

Value Driven Mobility: Expanding Mobility Cultures

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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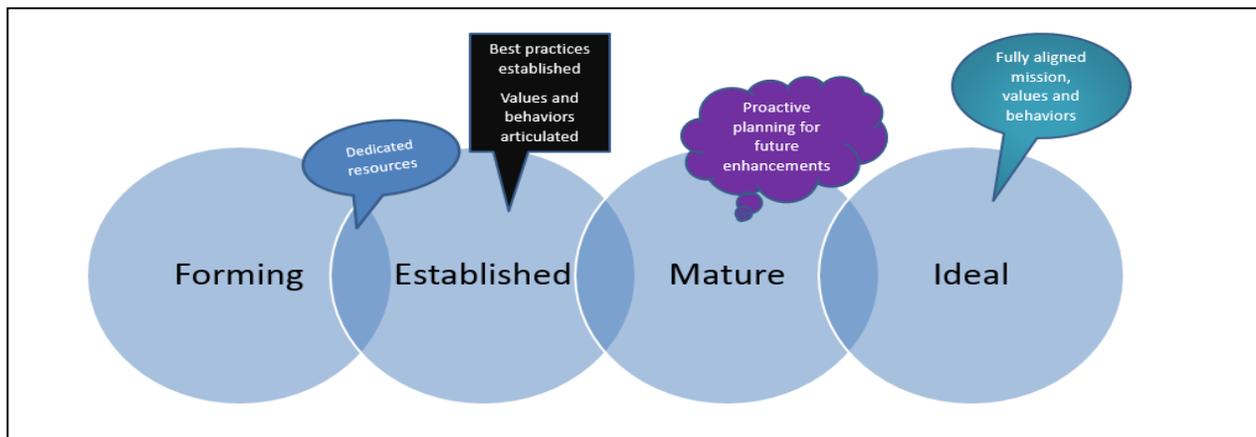
Value Driven Mobility: Expanding the Culture of Mobility

Executive Summary

Introduction

The intent of this project was to continue work with the rich data collected during the recent study, *Creating a Culture of Mobility* conducted in collaboration with the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer [ONCAT] (Penner, Howieson, & Ditullio, 2017). Results of the 2017 study allowed a culture of mobility to be described on a spectrum (Figure 1). Values associated with a culture of mobility were identified, along with best practices/processes leading to a hypothesis that: values and best practices are two variables (Mueller, 2015) acting as drivers, to move culture along a mobility spectrum. Unanticipated findings included gaps on the spectrum, as well as underutilized pathways existing at all institutions. Addressing gaps in the spectrum through application of best practices, and identifying pathway utilization are important components of expanding institutions' organizational culture as it pertains to student mobility.

Figure 1. Culture of Mobility Spectrum



The current project incorporated two goals: the first was to use the 2017 data in order to create culture of mobility spectrum maps illustrating each institution's cultural placement based on the values and behaviours that were communicated during data collection. The second goal was to have each institution select a best practice intervention to apply through the Fall 2017 semester and collect quantitative survey data measuring values and behaviours to estimate whether the intervention had the effect of movement on the mobility spectrum.

Describing a culture of mobility, providing feedback about institutions' cultures as measured by survey data, and sharing best practices mapped through qualitative interviews with key informants across the parameters of the participants, provided impetus for cultural expansion. The opportunity and means to inject new practices that had been shown to represent values as drivers in a culture that supports student mobility was related to positive change for the majority of this project's participants.

Environmental Scan

An environmental scan was performed in order to assist the researchers in understanding why students are transferring between postsecondary institutions as well as how their requests are being accommodated by both the transferring and receiving institutions. The question as to whether participating institutions had created a means to track pathway utilization was also explored during the environmental scan. Key Informants at each institution were asked if they had the ability to track and report the level at which their pathways agreements with partner institutions were utilized. The results of this aspect of the environmental scan indicated that the post-secondary system in Ontario has not yet addressed the creation of a mechanism for tracking underutilized pathways. Only one of the participating institutions had collected and organized pathways utilization data.

