Crafting a Culture for Student Success

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"The annual National Symposium on Student Retention, CSRDE's annual signature event, jump-started new ways of thinking about student success for our group. Extraordinary keynote addresses coupled with in-depth conference sessions gave us new ideas that we brought back to our college and helped us make real changes to our practices to improve student outcomes."

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Abstract

Research, strategy, and multi-level leadership across an institution are necessary to make meaningful advances in student success. The adage "culture eats strategy for breakfast" underscores that brilliant plans fail without changing hearts, minds, and processes. Butler County Community College engaged faculty and staff in a process that increased graduation rates by 15 percentage points. This presentation will situate transformational student success initiatives in three bodies of research—organizational culture, organizational change, and improvement science—in a case study showing real results. Actions taken by academic and student affairs guided by a theoretical approach were key. Participants will leave with concrete strategies to bring to their home institutions.

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Introduction

Engaged in transformational effort to improve student success, Butler County Community College's (BC3) graduation rates doubled in a six-year period. This paper will address their use of multiple bodies of research in addition to traditional student success research. The combination of supporting broad and pervasive change in culture, organization, and business practices was the key to BC3's progress.

Sub-optimal student success (referring to both retention and graduation rates) persists despite rafts of research, theory, organizations, and even technological solutions designed to cure the problem. In many cases, the purveyors of these cures can produce solid evidence that their solutions have worked at some or even many institutions. Having a sound plan to improve student success is necessary but insufficient. Successful implementation of such plans requires more than step by step instructions. This paper provides an overview of three bodies of research key to changing the work and outcomes of an organization. The first, organizational culture, describes the set of assumptions, values, and perspectives largely shared among individuals across an organization. The culture is the soil—fertile or hostile—which must be worked with to initiate change. The second body of research, organizational change, takes the 30,000-foot view, and can assist in re-orienting the culture and directions of an organization. In the case study presented, Kotter's (2011; 2018) eight-step process for leading change is used as the organizing principle. Finding this approach instrumental but insufficient, a third body of research was employed to mobilize small scale change. Where organizational change in this conceptualization is the 30,000-foot approach, small scale change is the necessary boots on the ground—modifying daily business practices in service of larger organizational goals.

In order to contextualize the three bodies of research, each one is presented alongside the narrative and data from BC3's journey toward increasing student success.

Literature & Case Study

The purpose of this paper is to present the use of multiple bodies of research used by BC3 to change its culture, organizational goals, and business practices to improve student success. Rather than artificially separating the literature from the actions of the case study, they are woven together for the reader's convenience. This section will proceed in the order of the macro-view of organizational culture, to working with broad transformation efforts in organizational change, and concluding with the boots on the ground efforts in mobilizing small scale change.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is no less a powerful force simply because the concept feels amorphous. The authors consider it be the soil in which seeds of change can be planted. Leaders have the role of working with the soil they encounter, whether fertile or hostile. Schein (1985) describes culture more acutely, as "a pattern of basic assumptions… that have worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel…" (p. 9). Schein's definition underscores the notion that culture reproduces itself through these processes, by definition resisting change. Cultural resistance to change can manifest in statements that "while appearing helpful, can deter attempts to get past legacy obstacles. These are statements

like, 'It's just not done that way,' or 'We tried that before—it didn't work'" (Kotter, 2018, p. 24). Working with culture is daunting, but ignoring culture can be the death knell of organizational change efforts (VanWaggoner, 2018).

Learning organization expert Peter Senge considers the unwritten rules that shape how people act and perceive reality to be deeper systems than the written rules. This is the culture. But no matter how deeply ingrained, Senge insists that

> culture is shaped by all of us through our everyday ways of thinking and acting. Therefore, when you realy start to understand the true nature of social systems, you realize that the first corollary is that we have created the system, and therefore only we can change the system. While there are different roles played in this process by people in different formal positions, the stronger imperative is to actualize leadership at all levels. Only when people start to perceive themselves as having this sort of efficacy do they develop a sense of responsibility to use their vision and talents to help the system evolve. (Eisler, 2015, p. 10)

Culture is a powerful force, but attentive leadership can work with culture to transform organizations to meet new needs. VanWaggoner (2018) describes six attributes of culture, each on an axis of functional to dysfunctional, that determine the culture's relative health. Two are salient in this essay: leadership and commitment to change. Functional leadership is described as humble and driven. A leader's "humility, modesty, and vulnerability are closely related characteristics that create an environment of openness, candor, transparency, and a belief that everyone has value" (VanWaggoner, 2018, p. 14). Vulnerability does not mean weak; the leader both inspires others to a vision of excellence and demonstrates "unwavering resolve" (p. 14). The leader owns their mistakes and shares credit for victories. Functional commitment to change is both pervasive and varied. This commitment is shared by a critical mass of people across the organization. Further, while committed to the same larger goals, different aspects of the organization are free to approach the goals in different ways.

