands (Buenger et al., 1996; Quinn 2011). This view also addresses the issue of legitimacy (Buenger et al., 1996); a concept previously identified in Chapter One as important to image and student recruitment. Key issues affecting College X, within the lens of the Competing Values Model, are explored in the following section. While some of these issues require change on a macro level, others are more micro with

significantly less complex history; however, each issue is addressed to ensure a comprehensive diagnosis of the organization.

**Open systems view.** Exploration of organizational context and change readiness identified that the most significant, long-term impact on student success rests with the long-awaited government decision about the external College review. While the external review recommends a university, a true vision of higher education for the province remains absent. A university is certainly a significant part of that vision; however, strategic direction is needed to guide the development of new programs, and support program continuation, if problems of the past are to be addressed.

Accreditation fits within the open systems view. Tensions have resulted because of these external mandates, particularly when larger organizational change is required to meet accreditation requirements of just one program. Energies have been devoted to securing needed resources, including the student records system. Development of a student persistence and success plan is another resource needed to respond to these external challenges. Within the open system, Quinn (2011) encourages organizations to use power to manage change; in this case the organization can use the power of language. While there is a mandate to make changes, the organization can ensure the language used in the creation of the persistence and success plan reflects the socially just and strength philosophy of student success described in this OIP. Clear articulation of the meaning of student attrition, persistence and retention, within a poststructural feminist approach, is within the control of the organization and it should exert this power.

External stakeholders have questioned whether student attrition at College X is linked to minimal entrance requirements (i.e., 65%) in math, English and sciences. Would increasing entrance requirements ensure a more educated and thus more successful student body, lessening

the attrition rate and meeting the satisfaction of external stakeholders? However, changing entrance requirements fails to address a deeper underlying issue, namely, the existence of a secondary education system that does not consistently prepare students for post-secondary study, and places blame solely on the higher education organization. A lack of social and health supports to address the intergenerational impacts of residential schools, and thus failure of secondary students to attain the needed pre-requisites for higher education, is another factor affecting student success. Some students are unable to meet minimal entrance requirements due to a lack of teachers or the existence southern developed distance options for which students have little technological and educational support. From a nursing education perspective, these trends are concerning as challenges in passing the national licensing exam, and thus practice as a registered nurse, is linked to low grades in the secondary science courses (Sears, Othman, & Mahoney, 2015). The writer is not recommending that entrance requirements increase from the basic 65%. In fact, this contradicts the very essence of social justice espoused in the proposed conceptual model of student persistence and success (see Chapter One). Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005) question the ethics of raising entrance requirements and alternatively challenge organizations to build the necessary supports to ensure student success. Furthermore, increasing entrance requirements would surely widen the educational and economic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. These macroscale changes are beyond the scope of this OIP; however, it would be remiss not to identify these variables in the open systems view. College leaders must always keep these fundamental gaps in the foreground and continue to raise awareness of long-term factors that influence student persistence and success.

Tensions are also explored within this open systems view—and policies and procedures that impact student success result in tension. For example, students with learning needs and other

academic accommodations require additional support to be successful. Clear policies that outline processes for students to obtain support for all health issues and learning related accommodation needs that affect persistence and success, are needed. Only when faculty and staff understand the process and view these students not as a burden or a pathology, but for their strengths and potential, will the policy truly reflect student support.

**Internal processes view.** The internal process view is a competing value concentrated on understanding the work unit (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ignols, 2016) and realigning with the organizational mission (Buenger et al., 1996). There is most certainly a mission drift within College X. Programs and services are not built upon the mission of collectively supporting success of local citizens. While some programs exhibit readiness for change, there is a lack of cohesion and coordinated effort on behalf of the College as a whole toward a unified approach. The opposite competing value is the open systems view. So, rather than dwell solely on the changes forced upon the organization (open systems) and the tensions that result from forced change (i.e., external review, accreditation), focus must also be placed on grounding the organization, and its component parts, with the mission and making use of resources (internal process view).

In terms of making effective and efficient use of resources, College X requires a transparent data collection plan, an understanding of existing services, and identification of gaps. Implementation of the new student records system should provide the data necessary to identify the student population characteristics and their needs; thus, inform College program planning. An evaluation plan that outlines what data should be collected and how it is utilized to inform program planning and evaluation is a key internal process to be developed, as a whole, not as individual programs. Best practices in data collection and analysis, researched with a social-

justice lens, must be identified. The student persistence and success plan will need to address how the organization will collect data on student, environmental, academic and professional factors, previously identified in Chapter One, which impact student success.

**Human resources view.** College X faculty and staff are challenged to work together, maintain a positive environment, and increase morale, while the future of the organization is seemingly out of its locus of control. As the organization waits for the government to craft a new model of higher education, it must continue to engage in the work of education. Future directions must address the siloed nature of the College's campuses. The multiple campus model poses complexity; however, cohesion can be attained through communication and collaboration. College X was built upon the vision of ensuring that local citizens, particularly Indigenous peoples, receive the educational upgrading needed to attain meaningful employment within their home community. The ability to meet this need is a source of pride for the College, particularly in smaller communities where students have the social supports to be successful.

Leadership within College X is complicated. While the provincial government and senior leadership has overall control of the College, its finances and programs, Program Coordinators and faculty, have significant power to effect change in the area of student success. Relationship building, helping others see the power they have to influence change, and other key tenants of the connective leadership model (Lipman-Blumen, 1996) complement the human resources view of the Competing Values Model.



**Rational economic view.** Other gaps within the organization are visible through the rational economic lens and include the concepts of college legitimacy and identity. As previously outlined, the College is loosely coupled structure, which has led to external, and even internal, questions of identity. Changing these perceptions must be at the foreground of the new College administration. The external review has stated that a new building or a new name, shaped around an existing model, is not a viable nor sustainable solution (Consulting Company, 2018). While this change driver is out of the hands of the writer's leadership potential, it is a competing value that informs actions.

As a result of external influences, questions have been raised about student persistence and attrition by members of the public, College staff, faculty, and even students. Response to the accreditation mandate for one program within Department A must be seen as valuable by the entire organization, placing this issue within the rational economic view. Attrition is also linked to economic gain. The rational economic view encourages clear direction to maximize productivity (Melo, Silva & Parreira, 2014). A well-developed student persistence and success plan has the potential to increase organizational revenue.

In summary, the Competing Values Model is deemed functional in multiple realities and complex cultures (Cawsey et al., 2016), and commended for its usefulness in multiple pedagogical contexts (Lindquest & Marcey, 2014). This model ensures that flexibility and control complement each other as it relates to both internal and external factors, and demonstrates how multiple factors can exist within an organization trying to effect cultural change (Lamond, 2003). The various styles of connective leadership, previously described as part of the leadership vision of change, also complement this model and can assist the

organization to ensure all influences and values are given ample consideration as possible solutions to the problem of practice.

### **Proposed Solutions**

College X could take three approaches to resolving this problem of practice: following the status quo, implementing strategic enrolment management, or developing and piloting a unique student persistence and success plan with Department A of College X. In this section, the merits of each alternative, including resource needs and potential consequences, are highlighted.

#### **Solution A – Status Quo**

College X's suspended Board of Governors, temporary senior leadership, as well as, the uncertain future in light of external recommendations for a university, leaves status quo as a reasonable solution. It is valid to question whether additional change is necessary at this time, or if necessary human resources and energies exist for such a collaborative effort. The government has stated that strategic planning will be one of the first steps in constructing the new vision of higher education, once a new College president is hired. Strategic direction is necessary to guide the future of higher education for College X. The new student records system will be implemented in 2019, resulting in accurate data about the student population and their educational trajectory. A solid plan for what data should be collected, why it should be collected, who will collect and analyze it, and how it can be used to support student persistence, is yet to be communicated. The status quo option will require time, human, fiscal, information and technological resources, but no more than will already be required to transition to a university, should this be the ultimate decision.

Status quo would use fewer resources as ideally all necessary changes will be made at the same time. However, a holding pattern will ultimately be detrimental to the College. College X's nursing program is one of the longest running, most consistently successful programs. It is also the only complete undergraduate degree in the province, made possible by many years of successful collaboration with southern institutions of higher education. The nursing program has a very good reputation with potential employers as well as members of the public, and the majority of graduates continue to work in the province. However, the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing accredits the program, and this accrediting body has recommended a student success plan. Ignoring this recommendation means gambling with future accreditation decisions about the nursing program. This is not a risk that faculty and leaders within the nursing program are willing to take. Thus, status quo is not a viable option.

### **Solution B - Strategic Enrolment Management**

Leaders within College X have expressed interest in strategic enrolment management (SEM). According to Bontrager (2008), strategic management assures that “every campus has a satisfactory number of new students and currently enrolled students to provide sufficient net revenue that the characteristics of the enrolled student body help to advance both the prestige and rankings of the institution” (p. 4). Public concerns about the legitimacy of College X, particularly because of the external report, and the financial struggles faced by the provincial government with whom the College is directly tied, means SEM is a viable option.