There are a variety of reasons as to why a student may choose to engage in credit transfer activities, including pursuing a different field of interest, increasing career opportunities, and employer request for academic upgrading (ONCAT, 2013). Although credit transfer pathways have improved, some students find the process confusing with regards to variations in grading systems, the absence of a data base that could store postsecondary students' academic records, and terminology that is used inconsistently (ONCAT, 2013).

The topic of credit transfer in Ontario continues to be of interest for postsecondary institutions. As a result, new studies are being published annually. Research has shown that postsecondary institutions are striving to improve student mobility options. The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development reports that over 55,000 students are taking advantage of articulation agreements within Ontario institutions every year. In addition, there are over 1,400 credit transfer pathways in Ontario (OCAS, n.d.). These pathways are believed to lead to over 800,000 individual transfer opportunities (Nation Talk, 2017). One study in particular determined that by an Ontario credit transfer student's fourth year of university, they were more likely to graduate when compared to a student who had not selected a credit transfer route (Martinello & Stewart, 2015).

In recent years, research has focused on the cost of credit transfer amongst Ontario institutions as well as students' subsequent academic performance. To put this into perspective, ONCAT is funding an increasing number of studies every year. Between 2016 and 2017, ONCAT granted funding to 40 new projects, focusing on Innovative Curriculum Delivery and Pathways Development among postsecondary institutions in Ontario (ONCAT, n.d.).

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted in order to address the topics of student mobility, value systems, and institutional culture. In addition, a focus was placed on the relationship between value systems within an institution and the development of institutional culture (Mueller, 2014). This includes literature outlining Organizational Culture, Change Management, and Quality Assurance.

Student mobility demands are continually increasing; therefore, it is of the utmost importance that institutions become articulate as well as responsive in terms of managing student mobility (Voorhees & Harvey, 2005). Research has already been performed on the effect that value systems have on institutional quality; however, there has been little focus on the relationship between value systems and a culture of mobility (Penner, 2007). Branson (2008) stated that the quality of one's work is influenced by their organization's ideology, which is ultimately experienced by its culture. This author also argued that the "bedrock" of organizational change is values alignment with regards to its culture. In addition, in order to be successful, the leaders within an organization may choose to adopt practices that allow employees to be creative and innovative. He furthered this statement by likening an organization's culture to a force by which

members are drawn together (Branson, 2008). He also discussed how values-aligned organizations often endeavor to align their employees' values with their organizations' in an effort to understand their influence. Branson (2008) continued by arguing that if values are not aligned, there is a low likelihood that the organization can operate efficiently.

By understanding its culture, an institution is more apt to build sustainable credit transfer programs, as its impact on student mobility will be more apparent (Harrison, 2005). Previous research, such as the recent study on *Measuring the Cost of Credit Transfer in Small Colleges*, have outlined numerous best practices, including the consideration of value system within an institution as a gauge of credit transfer initiatives (Penner & Howieson, 2016). The results of this research project will help build upon the body of knowledge regarding student mobility in Ontario.

Before implementing organizational change, one must consider the types of conditions that would increase favourability amongst its members. According to Weiner (2009), the first of which is change valence, a state that refers to whether the members of an organization value the proposed change. This includes whether they feel it is necessary, beneficial, and/or important.

Kurt Lewin's (1947) work is often considered to be a cornerstone in change theory. Burnes (2004a) reexamined the works of Lewin, arguing that his findings are still valid in modern society. In Lewin's *Field Theory*, he proposed that group behaviour had the power to modify individual behaviour. As a result, he considered individual behaviour to be a function of the "field", otherwise known as the group environment. Therefore, behaviour changes were said to result from forces within the "field". Lewin believed that if one understood these forces, they would be able to identify the forces that require modification in order to bring about change (Burnes, 2004a).