BC3, fortunately, had relatively fertile soil (or functional culture), for needed organizational change. As a small college with approximately 3500 credit students and 20,000 workforce and lifelong learning students (who take non-credit programs that range from single sessions to a few months), BC3 enjoyed many of the perks associated with stable public funding and limited competition for students. Of course, that changed. All the disruptions in higher education came to bear. The 2008 financial crash caused significant declines in state appropriations. As local high school populations began to shrink, other institutions—public, private, for-profit, non-profit, online and on ground—began to recruit the students who once "belonged" to BC3.

When change efforts began in 2012 at BC3, no formal metrics for cultural assessment were used. There were a number of positive variables that became evident along the way. The College's president demonstrated openness to new ideas and appreciation for the expertise that others brought. The Cabinet was quick to see that looming disruption would require new behaviors. Although many faculty and staff could have been quoted saying "it's just not done that way," there was fundamental employee satisfaction across all organizational sectors of the College.

In 2014, 48.6% of BC3 employees (faculty, staff, and administrators) completed the Ruffalo Noel-Levitz Employee Satisfaction Survey. Overall, on 29 of 30 items, BC3 scored significantly higher than that comparison group at the $p<.001$ level. One item asked employees to rate their satisfaction on the statement "This institution involves its employees in planning for the future."

Scoring 3.63 on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not satisfied at all and 5 = very satisfied), BC3 was noticeably higher than the comparison group at 3.09. Also significant at the $p<.001$ level, BC3 scored 4.29 (compared to 3.88) on the item "Rate your overall satisfaction with your employment here so far" (College Employee Satisfaction Survey, n.d.).

Additionally, BC3 had a track record of executing its strategic plans. The plan in effect in 2012, and the one prior included action steps under each objective to be completed at various points throughout the multi-year plan. These steps were woven into performance plans of staff and administrators. The prior plans were iterations of earlier ones, however, and existed within the current culture. With most employees satisfied with their involvement in planning and their overall experience combined with a tradition of successful strategic plan implementation, the soil was not perfect, but it was quite fertile.

Organizational Change

BC3's path to advance student success can be understood using Kotter's (2011; 2018) research and his eight steps to transforming an organization. Kotter argues that change is not an event, but rather a process. Because it takes place within a culture that likely has deep roots, directives alone rarely result in substantive change. Strategy, employee engagement, and sustained effort over time are necessary. Kotter modified his original eight steps to transforming (2011) in 2018 and reframed them as eight steps to accelerate change in your organization. Although the newer version was not known to BC3 during this process, the descriptions of both original and updated steps reflect the actions taken. One notable change in the newer version is the overt recognition that the steps may be running "concurrently and continuously" (Kotter, 2018). Therefore, one need not follow a lock step sequence.

In this list of the eight steps, the original version will be listed first, and the new version second, following a forward slash: 1. establishing a sense of urgency/create a sense of urgency; 2. forming a powerful guiding coalition/build a guiding coalition; 3. creating a vision/form a strategic vision and initiatives; 4. communicating the vision/enlist a volunteer army; 5. empowering others to act on the vision/enable action by removing barriers; 6. planning for and creating short-term wins/generate short-term wins; 7. consolidating improvement and producing still more change/sustain acceleration; and 8. institutionalizing new approaches/institute change (Kotter, 2011, 2018). This section will describe each of the eight steps and how BC3 implemented them.

Step 1. Establishing a Sense of Urgency/Create a Sense of Urgency

Change is hard. It pushes people out of their comfort zones and disrupts. Simon Sinek's bestseller Start with Why (2009) describes the importance of sharing the purpose—the why—when asking people to take action. Further, a logical reason is insufficient, as connecting to emotions is far more effective in inspiring action. In his book, those actions might be purchasing a product, buying into a social movement, or changing business practices. Kotter (2011, 2018) concurs with the importance of emotions, and adds urgency to the mix. "Building urgency is all about concentrating on a window of opportunity that is open today but may close tomorrow. [This] … brings people together, aligning them around a commonality, and clarifying where energy should be directed" (Kotter, 2018, p. 10).