Implementing SEM would involve time and human resources; mainly the time to research options, create and implement a plan. This could be accomplished while the College is awaiting government decisions about the external review. The new SRS is instrumental to SEM and data could be tailored to reflect the strategies of the enrolment plan. This SRS will be

implemented in 2019, regardless of which solution is chosen. As only some members of senior management know the full potential of the SRS, they could develop the student enrolment plan. Enrolment management is most successful when it reflects the institution's values and mission (Kalsbeek, 2006; Moore & Russ-Eft, 2016), and mission drift is an issue for College X. Therefore, revisiting the current mission would be a priority, or strategic planning could be expedited. SEM is also most successful when all departments work together (Henderson, 2017). Thus, SEM could possibly address the isolated silos that exist within the College.

Strategic enrolment management, while a successful approach (Flanigan, 2016; Serna, 2017), contradicts the model proposed in this organizational improvement plan. Bontrager (2008) stated that the primary task of enrolment managers is to “manage the nexus of revenue, prestige, and diversity at the institutions at which they serve” (p. 4). Arguments exist regarding which institutional department is best responsible for SEM (Henderson, 2017). However, student persistence is not simply the responsibility of one department or group of College employees. The sense of belonging necessary for student persistence can be created by anyone from the receptionist, librarian, counsellor, or the course instructor. SEM evolved from a structuralist perspective (Snowden, 2016), and a review of five definitions of enrolment management (Kalsbeek, 2006), frequently highlighted words such as funding, marketing, finances, enrolment, and competition. Terms related to relationship building, institutional and professional integration, and culturally congruent education were absent in the definitions. Proponents are calling for SEM institutions to place emphasis on relationships as well as on the business side of higher education (Leigh, 2014), and focus on the individual student and his/her relationships (Henderson, 2017). This student success approach is neoliberal, less personal, and requires modification to meet the inherent needs of belonging and relationships, which are intricately

linked to student success. SEM does not embody the social justice perspective nor support the continued need for decolonization within the province's institutions of higher education. It is for this reason and the need for more collaborative efforts at College X rather than bureaucratic, top-down approaches, that this approach is not recommended.

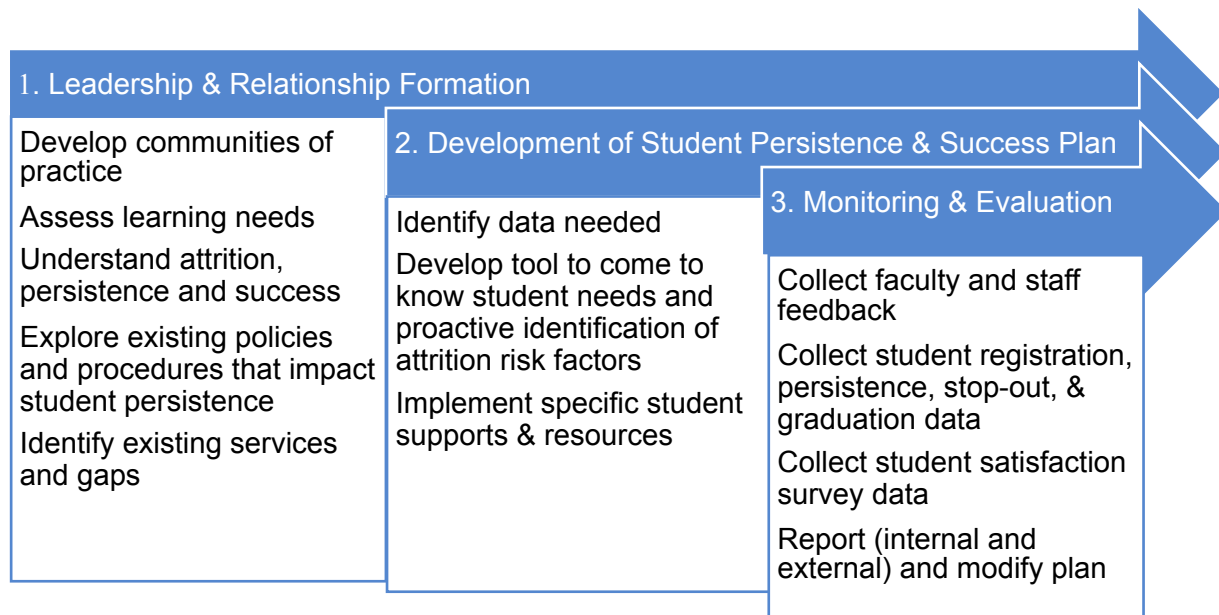
### **Solution C – Student Persistence and Success Model and Plan**

The previous options do not address the larger, foundational issue in this problem of practice—the need for cultural change. It is important at this time to revisit the definition of culture, which is described as:

a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 2016, p.18).

The manner and approaches used to teach students at College X are engrained and require a critical examination with a decolonizing lens. A student success plan requires faculty and staff investment, as efforts to support students are largely implemented by these individuals. While College X as a whole may not be ready for change, Department A programs are ready for change. The nursing program is unwilling to sacrifice its accreditation status while the institution grapples with imagining a future independent from the government, which ironically will make the decision whether or not, or to what extent, this future exists. College administration has been silent on most issues identified by the nursing accrediting body. Therefore, a viable option that would benefit the College in the long-term is to develop a student persistence and success plan within Department A, evaluate the plan, and report back to the College as a whole, with the hope of wider adoption across campus. This option addresses all components of the Competing Values Model and is the best solution for this OIP.

**Student persistence and success plan.** The conceptual model proposed in this organizational improvement plan (see Chapter One, Figure 2), will be used to design the student persistence and success plan. Figure 5 identifies the necessary, yet overlapping steps of this solution, and are further discussed in the subsequent section.



*Figure 5.* Proposed Phases of the Student Persistence and Success Plan. By K.L. Durnford, 2018.

Components of this student success and persistence plan include development of learning communities to understand the meaning of decolonization within education, and implementation of specific supports, resources and pedagogy, known to support student persistence, particularly for at-risk students. Examples of supportive pedagogy include: faculty advisors (Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Jeffreys, 2015; Troxel, 2018) and proactive advisement (Harris, 2018; Villano, Harrison, Lynch, & Chen, 2018), and increasing social and professional engagement through peer mentoring and professional student groups (Jeffreys, 2005; Kuh et al., 2005).

As previously discussed, sensemaking will be used to generate cultural change. Sensemaking is a time for the leader to “read” the team (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993, p. 26), or perform an assessment of their understanding of language. This assessment is particularly relevant as it relates to decolonization. Maitlis et al., (2013) state that when dialogue is encouraged among individuals, particularly when emotions are moderately high, social sensemaking occurs. In the case of this improvement plan, emotions may be heightened as individuals engage in their personal decolonization journey, or if they identify that existing practices, when viewed with a decolonizing lens, are contradictory to student persistence. These emotions, state Maitlis et al. (2013), are associated with empathy and a desire for relationship building, which are important to student persistence. Sensemaking will be accomplished through development of a learning community that extends beyond the program and department, dissolving the current siloed and inefficient approach to student success.

**Learning community.** Learning communities have naturally evolved within some College X departments due to geographical proximity of offices and social space. Professional similarities have created opportunities for sharing ideas and innovations in individual departments. Learning communities are an approach to imbedding change within the institution (Kezar, 2014), and a means of engaging in collaborative reflection for the purposes of learning and growth (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Learning communities have been beneficial to decolonization (Ottmann, 2013) and contribute to improvements in instruction (Andrews & Lewis, 2007; Little, 2002). A team learning approach welcomes members to explore differing perspectives without expecting consensus. Cultural change theory guides this discourse and shared meaning making, and coincides with the key features of learning communities: shared

values and vision, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry, collaboration, and promotion of individual and group learning (Stoll et al., 2006).

Learning communities provide an excellent environment to discuss the challenges and successes of student support. Critical dialogue and reflection within the community allow faculty the time needed to explore traditional approaches to student support, including reaching out when students are in trouble. Proactive advising, as recommended by Jeffreys (2012), Hatch and Garcia (2017), Goldrick-Rab (2010), and Kuh et al., (2005), require faculty and staff to collaboratively assess and identify factors contributing to a student's potential for non-persistence, and intervene early to suggest and implement strategies and resources to increase self-efficacy.

**Pedagogy.** The persistence and success plan will need to address classroom approaches as well as faculty-student relations (Jeffreys, 2012; Kirby, 2015). Professional development and dialogue to elicit critical compassionate intellectualism (Munroe, Borden, Lunney, Orr, Toney, & Meader, 2013), is a means for faculty to make sense and understand that decolonized education is congruent with 21st century education. A decolonized and 21st century education privileges inquiry, conceptual exploration, multiperspectival approaches, teacher and student co-learner perspectives, critical literacy and ethical citizenship (Munroe et al., 2013). Decolonized, feminist pedagogy can be implemented in a variety of ways and is already a source of pride for many Department A faculty.