In January 2013, at a BC3 president's cabinet meeting, the relatively new vice president for student affairs presented. The College's own data demonstrated that three-year student graduation rates were low; the 2009 cohort's rate was 14% (approximately 30% more transferred prior to graduation). The group in the room cared about educating students and their success. It was agreed that this rate was far too low. Concurrently, the local high school population was shrinking, indicating an approaching threat to enrollment. The vice president underscored that if fewer new students were likely to enroll, the College needed to invest in student retention in order to maintain enrollment and revenue. A deliberate effort to connect to both head (boosting retention will stave off a revenue threat) and heart (we all got into education to help students) was woven together with the urgency of declining local populations. Certainly, this team had the most positional power in the organization, but alone it was not enough. Kotter estimates that the "urgency rate" is adequate for change when "about 75% of a company's management is honestly convinced that business as usual is totally unacceptable" (2011, p. 7).

Step 2. Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition/Build a Guiding Coalition

Such a coalition has multiple benefits including identifying the right people to create a vision and beginning to spread the sense of urgency to more organizational stakeholders. Kotter contends that

> the Guiding Coalition is, in many ways, the nerve center of the 8-Step Process. It … must consist of members from multiple layers of the hierarchy, represent many functions, receive information about the organization at all levels and ranks, and synthesize that information into new ways of working. (2018, p. 13)

The chairperson or leader of this group "needs to get these people together, help them develop a shared assessment of their company's problems and opportunities, and create a minimum level of trust and communication" (2011, p. 8). What can make teams so powerful is that the intelligence of the group is greater than that of any individual. In a safe environment with committed people, the flow of ideas bouncing between members can become more than what any individual might create (Senge, 1990; 1999).

In the spring of 2013, BC3 formed a retention committee with twenty members. They included three of the college's four vice presidents, academic deans, faculty, student affairs personnel, and institutional researchers. Early on the team took on homework: they split into pairs, each pair committing to read a different article regarding improving student success. Upon reconvening, each team presented their article to the group and a facilitator began taking notes on a large white board of issues and ideas that seemed relevant to BC3. Institutional research provided local data on student retention which the group thoroughly discussed. They implemented a study to survey students who had dropped out in good standing to learn their reasons for departure. After the full committee analyzed this data, four members of the group were selected to write a report. Entitled Student Success @ BC3: Problems & Possibilities, this twenty-page document reviewed relevant literature, used local data to identify areas of concern, and concluded with a range of promising strategies from national research (Dunlap et al., 2014).

Step 3. Creating a Vision/Form a Strategic Vision and Initiatives

Kotter lists two key aspects to this step, "creating a vision to help direct the change effort" and "developing strategies for achieving that vision" (2011, p. 2). The vision and strategies need to be clear, comprehensible, and direct action (2018).

Kotter's model presumes that the guiding coalition will create the vision and strategies, but BC3 veered somewhat in this step. The retention committee authored the report which identified numerous potential strategies, but its work ended there. At that point, the vice president for student affairs and the vice president for academic affairs met and edited the possible strategies down to seven which in their judgement were feasible given the institutions' resources, culture, and capacities. Believing that seven initiatives might be overwhelming and also to develop buy in, they devised a "Shark Tank" meeting with their two leadership teams. Each of the seven initiatives would be represented by a two people, one from each of the two divisions. Each pair prepared a presentation on the value of their assigned initiative with a strict seven-minute time limit. In a meeting that was both productive and fun, all seven initiatives were pitched to the two leadership teams. Although the intent was to narrow down the seven, in the end, one person said "I do not know why we are making choices. These all have value. We are soon beginning work for our next five-year strategic plan. In a five-year period, we can do all of these things."

Step 4. Communicating the Vision/Enlist a Volunteer Army

In the newer iteration of this model, Kotter refers to this step as "enlisting a volunteer army," in recognition that the goal is to both explain the vision across the organization and win people over so that they see it as valuable and worthwhile (2018, p. 4). Kotter asserts that leaders should "use all existing communication channels to broadcast the vision… turn them in to exciting discussions of the transformation" (2011, p. 11). Leadership is recognized acutely in this step as the ability to win people over to the change. Leadership scholar Jean Lipman-Blumen calls this ability "instrumental achieving styles." She explains that "instrumental styles emphasize using one's personal strengths to attract supporters, creating and working through social networks and alliances, and entrusting various aspects of one's vision to others" (Connective Leadership Institute, n.d.. "Achieving Styles").

Even before the seven initiatives were selected, much work had been done to create a receptive audience. Presentations to multiple bodies happened in two waves. First, as the retention committee was nearing launch, information about the College's low retention and graduation rates was shared at multiple venues, including faculty senate, convocation (an annual faculty and staff event), and student affairs meetings. Second, when the report Student Success @ BC3: Problems and Possibilities was completed, it was emailed to all employees at the College, followed by presentations and discussions with faculty and staff. After the "shark tank" meeting cemented the seven initiatives, the vice president for student affairs began a "road show," presenting the seven initiatives to campus constituencies, including the president's cabinet, faculty senate, trustees, academic divisions, and the student affairs division. The initiatives are: change our messaging to promote the importance of completion, create learning communities, increase the use of academic and career advising, address student financial issues, increase faculty/student interaction outside the classroom, supporting the use of engaging pedagogies, and expand use of student success courses.

Step 5. Empowering Others to Act on the Vision/Enable Action by Removing Barriers

Higher educators know that student engagement, the effort students put forth in the curricular and co-curricular aspects of college, improves student outcomes (Kuh, Kinzie & Schuh, 2010). It should come as no surprise that employee engagement contributes to organizational success. Rather than centering executives in change efforts, step five requires that "employees are emboldened to try new approaches, to develop new ideas, and to provide leadership" (Kotter, 2011, p. 11). For Gallup,

engaged employees are "those who are involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace" (Gallup, n.d.). Such engagement matters because:

> Organizations and teams with higher employee engagement and lower active disengagement perform at higher levels. For example, organizations that are the best in engaging their employees achieve earnings-per-share growth that is more than four times that of their competitors. Compared with business units in the bottom quartile, those in the top quartile of engagement realize substantially better customer engagement, higher productivity, better retention, fewer accidents, and 21% higher profitability. (Harter, 2018)

BC3's seven initiatives were conceived of as destinations, not roadmaps. The distinction being that it gave latitude for creativity and decision-making to faculty and staff. The retention committee and the leadership of student affairs and academic affairs determined the "where to go." It was up to mid-level managers to work with their teams to figure out how to get there. The later section on mobilizing small scale change will explain BC3's efforts in detail.

Step 6. Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins/Generate Short-Term Wins

Forward momentum builds contagious enthusiasm and sustains employee engagement. Key to this can be a visible and touted "win," which is "anything—big or small—that helps you move toward your opportunity. They may take the shape of actions taken, a lesson learned, a process improved, a new behavior demonstrated, etc." (Kotter, 2018, p. 26).

BC3 took this step, but out of Kotter's prescribed sequence. In 2013 the College radically changed its onboarding processes to follow specific learning outcomes aligned with best practices. All were elements that would theoretically contribute to student integration and retention. Previously, different offices provided different programming (placement testing, advising and registration, and a two-hour orientation session the day prior to classes) that were not based on student learning outcomes and were designed independently of each other.

The new model involved multiple stakeholders who wrote learning outcomes, a budget increase for orientation programming, and a campus-wide effort to host hundreds of additional students for a day-long Welcome Day event that replaced the previous orientation session. Some learning outcomes were pragmatic, such as "students will know how to navigate the portal" others higher order such as "Students will recognize the value of being engaged with the curriculum and co-curriculum" (Willoughby, n.d., p. 2).

Data from multiple sources supported the conclusion that the new onboarding efforts were successful. In a survey completed by nearly 50% of faculty, 95% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement: From my perspective, students left the program meetings with a better understanding of faculty expectations (Willoughby, n.d. p. 5). Student self-reported data indicated that they both enjoyed the experience (92.5% agreed/strongly agreed that they were more excited about starting at BC3) and achieved key learning outcomes (knowing how to find help at BC3: 99.38%; acknowledging their role in exploring academic and career goals: 93%; acknowledging that connecting with other students promotes success: 98%; response rate: 30%) (Willoughby, n.d. p. 4). A key goal of the new advising and registration processes was to shift the enrollment culture to empower students to use online tools in place of the reliance on paper forms. The results were clear. Online registrations for new students on the Main Campus went from 9% to 45% after the first summer and jumped to 65% after the third year of implementation (Butler County Community College, 2016).