While specific curricula must be taught, from a professional and regulatory standpoint Indigenous perspectives should be centred within curricular concepts (Ottmann, 2103; Pete, Schneider, & O'Reilly, 2013). In other words, these perspectives should not simply be added; they must be embedded and lived. Bishop et al. (2012), recommend relationship-based pedagogy



to enhance student performance. An impressive example of this relationship-based approach comes from the Te Kotahitanga model, a culturally responsive professional development model that views teachers as learners, critically examines power structures, and encourages faculty, through learning communities, to be agents of change (Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Bishop et al., 2012). While this approach to improving the success of Indigenous students occurs in secondary schools, further exploration of this model could greatly inform College X. Such an approach to change will take time; yet cultural and social cognition theories recognize that for change to be sustainable, time must be spent encouraging understanding to reduce potential resistance. Change will not be sustainable if imposed or if faculty and staff feel a lack of ownership.

In summary, this proposed solution will require minimal financial resources, other than those already promised, such as the SRS. The most significant cost will be human, as faculty and staff are essential to the creation and success of this plan. For example, faculty and staff workload will change as they implement new support approaches. Some financial resources may be necessary, as faculty and staff identify their own professional development needs in their journey to decolonizing curricular practices. However, professional development funds exist for each College faculty and staff member. This solution, unlike SEM, would be implemented with cultural congruence, strength-based and socially just principles, as well as collaborative relationships at the core; as reflected in the proposed Student Persistence and Success Model (see Chapter One, Figure 2). It is anticipated that data collection, as identified in the plan, would inform monitoring and evaluation, and validate the impact of cultural change on the numbers of students persisting. It would also reveal the student's perspectives on cultural congruence, and degree of institutional belonging.

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

The concepts of student attrition, persistence, retention, and success have been explored throughout this organizational improvement plan using a poststructural feminist lens. This has meant exploring the complex issue of student attrition considering social justice and oppression, as it applies to typical approaches of calculating and analyzing student data. Attrition analysis approaches used by stakeholders in higher education further stigmatize certain student groups and place unnecessary blame on either the student, the institution, or both. This problematization of attrition requires an ethical leadership perspective of the myriad challenges that exist within a proposed change process.

### **Ethics of a Loosely Coupled System**

Several solutions to the problem of practice are presented in this chapter. The chosen solution involves developing a student persistence and success plan within Department A. As previously described, College X is a loosely coupled system of departments and programs, divided by geography and lacking in long-term leadership. The enormous effort required for departments to work cohesively on a student persistence and success plan is unrealistic at this time; in addition, it is not within the interest of most faculty and staff. Department A, however, which houses the nursing program, is poised to gamble with its accreditation status if it chooses not to develop and implement a student success plan. The ethical consideration here is that piloting a student success plan in one department means not all students will benefit from designated services and approaches at the same time. Development of a solid monitoring and evaluation plan is a solution to this challenge. Comprehensive evaluation will allow modification of the persistence and success plan as needed. Subsequent recommendations can thus guide

implementation of this plan with the entire student body. It is important to note that support services and systems would still be available for all other students during this pilot.

### **Ethics of Data Collection**

Implementation of a new student records system means data will be collected by a system that allows for collation and analysis of trends. Data will be entered from the source (i.e., course instructors will enter their own marks), limiting the potential for error that comes with the current multistep, paper-based system. Questions with ethical implications are essential at this point. What data should be collected and why? And, how can the organization demonstrate transparency regarding the purpose of data collection to gain the trust of the diverse student body, as it relates to privacy and use of these data. These questions must be addressed.

As previously mentioned, Indigenous students have a history of failing to declare their ethnicity in post-secondary applications (Cote-Meek, 2014; Moffitt, 2016). Student data at College X mirrors this trend. This omission comes from a place of mistrust. Educational institutions of the past were designed by the federal government to eliminate Indigenous culture and language in exchange for what was considered more civilized ways of the white man. Years of residential schooling and forced removal of children from their homes has left generations of people suffering the mental health and psychosocial effects of trauma, as well as of racism and stigma. Thus, Indigenous people have a reason to be skeptical of the intentions of an institution with their personal ancestry data. Furthermore, leaders must be cautious not to demand too much of these students because of their indigeneity, which Greenwood, Leeuw, and Fraser (2008) state borders on exploitation. Pan-indigenizing occurs when non-Indigenous people make generalizations about Indigenous peoples (Greenwood et al., 2008), which is a point of caution for leaders in the face of added data collection.

Current attrition language and processes perpetuate the problematization of students; for example, governance bodies draw limited and false conclusions about attrition using numbers of students admitted to programs and numbers of students graduating. This incomplete picture would be particularly problematic if certain groups, i.e., Indigenous students, were highlighted in this process. At the same time, data about numbers and challenges of Indigenous students is necessary to ensure the organization, its staff, faculty and curricula are providing the necessary supports. Clear articulation of the fact that persistence is not merely the responsibility of the student, but also the organization, is a key aspect of building trust. Data collection should include all academic and institutional factors that impact student success, as discussed in Chapter One. Transparency as to how these data inform program and curricula decision-making is essential.

### **Faculty and Formal Leaders**

In the process of decolonization, it has become readily apparent that College X lacks Indigenous faculty and formal leaders. In fact, Department A, where the pilot implementation is proposed to take place, has no Indigenous faculty. Efforts to recruit faculty are ongoing, but accreditation and university partner standards of hiring faculty with a minimum of a master's degree pose challenges. There are limited human resources in a province with a small and transient nursing workforce, many of whom have a diploma as the highest level of education. Therefore, another challenge is that the work of decolonizing the curriculum, and supporting Indigenous students, is largely fulfilled by non-Indigenous faculty. This does not mean the work cannot be done. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of collaboration with community members, and Elders (Pidgeon, 2008). Efforts to recruit Indigenous faculty and encourage Indigenous students to pursue graduate education is an important consideration within the student persistence and success plan. Culture is a missing educational leadership variable among

institutions that serve Indigenous communities (Blakesley, 2008). Thus, the privilege that comes with being white must also be the subject of ongoing reflection to negate perceptions and realities of oppression among students, and inclinations toward leadership superiority over others.

### **Connective Leadership and Ethics**

The connective leadership approach is well designed to meet many of the aforementioned ethical concerns. A connective leader, using the relational style (Lipman-Blumen, 1996), is not the expert. Instead, this leader uses relational skills to form relationships with respected community members to serve on advisory boards, hold cultural events for students, and seek support for students to increase self-efficacy and persistence. Connective leadership is socially constructed (Liu, 2017), and ethical leadership is an inherently relational process.

Connective leadership is a form of ethical leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2017). A true spirit of collaboration means that student services staff should not be used as a means to the end product, which is the success plan and data extraction. All members of the College team play a role in student success. Connective leadership was chosen for this organizational improvement plan because one person should not, and from an effectiveness and sustainability lens, could not, create and implement a student persistence and success plan. The proposed solution to the problem of practice is not a passive process led by one leader.

Another core attribute of the connective leadership style is assisting others to increase their self-efficacy; also, a key factor in change readiness. The intention is not to bestow skills upon others but to help them garner and recognize the potential within themselves. This will be particularly relevant for faculty as they engage in decolonized pedagogical approaches. Framed by poststructural feminist theory, the need to explore attrition and retention discourse is another

means to identify sources of oppression, and a key aspect of ethical leadership (Liu, 2017). Challenging discourse in this way is an act of advocacy and a characteristic of connective leadership called “ethical political savvy” (Lipman-Blumen & Leavitt, 2009), further aligning this leadership approach with the proposed solution.

### **Summary**

The external call for a university may be the proactive change needed to re-establish a vision for higher education in the province. In the meantime, deferral of accreditation recommendations while other decisions are made about the future direction of the organization, is unacceptable. Change, whether reactive or proactive, should not be implemented without understanding the deeper cultural context of College X. Long-standing policies and procedures, perceptions about the nature of the relationships between faculty and students, and culturally congruent pedagogy built upon the principles of social justice, can be explored through sensemaking. Connective leadership is built upon a collective search for meaning; in this case, interventions that allow faculty, staff and stakeholders to see the multifaceted meaning of student attrition and persistence. In the same way, little is known about how connective leadership can address the absence of culture in common leadership approaches (Blakesley, 2008). However, the focus on empowerment and shared decision-making that frames connective leadership leaves the assumption that this leadership style is poised to fill this gap.

The complexity of student attrition poses ethical leadership challenges. The issue of increasing the number of Indigenous faculty is not easily solved; even best efforts at decolonizing education and reconciliation cannot replace the importance of having services for Indigenous students, developed, delivered and evaluated by Indigenous faculty. In the meantime, a dedicated student persistence and success plan using a relational approach, fostering a sense of

belonging, and trust in an institution to provide culturally congruent education, in addition to quality education, is an important step in the right direction.