Due to the campus-wide involvement in the new programming, and the dissemination of a report demonstrating its success, this "pre-emptive" win was able to serve the function of step five despite having occurred before steps two and three!

Step 7. Consolidating Improvement and Producing Still More Change/Sustain Acceleration

This step is about moving from small wins to changing the systems to realize the broader vision. Kotter (2011) argues that the greatest pitfall here is declaring victory too soon and allowing work patterns to revert to prior models. Instead, he argues to press on for new changes in service of the vision, including how employees are hired and developed.

In an example of the steps running concurrently, BC3 took many of these actions while in the earlier stages of the change process. Such actions were aimed at reorienting the culture toward student success. When personnel vacancies occurred, leadership used the opportunity to reframe positions and duties toward the goals of student success. In a college with a dearth of professional development opportunities, new programming was added at the divisional and college-wide level. Programming ranged from transactional topics, such as customer service, to transformative ones such as using findings in neuroscience to promote student learning. See appendix A for a list of selected division and college-wide professional development programs.

Step 8. Institutionalizing New Approaches/Institute Change

Kotter asserts "In the final analysis, change sticks when it becomes 'the way we do things around here …" (2011, p. 15). Changes need to be anchored in the organizational culture or that culture will reassert itself. One method of anchoring is to connect business successes to those changes explicitly and repeatedly. It should be discussed at all levels, from the board to front line employees, and in an array of media including meetings, newsletters, websites, and presentations (Kotter, 2018). A critical mass of people needs to hold the narrative that the changes mattered to the organization's successes. It should be underscored that the activities in prior steps contribute toward the institutionalization of change. Creating urgency, creating a powerful coalition, empowering people to take action toward the organizations, and celebrating early wins all powerfully contribute to the "stickiness" of the change.

In addition to all the activities in prior steps designed to convince the faculty and staff that a reorientation toward student success mattered, BC3 also cemented the change in its 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. The plan fed from the College's Goals which had been rewritten in 2015, adding "Student Success" for the first time. The process for creating the plan involved stakeholders at all levels, and cross-functional teams authored various sections. The new strategic plan was divided into four "pathways," each encompassing two of the new college goals. Signaling its centrality, "Pathway 1: Students" included the two college goals "Student Success: Provide programs and services that enable diverse students to explore, clarify, and achieve educational goals" and "Learning: Foster active and lifelong learning through innovative and effective teaching strategies" (Butler County Community College, 2017, pathway 1 section). Further each pathway is divided into actionable objectives, including timelines, responsible parties, and metrics for success.

Doubling Graduation Rates

The processes and outcomes here are the results of assessment, not research. McGillan (2001) clarifies the differences in the goals of the two processes.

> While research focuses on the creation of new knowledge, testing an experimental hypothesis, or documenting new knowledge, assessment and evaluation focus on program accountability, program management, or decision-making and budgeting. That is, while research is designed to document or measure a phenomenon not formerly recorded … program assessment provides information to your campus about whether you are achieving prescribed goals … or meeting a campus need. (para 3 and 4)

The differences in goals connects to different expectations in rigor. Organizations looking to assess programs and services need answers reliable enough to make decisions at the local level, a different bar than pure research which seeks to create new knowledge with broad applicability. Further, research often seeks to scientifically attribute causality, which is very difficult in assessment.

BC3 cannot attribute causality of its student success to its efforts in a way that would satisfy research criteria. It is noteworthy that as the College engaged in practices demonstrated by national research to be associated with increased success, that student success did indeed increase – dramatically so. This new direction began in 2012 and additional changes and improvements were added each year.

The doubling of BC3's three-year graduation rates over six years headlines the changes in student success. This Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Set rate for first-time, full-time new students moved from 14% in the 2009 cohort to 28% in the 2015 cohort, bumping up one additional point to 29% for the 2016 cohort. Further, the rate of students who transfer prior to graduating consistently hovered around 30% during this entire span, adding to total amount of students who succeeded. Fall to fall retention rates also climbed by 3 points in 2012 and have held steady (U.S. Department of Education, 2007-2019).