### **CHAPTER 3: IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION, AND COMMUNICATION**

Development of a student persistence and success plan addresses an organizational gap and results in a cultural change needed to create a more strength-based and decolonized approach to higher education at College X. This chapter addresses strategies to meet the goal and priorities, as well as approaches to manage and communicate the change. Robust and evidence-based data collection will inform development and ongoing improvement of the student persistence and success plan; hence, a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation approach is proposed to inform the change process.

#### **Goal, Priorities and Strategies of Planned Change**

The goal of this organizational change, as identified in Chapter One, is to develop a student persistence and success plan for Department A. For the purposes of this OIP, student persistence and success is defined as the ability of a student to continue in his/her course or program of study until graduation, despite obstacles and challenges, and with a sense of cultural congruence. An essential component of a persistence and success plan is the provision and/or connection of students with the necessary support services and resources to overcome obstacles and challenges. Cultural change, a larger goal of this OIP, involves challenging discourse as it relates to student attrition, fostering a more strength-based and collaborative approach to education, and creating a culturally congruent experience for college students. These changes are necessary for, and could simultaneously result from, implementation of a student persistence and success plan. It is hoped that this change will have an overall organizational impact; however, the plan will be piloted in Department A.



The goal and priorities of this change are listed in Table 2. The need for a persistence and success plan, as it relates to accreditation for one Department A program, requires urgent and reactive change. An initial step to accomplishing the overall goal is to **form a committee to develop the student persistence and success plan**. As noted, the College's traditional siloed approach has led to a lack of integrated services for students. Therefore, this committee

Table 2

*Goal and Priorities of Change*

POP/Goal: To develop a student persistence and success plan for Department A
<p>Priorities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To establish a student persistence and success committee to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify resources and supports that currently exist within the College which foster persistence and success.</li> <li>• Identify gaps in student support services and resources within the College.</li> <li>• Identify issues that impact student persistence and success within the College.</li> <li>• Establish the goals of the student persistence and success plan.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. To develop a student demographic profile form for all students to complete on admission.</li> <li>3. To review support services and resources used in other institutions of higher education, as well as literature and published research related to student success interventions and programs.</li> <li>5. To establish a student persistence and success learning community within the College.</li> </ol>

will include Student Services staff and those with influence, such as those in formal leadership roles. As the lead writer for accreditation reports, and coordinator of the College's largest program, it is within the writer's locus of control to initiate a meeting and invite others to serve on this committee. Ideally, the meeting would involve the Chair of Department A, the Vice-President of Student Services, the Registrar or Assistant Registrar, a Student Services staff member, and a senior student from Department A, or a recent graduate. The writer recommends

this approach as those with influence, both from human resource and budgetary perspectives, must understand, value, and communicate the need for change to College stakeholders. The economic potential afforded by student success would appeal to these leaders. Furthermore, should financial costs arise in terms of professional development or workload, it is essential to have the support of those who make budgetary and human resource decisions. A Student Services staff member can verify existence of, and challenges with, current and former services. While consultation is possible, and perhaps easier, true collaboration, and thus eventual adoption of the plan, relies on a shared ownership and early involvement of key stakeholders. Following Armenakis et al.'s (1999) change readiness model, shared ownership is needed to ensure the factors related to change readiness, as described in Chapter One (discrepancy, appropriateness, efficacy, principal support, and valence), are addressed. The writer could address issues faced by students, as a significant part of the Program Coordinator role involves student counselling and data collection; hence, there is intimate knowledge of many of the factors that contribute to and impede student persistence.

A second priority action is to **develop a student demographic profile questionnaire** allowing Department A to gather information about students once they enrol in their program of study. This questionnaire would identify factors that knowingly contribute to student attrition, as previously identified in Chapter One, Table 1. Absence of such a profile poses challenges to developing a persistence and success plan, as it is unknown if factors that impact student success, identified in the literature, actually exist for students of College X. A proposed student demographic profile questionnaire, based on an extensive review of factors that contribute to attrition and persistence, is found in Appendix A.

A third priority is to **discuss approaches used within higher education to support student persistence and success**, in order to draft a persistence and success plan for Department A. A summary of initiatives and services that contribute to student persistence was prepared, (see Table 3) through reviewing the literature, analyzing resources from other institutions, and discussing successes and challenges in implementing programs with other academic leaders. This summary highlights services and supports congruent with the concepts of engaged learning, relationship building and integration, previously cited from the work of Jeffreys (2012), and considered critical to student persistence and success. It is important that the committee analyze this information and establish potential support of select approaches, particularly from a financial perspective. Some of these supports are used within Department A programs, and evaluative data exists regarding their success and challenges.

Table 3

*Proposed Support Services and Resources for Student Persistence and Success Plan*

Support Services that Contribute to Student Success	
Student/Academic Supports	Professional/Integration Supports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty advisors (developmental advising)</li> <li>• Early-alert process/systems</li> <li>• Exit interviews (for withdrawals)</li> <li>• Personal counselling (free &amp; accessible)</li> <li>• Writing supports</li> <li>• Tutoring</li> <li>• Study skills assessment and information</li> <li>• Study groups</li> <li>• Skills lab practice time</li> <li>• Peer mentoring</li> <li>• Clear accommodation policies and processes</li> <li>• Early and integrated orientation</li> <li>• Cultural wellness and support</li> <li>• Elder in residence</li> <li>• Childcare options</li> <li>• Scholarship opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty-student social events</li> <li>• Professional groups (i.e., campus student councils, professional student associations, Indigenous student associations)</li> <li>• Student representatives on program committees</li> </ul>

Cultural change is an intended long-term goal. As previously described in Chapter Two, cultural change results from sensemaking and learning. Therefore, the next priority is to **facilitate development of a professional learning community (PLC)**. This community will assist in monitoring the persistence and success plan and influence the learning and professional development of other faculty and staff, as it relates to student persistence and success. If the initial committee were solely responsible for this plan, staff and faculty would likely feel little to no ownership and resent, yet another, top down approach. Moreover, this fails to address all aspects of change readiness (Armenakis et al., 1999, 2015), and thus decreases the likelihood of change adoption and institutionalization. This OIP proposes a greater collaborative perspective, with the PLC collaborating with the leadership committee. Proposed membership for the PLC is found in Table 4. A member of one of the local Indigenous groups is necessary to ensure the community consistently approaches its work using a decolonizing lens.

Table 4

*Proposed Professional Learning Committee Membership*

Proposed Members of the Professional Learning Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department A faculty (minimum 5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1-3 from each fully funded program</li> <li>- Program Coordinator</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Student Services staff (minimum 3) (i.e., counsellor, tutoring services, residence officer, social coordinator) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- At least one should be a registration office/front desk personnel</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Registrar's office staff (minimum 1)</li> <li>• Indigenous community member (i.e., existing program advisory committee member)</li> </ul>

## **Managing the Transition**

### **Stakeholder Reactions**

Reactions and resistance are potentially high in second-order change. Now that specific priorities and strategies have been identified, it is important to address potential reactions to change and outline supports and resources to manage this change. There are both internal and external stakeholders to consider. Internal stakeholders include the faculty and staff responsible for the plan, as well as students. External stakeholders include program advisory members, government departments and funding sources, partner colleges and universities, as well as local Indigenous communities. See Table 5 below for potential stakeholder reactions and proposed plans to address these issues. Resistance often results from power, control and vulnerability (Lucas, 2000); providing further support for connective leadership, which attends to each of these factors. Understanding reactions to change will be possible through ongoing monitoring and evaluation, which will be addressed in the next section of this chapter.

Table 5

*Potential Stakeholder Reactions and Plans to Address Reactions*

<b>POP/Goal: Develop a Student Persistence and Success Plan for Department A</b>	
<b>Potential Stakeholder Reactions &amp; Development/Planning Issues</b>	<b>Plan to Address Potential Stakeholder Reactions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students- privacy concerns</li> <li>• Faculty-time; professional development (PD); working across departments</li> <li>• Student services staff- time, PD; challenges of working across departments</li> <li>• Senior administration- potential future costs of the plan; potential workload concerns from committee members</li> <li>• Academic partners- impact on accreditation</li> <li>• Program advisory committees- image and legitimacy of program</li> <li>• Indigenous advisors/community members- concern for a more strength-based approach and decolonization; concern about purpose of data collection and the potential to negatively portray students/groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication plan with regular updates (internal/external) (applies to all potential reactions); policies and procedures regarding data</li> <li>• Plan time for group and relationship formation; establish rules of engagement to ensure respect and open communication</li> <li>• Keep committee/community size manageable so as to efficiently plan meetings</li> <li>• Seek funding opportunities; explore cost of attrition versus cost of increasing supports and persistence</li> <li>• Set goals and work plan at the outset so workload commitment is transparent</li> <li>• Identify opportunities for transfer/sharing of learning using expertise of community members</li> <li>• Advocate for PD opportunities should additional learning needs arise</li> <li>• Commit to using data to improve services; demonstrate ongoing commitment to annual reporting; develop policies and procedures for data collection and use; seek ongoing advice from Indigenous advisor</li> </ul>

**Supports and Resources**

The most significant resource required in this plan is time—time for faculty and staff to engage in the committee and/or the PLC, implement the plan, and engage in the professional

learning that will inevitably result from this change. The leadership committee must be open to listening to workload concerns and collaboratively identifying solutions. However, as student support is central to the work of higher education and consumes a great deal of faculty and staff time, this proposed collaborative approach could ultimately decrease workload, particularly once the plan is implemented. Some financial support is anticipated; however, much of the data required to monitor and evaluate the plan can be collected through the new student records system. The new records system will require technological support, particularly as data are collected and collated as a part of the monitoring and evaluation plan. Professional learning opportunities for faculty and staff will also require financial support. This investment is necessary to see a sustainable impact on student success, including increased student satisfaction with their higher education experience, ultimately leading to economic gains and a positive reputation for the College.

### **Engagement and Empowerment—Professional Learning Community**

Ongoing engagement and empowerment of faculty, staff and key stakeholders is accomplished through formation of the PLC. As previously identified, Student Services staff are frequently at arms' length from the student's educational trajectory, often limited to, and valued mainly for, their role in registration. The goal is to include staff outside Department A in the PLC. Thus, the initial phase of the PLC formation involves relationship building. This step is important to the readiness phase of the change process (Armenakis et al., 2015). It is likely that concerns, as well as driving and restraining forces of change, will arise once the PLC begins the process of establishing and implementing the plan. Thus, engagement and a reciprocal relationship between the leadership committee and the PLC are essential to timely and ongoing change momentum.

It is essential that the PLC is not viewed as originating from Department A with the addition of student services. While expertise will vary within the PLC, power must be leveled. The connective leadership style is well suited to advocating for necessary resources and dealing with possible issues and challenges in a timely, efficient and relational manner. The need for and potential value of the PLC should be communicated at the outset to engage faculty and staff. Clear communication about the value of this work from the leadership committee, during staff meetings and ongoing communiqué, will allow transparency and convey support.

### **Building and Maintaining Momentum—Short and Long-Term Goals**

While the ultimate goal is to increase student persistence and success for socially just, and economic reasons, other, more tangible rationale must be articulated to appeal to all organizational staff and faculty. Again, this aligns with the valence aspect of the change readiness model (Armenakis et al., 1999, 2015) as individuals will question how the change can benefit them. Short, medium and long-term goals are shown in in Figure 6.



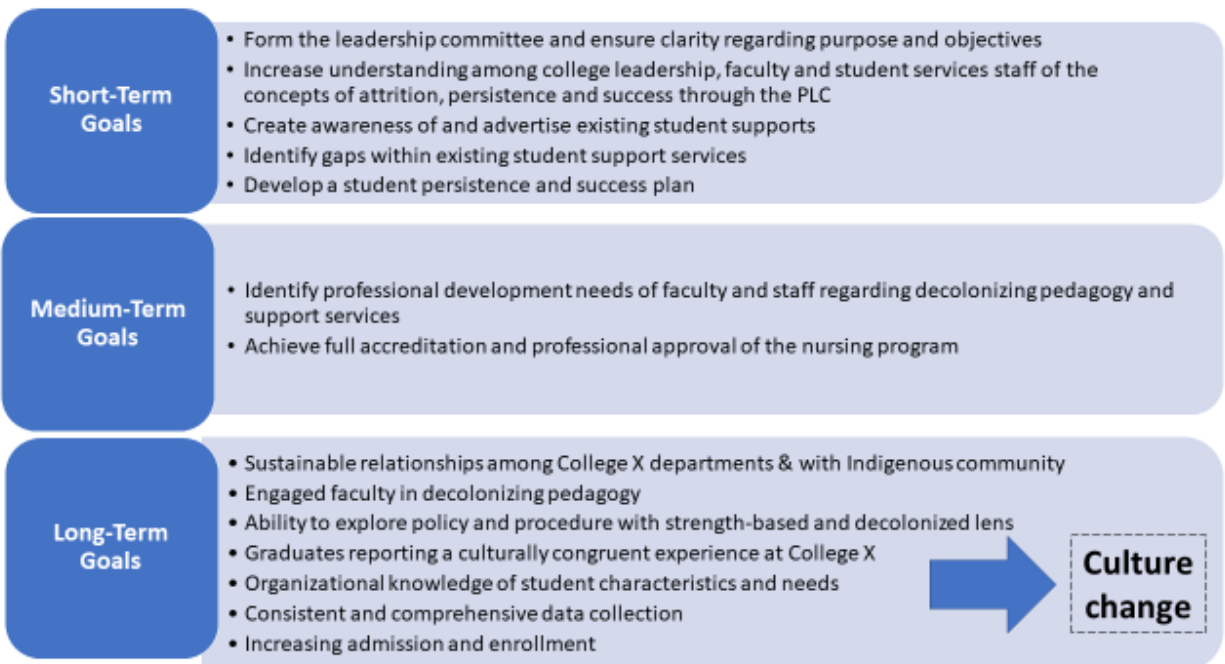


Figure 6. Goals of organizational improvement plan. By K.L. Durnford, 2019.

### Limitations of the Implementation Plan

There are several limitations and challenges posed by this change implementation plan. One of the most obvious issues is the current holding pattern of the College as it awaits a decision about its future as a potential university. Many may question, why change now? Inspiring staff to engage in student persistence for just one department may be a challenge. The leadership committee needs to articulate that change is both reactive and proactive at this point, and how accreditation of one department benefits the entire organization.

Another challenge involves formation of a community of individuals who traditionally do not work closely together. The writer is a leader within Department A, however has no formal leadership within the Student Services Department. Ultimately, however, both Student Services staff and program faculty are advocates of student success (Roberts, 2018) and this will be the

common foundation for relationship building. The newly formed community will need to learn to work together, listen to, and value each other's experiences and ideas.

Another challenge is the fact that most faculty are non-Indigenous yet many Student Services staff are Indigenous. Non-Indigenous faculty and staff need to ensure they are coming from a place of decolonization to maximize student success and cultural congruence—listening to and learning from others is a necessary step. Participation of an Indigenous community member in the leadership team is pivotal to any true measurement of success on this level.

As previously stated, concerns regarding faculty/staff workload are anticipated. These concerns may reflect the workload of the initial committee, the PLC, or actual implementation of the student persistence and success plan. Similar concerns were identified in the literature as it relates to faculty advising as a strategy to support student success (Snyder-Duch, 2018). For Department A faculty, the persistence and success plan could result in research opportunities allowing them to meet professional and accreditation competencies and standards. However, the writer has no formal nor monetary means by which to reward participation, nor to alter workload assignments. This is where the writer has influence as an advocate for change. Empowerment, shared leadership, and relationship building, as key characteristics of connective leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 1996), will be maximized. McGrath, Barman, Stenfors-Hayes, Roxå, Silén, and Bolander Laksov (2016) successfully used clear communication and active engagement of colleagues, in the absence of the leader being in a formal managerial position, to negotiate change and overcome resistance. There are likely similar examples in other institutions. Public recognition is a positive means of acknowledging contributions. College employees and Department A in particular, have a history of volunteering for committees and projects, with little acknowledgment of the true workload from senior management. Hence, the importance of

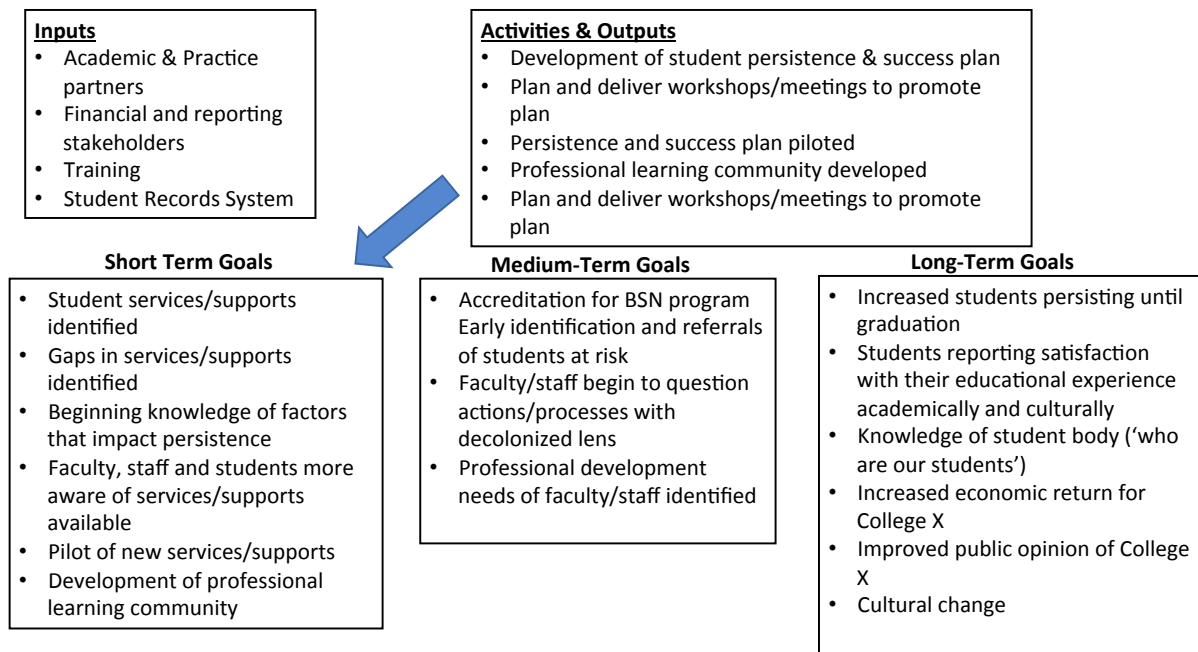
the leadership committee, who will ultimately be responsible for responding to the concerns raised by faculty, staff, as well as other stakeholders, and to finding ways to acknowledge this work and the benefits to the community and organization.