Table 1: *BC3 IPEDS graduation rates.*

Entering Fall (Cohort Year)	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**
3-Year Graduation Rate	12%	16%	14%	19%	20%	23%	25%	25%	28%	29%

One contributing factor is increased student satisfaction as measured by the Ruffalo Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI). Administered on a three-year cycle, a surprising statistically significant jump in student satisfaction was recorded during the 2014 survey. Between 2011 and 2014, BC3's scores on each of the SSI's twelve scales (themes consisting of an aggregation of scores on multiple questions in the instrument) increased significantly. On the twelve scales, eight of the increases were statistically significant at the $p<.001$ level, three at the $p<.01$ level, and one at the $p<.05$ level. In 2017, BC3's scale scores all increased numerically, and one achieved significance at the $p<.01$ level and two at the $p<.05$ level (Noel-Levitz 2011, 2014; Ruffalo Noel-Levitz, 2017). See Appendix B for more information.

Mobilizing Small Scale Change

This paper conceptualizes organizational change as the 30,000-foot view and improvement science as boots on the ground. To situate it in the theoretical lens, it fits into Kotter's (2011) fifth step, empowering others to act on the vision. Organizational change on the scale undertaken by colleges and universities can be daunting, and often is not accomplished in one massive change, but rather through the collective of changes across the many functional units within the whole. This might not just mean within each formalized hierarchical office grouping, but rather, each working unit overseeing some change initiative, such as a committee or task force. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) think about organizations as any unit mobilizing to overcome a challenge, which provides a useful lens to think about the management of specific changes. How might a retention team implement a new program, an advising team incorporate a more robust outreach plan, or a group of faculty improve remedial instruction? In each of these examples, some group is empowered to act, and called to implement change to improve the larger organization. As the college seeks to meet larger goals, such as improved retention or completion metrics, it can be the collective impact of smaller changes made within each unit that can improve the whole (McChesney, Covey & Huling, 2012).

Even at this smaller scale though, change is hard, and progress is difficult. Langley et al. (2009) provide some context to this challenge by asserting, "Change is difficult. The current system pulls innovative changes toward more familiar ground like a giant magnet. What begins as a large change can result in only a small adjustment" (p. 93). In this context, each initiative fights that status quo magnet, and to overcome it, specific change management practices can help each unit to successfully implement, iterate and sustain changes toward the desired impact, instead of sputtering out to small effect. Improvement science provides a grounding theory for managing this sort of change in a way that empowers all members of the organization to contribute to the change, is informed by institutional culture and context, and iteratively builds in a way that strengthens, rather than reduces, the impact of the change over time.

Improvement Science

It can be easily understood that improving educational practices does not have the same type of technical solution as fixing a computer might. Educational institutions and the students they serve present myriad complexities and challenges, and methods from improvement science (Langley et al., 2009) and action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005) have emerged as tools that respect and support change within complex systems. Consistent to each of these methods, the processes for managing change requires a component of iteration in the form of Plan, Do, Study, Act cycles that allows groups to learn what components of the change are working best and quickly expand upon them, and to also identify which areas of the change are running counter to expectations. They also build in clear indicators of progress that assist in an ongoing assessment of whether the change is actually resulting in desired improvement. Within organizational or working units, these processes also harness the impact of professional learning communities made up of team members working towards similar goals in different ways, which allows for group learning and development, and great momentum towards the final goal.

Theory to Action

As functional units work to achieve the goals of the institution, it is imperative to be able to develop effective strategies that can work within the local culture and context. Exceptional, nationally recognized strategies that do not fit the institution can be doomed to fail, and thoughtful, locally developed ideas can falter when not given the room to develop and flourish. The application of change management strategies can be a tool to allow institutions to identify potentially effective practices, to implement them in ways that are expected to accomplish the desired local outcomes, and then to iterate those plans in a way that will help them to thrive within the local context. To illustrate this concept, following is a synopsis of an action study undertaken at BC3 that outlines how the iterative process can lead to improved programs, and how designing for change can lead to improved outcomes.