This OIP is a means of establishing relationships and communicating, both internally and externally, the organization's values and beliefs around student attrition, persistence and success. Developing and implementing a persistence and success plan using a professional learning community, comprised of program faculty and Student Services staff, also changes the long-standing siloed approach to program planning, delivery and evaluation within the College. The next step is ensuring the plan is appropriately and efficiently monitored and evaluated. The resultant data will provide insight for which the organization can glean a more comprehensive picture of the multifactorial issue of student attrition.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

#### **Theory and Program Logic**

This OIP recommends a mixed-methods approach to monitoring and evaluation, primarily using the theory-based approach of Markiewicz and Patrick (2016), which allows those involved in evaluation to have a greater understanding of the issues and highlights how the interventions within the plan will lead to intended results. As this plan involves collaboration among departments and individuals who traditionally do not work intimately on the issue of student persistence, this theory-based approach maximizes clarity among faculty and staff responsible for implementing the persistence and success plan. A program logic outlines the shift from implementation to results, as identified in Figure 7.



*Figure 7.* Program logic for Student Persistence and Success Plan. By K.L. Durnford, 2019

This program logic is based upon the assumption that faculty and staff are inherently inclined to support students to persist until graduation. It is also the belief, based on the strength-based approach, that students have the ability to be successful, including those who enter programs with the minimal entrance requirements. These assumptions are based upon the condition that the College is responsible to work with students to provide or seek resources to meet student needs. Furthermore, each of these assumptions is congruent with the current mission of College X—to support the success of students. Another important precondition is that all faculty and staff of the College have a role to play in the persistence and success of students. The connecting factor within this logic model is that by providing appropriate support services and resources students will persist in their chosen program until graduation. Students who persist to graduation have the ability to secure meaningful employment, ultimately and positively impacting the community and its economy.

Markiewicz and Patrick (2016) recommend that existing and potential external factors be identified in the program logic to allow for mitigation of issues as they relate to program implementation and resultant evaluation. As previously identified, there are a number of external factors affecting this OIP. The most significant external factors at this time include uncertainty about the future of the College as a potential university, absence of a board of governors, and changing senior leadership. Other factors include financial considerations and competing priorities, the existence of employment opportunities for graduates, community perceptions about the College as a culturally safe and supportive educational institution, as well as the availability of faculty and staff (in terms of time), to attend meetings and training related to student persistence and the professional learning community. Other than the governmentality and the future college structure, the proposed evaluation plan addresses each of these external factors.

Evaluation questions are organized within five domains (appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability) (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016), to ensure a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan. The domains, proposed questions and tools to monitor and evaluate a student persistence and success plan are identified below in Table 6, as modeled by Markiewicz and Patrick (p.105). For the purposes of this table, the student persistence and success plan are referred to as *the plan*.

Table 6

*Summary of Broad Domains and Questions to Guide Monitoring and Evaluation*

Domain and Definition/Description	Questions for this OIP
<p><b>Appropriateness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assesses sustainability of the plan within the context</li> <li>• Allows for testing of identified assumptions</li> <li>• Assesses the extent the plan meets the priorities and needs of the organization &amp; key stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How appropriate were the support services/resources/approaches for the students of Department A?</li> <li>• How well does the plan meet accreditation competencies and recommendations?</li> <li>• How effective is the plan in meeting the needs of Department A students?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Effectiveness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assesses achievement of objectives</li> <li>• Assesses the quality and value of the plan</li> <li>• Assesses the extent to which the plan was implemented as designed and reasons for modifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent were services and resources available to students?</li> <li>• What factors contributed to, or prevented achievement?</li> <li>• How well did the plan contribute to staff and faculty knowledge of student persistence and success?</li> <li>• To what degree: were the services identified in the plan utilized as intended? was the plan able to contribute to student persistence?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Efficiency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compares outputs to the inputs</li> <li>• Assesses the cost of resources in relation to attainment of results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent were the services and resources in the plan sufficient to address student needs?</li> <li>• To what degree were resources (i.e., time, staff) used to meet the needs of students?</li> <li>• How efficiently was the plan managed?</li> <li>• To what extent were there financial resources to implement the plan?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assesses the changes produced by the plan (short and long term, intended and unintended)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How beneficial was the student persistence and success plan to student's overall success?</li> <li>• Which changes were intended and unintended as a result of the plan?</li> <li>• Which specific services, supports and/or resources contributed to change?</li> <li>• Which specific services, supports and/or resources did not contribute to change?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess the continuation of the benefits attributable to the plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what degree did the program develop capacity within staff and faculty to support student persistence and success?</li> <li>• To what extent can ongoing benefits be attributed to the plan?</li> <li>• To what degree can this plan be utilized in other organizations of higher education?</li> </ul>

### **Proposed Monitoring and Evaluation Plan**

It is important to first distinguish the difference between monitoring and evaluation, as these terms are not mutually exclusive. Monitoring allows the organization to track the plan's implementation, identify potential and actual issues as they arise, as well as early outcomes (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). Evaluation focuses more on making judgments and decisions about the plan and its results—near or after completion of any major activities (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). Monitoring is the every-day work of implementing the plan. Evaluation uses the information and data collected over time, through monitoring, to allow organizations to make decisions about the appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the student persistence and success plan.

This plan will focus on both monitoring and evaluation, outcomes and impact, which correlates with the current approach of monitoring and evaluation, rather than the access and input focus of the past (UNESCO, 2016). A significant portion of formative evaluation will require information from cohorts of students, which for some Department A programs, will take four or more years to collect and collate. It is anticipated that evaluative data at the end of the first year of implementation will be sufficient to warrant discussion about possible larger scale implementation within the College.

The proposed monitoring and evaluation plan, as shown in Appendix B, Table B1, uses a mixed-methods approach of questionnaires, attendance records, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Mixed methods allow for extensive data collection, and has been used in other evaluations of student success processes and interventions (Hlinka, 2017; MacDonald, 2014), including evaluation of Indigenous students' perspectives (Rawana, Sieukaran, Nguyen, & Pitawanakwat, 2015). A program completion questionnaire already exists within Department

A's nursing program. Additional questions are proposed to provide formative evaluation (see Appendix C). Additionally, Jeffreys (2012) developed a number of tools as a part of her Nursing Undergraduate Retention and Success model. Permission to utilize the following tools will be requested for this monitoring and evaluation plan: *Assessing At-Risk Students*; *Measuring Student Self-Efficacy*; *Assessment of Peer Mentoring and Tutoring Services*; *Appraising Teaching Strategies for Diverse Populations*; and, *Professional Integration and Socialization Assessment*. These tools will provide a complement of resources allowing a comprehensive evaluation. Proposed tools to assess use of and satisfaction with services, such as faculty advisors, as well as, faculty and staff pre and post workshop assessment tools, are included in Appendix D.

A significant proportion of monitoring and evaluation identified in this plan rests with Program Coordinators, and is indeed a part of this job description. It is anticipated that through use of connective leadership, creation of the professional learning community, and thus, shared ownership of the plan, an increased desire of others to participate in monitoring and evaluation will result. This initiative and sense of inquiry already exists within most Department A faculty. Inspiring staff in other departments will be the role of the writer. It is important to note that the interventions and resources proposed in this monitoring and evaluation plan are a compilation of suggested tools and approaches found in the literature. To stay true to the collaborative and decolonizing processes, foundational to this change, this plan will need to be modified and approved by the leadership team and the professional learning community prior to implementation, and throughout the monitoring and evaluation process.

In summary, monitoring and evaluation are critical aspects of quality improvement. The plan identified in this chapter is based upon an extensive review of professional literature and



research, other organizational student success plans and evaluative data, and evaluation methodology. The mixed-methods approach increases accountability and transparency, and ensures a comprehensive and collaborative evaluation. Furthermore, this approach to monitoring and evaluation challenges the hegemonic practice of calculating numbers of students admitted and numbers graduating, as the primary means of measuring student success. Evaluation data will inform the organization about the effectiveness of its efforts to support student persistence. This data can highlight additional challenges. The ultimate goal is that this data can lead to identification of sustainable approaches that support students to be successful in their higher education journey.

### **Communication Plan Framework**

Communication is critical to student persistence and success. It is also an essential skill of connective leadership, the leadership approach used in this change process, where relationships are formed, sustained and nurtured through communication. Communication within College X has been hindered by geography, frequent changes in leadership, and siloed, internal approaches to higher education. The campus in which Department A is located, where the student persistence and success plan will be piloted, is small, with less than 100 staff and under 300 students. Many long-term faculty and staff have established strong intra-departmental working relationships. As previously addressed, a challenge involves bringing together faculty from Department A and staff from the Student Services Department to work collaboratively for student success. To accomplish this goal, communication must be clear, honest, transparent and timely, considering the College's history of inefficient, and less than transparent, communication approaches. Clear objectives must frame the communication plan. Communication objectives are found in Table 7.

Table 7

*Communication Objectives*

<b>Communication Objectives</b>
Use communication to establish trusting, professional working relationships
Use communication tools to establish the need for change, as well as, potential impacts for students, individual staff and faculty
Build awareness of events and activities to understand the concepts of student persistence and success
Actively communicate goals of change to internal and external stakeholders
Ensure communication messages are consistent
Use communication strategies to ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities
Ensure message is clear to allow for change transition
Seek feedback to continue to improve communication throughout the change process
Use communication to celebrate the impact of change

There are key stakeholders, to and from which communication must be transparent, consistent and reciprocal: faculty and staff, students, senior College leadership, university partners, advisory committees and the community as a whole. The community influences higher education choices of future students, and their involvement is particularly important for Indigenous students (Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Pidgeon, 2008). Hierarchy is not intended in this stakeholder list; however, communication with faculty and staff must take initial priority in the change process, as they are engaged in the daily and direct work of student persistence. Communication with students is the next critical step. A model of communication is shown in Figure 8, to illustrate how the change readiness model relates to key individuals and groups, the communication process, and the communication channels to be utilized. Further elaboration of this model occurs in subsequent sections.

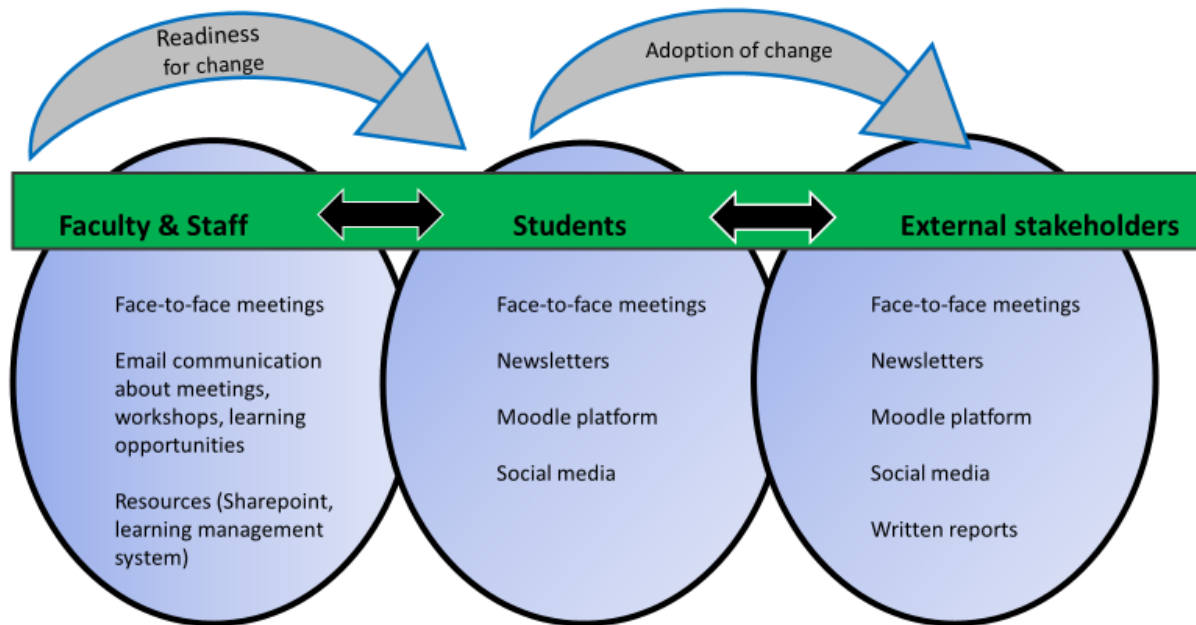


Figure 8. Communication model. By K.L. Durnford, 2019.

### Communication with Faculty and Staff

Similar communication messages are needed for both faculty and staff, with some nuances. Faculty and staff alike need to understand the reason for the change, in terms of short and longer-term goals, as well as understanding the concepts of student persistence and success. Transparent communication regarding the leadership style used for decision-making is important, as absence of such understanding often leads to failed change (Lucas, 2000). Communication messages may vary in that faculty will likely need to spend more time learning about pedagogical approaches that support student persistence. Knowledge, skills and abilities as it relates to pedagogical approaches will benefit some Student Services staff, such as, academic support services; however specific classroom techniques and policies related to assignments, for example, may have less meaning to others, such as front-line registration staff. The

communication message to these staff would largely concentrate on the importance of relationship building from the moment of registration and their vital importance to student success. Communication related to customer service may also be more applicable to this group.

The principal message framed within this context is that a more strength-based approach to student support, and creating culture of success, rather than culture of disadvantage, is needed within the organization. In other words, faculty and staff should not view themselves, their role, their students or their organization for its shortcomings—rather they must look for and celebrate its strengths (Smyth, 2012). The key message is the College mission—to support student success. Even in the current time of uncertainty, innovation must continue. A holding pattern while a decision is made about the future of the College is unacceptable, with potential negative consequences on student persistence. The benefit of student persistence to the College in terms of economics, legitimacy, and community development, is another important message in this plan. However, realistic communication is critical, as overemphasizing the positive or the negative are reasons communication plans often fail (Cawsey et al., 2016). Open lines of communication ensure ongoing monitoring and subsequent improvement of the communication plan, as messages are sent and received throughout the change process.

Communication channels will primarily involve face-to-face meetings allowing faculty and staff to discuss reasons for the change and validate the importance of working as a whole to support students, rather than in silos. The small nature of College X lends itself well to these meetings. Direct, or persuasive, communication, active participation, and ensuring the views of others are heard, are important to securing readiness for change (Aremenakis & Harris, 2002). Face-to-face communication with students is key to timely monitoring and evaluation. All information is based on the theoretical understanding of communication as a two-way,

participatory and interactive process (van Ruler, 2018). This view is congruent with the cultural change approach used in this OIP as participatory communication allows for learning and co-creating of meaning. Face-to-face dialogue is considered the best communication medium for its intimacy and opportunity for transparency and learning (Men, 2014). Face-to-face meetings will also take place with external stakeholders, albeit less frequently than faculty, staff and students. Many of these meetings already take place through processes such as advisory committees.

Connective leadership will inform this phase of the communication process. Connective leadership values authenticity (Lipman-Blumen, 1996), meaning that the reason for change is not about the individual, but rather the needs of the organization as a whole. This is best communicated in face-to-face meetings, where the feelings of others, as it relates to the difficulties and emotions of student attrition and other issues, can be shared and heard. A potential point of contention may be why a plan is being developed and implemented to support only Department A students. The immediacy of this reactive change, as it relates to accreditation, as well as the proactive nature of the change as it relates to sustainability of the College as a credible organization of student success, must be clearly communicated. Absence of a hidden agenda, should be clearly articulated through open and clear dialogue.

It is anticipated that faculty and staff will have questions about the meaning of this plan as it relates to their roles and responsibilities and how it might impact their workload. Every opportunity must be made to keep this dialogue open and honest; a task well suited to the connective leader. As this is a potential source of resistance, efforts are necessary to ensure continued readiness, and thus, adoption and institutionalization of change (Armenakis & Harris, 2001). The College's SharePoint and Moodle learning management system sites can be used as a repository for resources and to share announcements and ideas between meetings. Literature

related to student attrition, persistence and success can be added to this repository for faculty and staff, based upon identified needs.

### **Communication with Students**

Student involvement has been, and remains, a key component of this OIP, embodying the strength-based and relationship premise of this approach to change. The creation of social and educational communities where students are integrated into the learning process is key to student success (Healy, Flint, & Harrington, 2014; Jeffreys, 2015). Thus, reciprocal communication among the PLC, leadership committee, and student community is essential. Chief messages to students should reflect that the College is seeking to discern reasons for student attrition, and are committed to working together as faculty, staff and senior leadership, and students, to mitigate these factors. The ultimate intention is supporting student persistence, and ultimately, graduation.