Advising Redesign

In response to institutional goals to improve retention and graduation rates, BC3's main advising office was empowered to identify strategies for change. A review of the office's current practices contrasted many of the "best practices" being outlined in the national literature on advising. Specifically, advisors were predominantly working with drop in advisees, rather than students specifically assigned to them, and much of the advising work was focused on course scheduling activities. An extensive review of literature highlighted the potential for change. Research from the Community College Research Center at Columbia University emphasizes the impact academic advising can have on student persistence and success, specifically calling for an approach that is Strategic, Sustained, Intrusive and Integrated, and Personalized (Karp & Stacey, 2013). At its core, this model focused on a more proactive partnership between advisor and student that included planned connections throughout the course of the term, was infused with career and academic planning strategies, and prioritized students who needed support, not just those who sought it. Simultaneously, the office committed to efforts to identify other organizational barriers to successful implementation, and to address them as the project progressed.

Drawing on this theory, the advising team identified a high priority group of students who entered the institution as "undecided" on a major, and conducted a pilot study to determine both how to successfully implement the potential improvement and whether the change would result in a desired, positive impact on students. Advisors were assigned specific undecided students, were trained on the tenants of SSIP advising, and committed to a more engaged and proactive approach. Consistent with themes from improvement science, the advising team formed a small-scale professional learning community. Throughout the course of the term, the team met every two weeks to focus exclusively on the implementation of the new model, to discuss its successes and failures and to assess its impact. Advisors were individually tasked with creating a Plan, Do, Study, Act outreach effort every two-week period, and the results of this were then the topic of each meeting. As an example, in the first week of the term, advisors all attempted a welcoming outreach to assigned advisees, requesting students "pop in" to say hello. Each advisor took a different approach, projected their expected results, and then recorded their outreach and students response. These results were then discussed at the ensuing meeting, and advisors with high engagement from students detailed their strategies, which led to greater group learning and growth, which fueled the next round of outreach. Over the course of the term, advisors took personal ownership over the engagement of students, monitored their plans and results, and continued to iteratively modify their efforts to increasingly desirable effect. While the advising theory and structure was an essential

component of the change, it became increasingly clear over the course of the study that the improvement science strategies were just as essential. These strategies clearly increased the efficacy of the change, they strengthened the resolve of the group to sustain the change, and importantly, they used an iterative process to ensure that the change led to improved results for students (Novak, 2017).

The question, "how do you know that this change was an improvement" (Langley et al., 2009), became a backdrop for the assessments utilized in the study. Based on the extensive review of literature, the theory of action contended that if advisors could implement improved strategies and the office could work to remove barriers to improved advising, that students would show greater rates of engagement with advisors. If students were more exposed to this high quality, personalized advising infused with career and academic planning, they theory proposed they would be more likely to engage in positive behaviors, such as declaring a major or enrolling early for subsequent terms, and therefore would be more likely to be retained. A quasi comparative study was conducted comparing the pilot year study group with the prior year's same group of undecided students across key metrics. To assess the effectiveness of the model, the groups were compared for rates of engagement with advisors, rates of major change and engagement with career development resources and rate of early registration for the term. To measure impact against the college's broader goals, the groups were compared for retention to the subsequent spring enrollment term.

Results of this study suggest that the change was an improvement. Data reported below was published in the dissertation titled Studying the Effectiveness of a Community College Advising Model for Undecided Students (Novak, 2017). Advisors self-reported increased engagement with students, and quantitative data from the comparison confirmed a 39 percentage point increase in engagement from the prior year, with 55% of students engaging compared to 16% the prior year. Using a causal comparative design (Henning & Roberts, 2016), these results were found to be statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. In addition to increased engagement, students where 13.3% more likely to use career development tools (21.2% utilization rates compared to 7.9%, statistically significant at $p < .05$), and 9 percentage points more likely to declare a major in their first semester (24.3% declaring compared to 15.3%). The analysis of retention provided further evidence of improvement. First-year students engaged in this study were retained into the subsequent Spring term at a rate of 78.6%, while the same cohort from the prior year was retained at a rate of 68.4%. Major change and retention results were not statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level, but provided a level of practical significance that proved worthy of continued study.

In summary, this example highlighted a model that allowed effective change to emerge by building an iterative and responsive process, which was guided by the experience and successes of the advisors tasked with making the change. In turn, this resulted in both an improved advising process, and a great sense of self efficacy from the advisors, who empowered each other to pull momentum for the change away from the magnet of the status quo. The regular and summative assessments aided in identifying that the change had a positive impact and was an improvement from the previous style of advising. In subsequent semesters, advisors have expanded this model to include increasing numbers of students and continue to hone and develop their advising strategies for increased impact.

Conclusion

BC3 utilized knowledge on organizational culture, organizational change and improvement science to leverage student success research in order to promote pervasive and widespread change. As has been noted consistently throughout this paper, change is difficult, and requires robust process and strategy to ensure both effective implementation and successful impact. This paper identifies three distinct and yet integrated theories of organizational change utilized to push an institution closer to its aspirational goals for student success. The takeaway should not be that any of these will function in isolation, but rather that large scale institutional change happens at many levels, and leaders at each of those levels must equip themselves with the tools to successfully manage and motivate improvements. Minding the institutional culture and the broader vision for change is important, but insufficient without effective change in the day to day functions of the institution. Likewise, small scale changes cannot ripple to great magnitude without an effective 30,000 foot strategy and view. This paper provides a case study of how one institution utilized effective change management strategies to double graduation rates, and to position the institution to be capable of maintaining ongoing improvement to support student success.

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Appendix A

Selected List of Professional Development Programming at Butler County Community College

Year	Title
2012	• Orienting New Students: A Learning Perspective
2013	• Learning Transition and Neuroscience: How New Findings Affect Your Work • Retention and Orientation
2014	• Role Theory, Student Success, and You • Learning Outcomes in Financial Aid 2014
2015	• Steps to Success in the Enrollment Process • Disney's Approach to Quality Service & Leadership Excellence • Creating a Web of Support for Students
2016	• Green Zone: Supporting Student Veterans • Student Affairs Role in Student Success
2017	• Diversity on College Campuses March 2017 • Thriving in Change
2018	• Bandwidth Recovery: How Cognitive Resources Are Depleted by Poverty, Racism, and Other "Differentisms" • Understanding Your Clifton Strengths
2019	• Using Your Strengths to AMP Up Your Leadership • Using Nudges for Student Success
2020	• Promising Ideas: National Symposium on Student Retention • Promising Ideas: Designing a Culture of Hospitality & Innovation

Appendix B

BC3 Ruffalo Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey Results 2011, 2014, 2017

Scale	2011	2014	2011 vs. 2014 Mean Difference	2017	2014 vs. 2017 Mean Difference
Instructional Effectiveness	5.44	5.59	+ 0.15 **	5.62	+ 0.02
Registration Effectiveness	5.49	5.59	+ 0.10 *	5.66	+ 0.07
Academic Advising/Counseling	5.16	5.43	+ 0.27 ***	5.50	+ 0.07
Concern for the Individual	5.26	5.53	+ 0.27 ***	5.54	+ 0.01
Safety and Security	5.06	5.35	+ 0.29 ***	5.47	+ 0.12 *
Student Centeredness	5.47	5.66	+ 0.19 ***	5.71	+ 0.05
Campus Climate	5.38	5.62	+ 0.24 ***	5.66	+ 0.04
Admissions & Fin Aid	5.19	5.35	+ 0.16 **	5.46	+ 0.11 *
Academic Services	5.34	5.56	+ 0.22 ***	5.70	+ 0.14 **
Service Excellence	5.33	5.50	+ 0.17 ***	5.57	+ 0.07
Campus Support Services	4.98	5.20	+ 0.22 ***	5.24	+ 0.04
Responsiveness to Diverse Populations	5.48	5.68	+ 0.20 ***	5.79	+ 0.11

* significant at the $p<.05$ level

** significant at the $p<.01$ level

*** significant at the $p<.001$ level

About the Consortium

The Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) is an association of four-year institutions with the common goal of achieving the highest possible levels of student success through collaboratively sharing data, knowledge and innovation. Founded in 1994 by a small group of Institutional Research directors as a data exchange of college retention and graduation data, our first report was published in May of 1995.

The Consortium has broadened its mission to include sharing not only data, but knowledge and innovation. We now have a diverse membership of about 300 colleges and universities and compile three retention reports each year. As well as hosting the annual National Symposium on Student Success and Retention, we host a webinar series and have created a dynamic electronic book called *Building Bridges for Student Success: A Sourcebook for Colleges and Universities*.

CSRDE is coordinated by the Center for Institutional Data Exchange and Analysis (C-IDEA) at the University of Oklahoma. C-IDEA is also the program evaluator for the Oklahoma Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (OK-LSAMP) program, which is funded by the National Science Foundation.

The mission of the University of Oklahoma is to provide the best possible educational experience for our students through excellence in teaching, research and creative activity, and service to the state and society.

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