Needs of students as it relates to this change will vary. Some students will wish to be actively involved in learning and feedback as the process unfolds. Department A actively involves students in several program committees, with usually two to three students applying for these roles, as they arise. Some students will want to know the potential impact of change on them, and others will have no desire for involvement, other than assurance that services will be available when, and if, they need them.

Social media is an efficient communication channel for students (Crescenzo, 2011). A social media group can be created for student persistence where messages are posted about available services and resources, and tips for success at more challenging times in the semester. Students may also pose questions. A member of the PLC, or Student Services, could take responsibility for monitoring this site and student members of the PLC could inform the process.

Newsletters can be posted around the campus and students can be actively involved in sharing ideas and stories through this channel. A question and suggestion box could be placed in the general student area and the PLC could be responsible for monitoring this box and answering questions. The key objective is ensuring student voices are collectively encouraged, and used, to inform the adoption phase of change. Communicating how their questions and feedback influences the change is also important to continued involvement.

### **Communication with Stakeholders**

It may appear in Figure 8 that communication with stakeholders comes later in the change process. This is not entirely accurate, but readiness and early adoption of change must first come from within the organization (faculty, staff, and students). The two-way arrows in Figure 8 represent ongoing feedback from stakeholders throughout the process. Stakeholders, such as university partners and program advisory committees, are essential to the communication plan. University partners can be informed about the change through existing face-to-face and virtual meeting platforms, allowing the opportunity for questions and suggestions, as the plan develops and unfolds. Program advisory committee members will be apprised through active involvement in the PLC as well as through the sharing of ideas and reports at bi-annual meetings. Historically, advisory members share these minutes with their administration, thus widening the communication network.

Communication with community groups, particularly Indigenous elders and other advisors, will take more time. Communication with these stakeholders must be bi-directional. This plan also recommends an Indigenous advisor be included in the PLC, thus ensuring that a decolonized approach throughout all phases of this work.

### **Communication Challenges**

One of the greatest challenges will involve ensuring clear and consistent communication during this time of significant change for the College. Numerous and frequent messages in the next few years, as it relates to the movement of the College to a university, are anticipated. Multiple changes may increase resistance and frustration, and communication overload, both internally and externally. Thus, communication about student persistence and success should highlight the College's strength-based and innovative approach and reflect an unwavering commitment to the College mission. Communication must also be realistic and reflect the challenges faced by students and the College in supporting student persistence. Realism and honesty is key to ensuring trust in the change process. The College website is sorely lacking in visual and navigational appeal; thus, communication is also needed among the leadership committee, the PLC, and the Communications Department to create space, information and visuals that celebrate and raise awareness of the College's support services. Collaboration with the College communication department will be key in creation of the brand, or message to be conveyed to all internal and external stakeholders.

### **Conclusion**

The problem of practice addressed by this organizational improvement plan is the need for a coordinated organizational response to student attrition. Rather than succumbing to reactive responses and developing a mitigation plan, this OIP challenges hegemony and advocates for a strength-based approach, through development of a student persistence and success plan. The proposed solution affirms the organization's commitment to its mission through maximization of supports and services. Connective leadership, with its focus on relationships, offers a



collaborative approach to this problem. This collaborative approach involves program faculty, as well as, Student Services staff to provide support for students throughout their educational journey. Through use of the specific relational and instrumental styles of connective leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 1996), relationships are fostered, leadership is shared and emancipatory, and student persistence and success can be maximized. The underlying assumption of communication is that through listening, learning, collaboration, and relationship building, students have a higher likelihood of persistence and success. Using a poststructural feminist perspective as the philosophical framework for the persistence and success model, it becomes apparent that language is powerful. Using the language of student persistence, rather than drop-out, focusing and reporting on persistence rather than solely on attrition, are means for leaders to challenge hegemonic and deficit-based approaches to student success.

Student, academic, professional and environmental factors must inform approaches to student persistence. Calculating attrition using formulas required by accreditation boards and professional approval bodies often pathologizes attrition and places blame on the organization for a seemingly apparent lack of student success. Mitigating attrition, as proposed by some accreditation bodies, leaves the assumption that the organization can do more. A more holistic and relational approach as proposed here, challenges educational leaders to envision a more strength-based, yet realistic, picture of this complex issue. Focusing on student persistence and seeking to understand factors contributing to student persistence, are strength-based approaches to student success.

Indigenous students have been a key focus of this plan and appropriately so, considering the responsibility of institutions of higher education to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) (2015) *Calls to Action*. These action items require institutions to

understand, and inform others about, the history of colonialization, the intergenerational impact of residential schools, and the resultant social, economic and health effects that directly impact a student's ability to persist until graduation. This student persistence and success plan is not, however, solely about responding to the TRC. Access to education and the imperative to provide adequate student supports is a social-justice issue to which all educational leaders and institutions should respond. This plan seeks to incorporate cultural congruence as an essential aspect of the student persistence and success plan, meaning that students entering the organization should not have to change who they are and adapt to the organization's needs, picking up their culture again when they graduate. This is not student success, but organizational failure. Learning from and collaborating with Indigenous elders, advisors and students to take a decolonized approach to all aspects of education is a core component of this change.

The proposed monitoring and evaluation plan will provide robust data and potential research opportunities for expanding knowledge and leadership in higher education. Furthermore, data resulting from this plan will provide a greater understanding of persistence rates and factors that support student persistence. Additional research on the impact of the persistence and success model on all student populations is needed. There is also an absence of research on the impact of connective leadership, particularly for its relational and shared leadership approaches and potential student persistence outcomes. Future considerations for leadership also include: understanding the impact of student success on the economy of smaller communities where graduates tend to seek employment; perceptions of the greater community, as it relates to legitimacy of the College and student success; the need for advocacy and political activism to ensure the secondary educational system is equitable for all students and prepares them for higher learning; and, the need for leaders to advocate to accreditation and approval

bodies for a more holistic approach to reporting student attrition and persistence data. Student persistence and success will inevitably be relevant for many generations. The College, its faculty, staff, and students are essential components of this community and the future of this province.

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**Appendix A**  
Student Demographic Profile Form

Welcome to the Department A! We are delighted you have chosen College X on your journey to a career in healthcare. Faculty and staff of College X want to support your success. One way to do this is to better understand you as a person, celebrate your strengths and identify areas where you might require additional supports and resources.

The information you provide will only be shared with your faculty advisor and program coordinator. Information will be entered by the Program Coordinator in a data file to track your success throughout the program. This data file will be password protected and managed only by the program coordinator.

You will not be penalized for not completing this form. You can complete part or all of it. The information you share helps us support your needs and interests in the program.

If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to speak with (name), the Program Coordinator via email (-----) or phone (-----) or in person (office -----).

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Gender with which you identify:**

**Ethnic origin/cultural group to which you identify:**

- Dene
- Métis
- Cree
- Inuvialuit
- Gwitch'in
- Inuit
- Filipino
- French
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary language spoken:**

- English
- French
- Dene
- Cree
- Inuktitut
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Previous education:**

- High school
- Some university/college
- Post-secondary college/university certificate/diploma/degree



**If you have children, how many children live with you?**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

**If yes to the above, do you have childcare while you attend school?**

- Yes
- No

**What are your immediate supports while you attend school? (Circle all that apply)**

- Children
- Spouse/partner
- Family
- Siblings
- Friends

**What is your housing situation? Circle all that apply.**

- College housing
- Living with parents/family
- Living with spouse/partner
- Living with friends
- Renting
- Own my own home
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Did your parents/grandparents/guardians receive a post-secondary education?**

- Yes
- No
- Some

**Are you receiving student financial assistance to attend school?**

- Yes
- No

**If no to the question above, are you funding your education yourself?**

- Yes
- No

**Will you be working while you attend school?**

- Yes
- No

**If you answered yes above, how many hours per week do you expect to work?**

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21 or more

**Do you have a documented need for accommodation due to a medical condition or learning disability?**

- Yes
  - No
  - If yes, what documented accommodation do you require? \_\_\_\_\_
- 

**Please answer the following questions by circling the answer that most applies to you:**

- a. How confident do you feel in your ability to be successful in your program of study?

Not confident                      Somewhat confident                      Very confident

- b. How confident do you feel in your ability to manage the workload in your program of study?

Not confident                      Somewhat confident                      Very confident

- c. How would you rate your study skills?

Poor                      Fair                      Good                      Excellent

- d. How would you rate your time management skills?

Poor                      Fair                      Good                      Excellent

- e. How likely are you to engage in social events within the program (i.e., faculty/student lunches, student council socials)?

Not likely                      Somewhat likely                      Very likely

**Please circle any of the services that you would like more information about:**

Peer support

Tutoring

Writing supports

Study skills

Study groups

Library/online library skills

Personal counselling

Student wellness

Academic counselling (i.e., which courses to take)