Research about cultural change as it applies to student mobility was published in *Creating a Culture of Mobility: Needs of Small Institutions*, determined that an institution's culture of mobility can be thought of as phases upon a spectrum. Each phase of cultural development is characterized by specific indicators and best practices. It was also determined that values, specifically student success, mobility, access, and faculty engagement are associated with an institution's culture of mobility. This study concluded that based on their findings, institutions could be plotted on the culture of mobility spectrum. Upon review of their results, the participating institutions would then have the ability to make informed choices as to their goals of movement across the spectrum (Penner et al., 2017).

By considering previous research on value systems, institutional culture, and organizational change, one is more adept in determining the most appropriate method to invoke change within their specific institution. In doing so, the institution has the opportunity to consider how best to prepare their staff for new policies and procedure to increase student mobility, based upon their best practices.

Methodology

The goals of this project were:

- To extrapolate and apply a specific, agreed upon best practice where the institutions' cultures of mobility are at a different point on the spectrum and measure the effect of this application.
- To create a matrix values mapped to the cultural spectrum, to guide future cultural development.
- To identify the culture of mobility gaps that exist at various places on the culture of mobility spectrum within the ten participating institutions.
- To inventory underutilized pathways and identify approaches to improve utilization.

To achieve these goals, ten (10) small institutions participated to determine the culture of mobility within their institution.

The research questions to fulfill the goals of this project are: ***How does an institution move their culture of mobility along the full spectrum?***

1. Where are the gaps in mobility, based upon the existing cultures in these ten institutions?
2. What existing best practices could fill the gaps, and how do we adapt and apply within our institutions?
3. How can underused pathways be better utilized?

Findings

Using pretest and posttest survey data to map participating institutions on a spectrum that describes the culture of mobility, this study addressed the research questions inquiring about the gaps in existing cultures of mobility for each institution and whether best practices interventions could fill cultural gaps. Considering a modest participant pool (eight small institutions) and data set (n=99 for pretest and n=72 for posttest), the results are encouraging. Seventy-five percent of the participating institutions showed forward movement on the spectrum of cultural mobility for the "Practices Indicating Culture" variable. In addition, 25% showed forward movement for the "Behaviours indicating Values" variable. Table 1 is a summary of institutions' cultural shifts on the spectrum before and after the intervention.

Table 1. Movement on the Culture of Mobility before and after best practice interventions

Institution Identification Number	Best Practice Categories Implemented	Results	
		Values	Practices
1	New Procedural Behaviours	<i>Waitlist*</i> moved backward from Mature phase to Established phase	<i>Information to Help Students*</i> moved forward from Transitioning to Established into Established phase.
	Employee Engagement	<i>Employee Engagement*</i> and <i>SEM*</i> moved backwards from Transitioning to Mature into Established phase	<i>New Behaviours*</i> moved backwards from Established phase into Transitioning to Established
	Providing Information to Help Student Decisions		

Institution Identification Number	Best Practice Categories Implemented	Results	
		Values	Practices
2	New Procedural Behaviours	No movement on the spectrum	<i>Student Mobility Terms Used*</i> moved forward from Forming phase into Established phase. <i>Student Mobility Terms Understood*</i> moved forward from Established phase to Mature phase
	Employee Engagement		
3	New Procedural Behaviours	<i>Return on Investment*</i> moved backward from Mature phase into Transitioning to Mature <i>Waitlist*</i> moved backward from Transitioning to Mature into Established phase	<i>New Behaviours*</i> moved backwards from Mature phase into Transitioning to Mature <i>Information to Help Students*</i> moved backwards from Mature phase into Transitioning to Mature
4	New Procedural Behaviours	No movement on the spectrum	<i>Information to Help Students*</i> moved forward from Established phase into Mature phase
	Employee Engagement		
	Providing Information to Help Student Decisions		
5	New Procedural Behaviours	No movement on the spectrum	<i>Internal Communication*</i> moved forward from Established phase into Transitioning to Mature Phase
6	New Procedural Behaviours	General shift forward from Established into Transitioning to Mature	General shift forward. <i>Internal Communication*</i> moved a full phase forward from Transitioning to Established to Transitioning to Mature
	Employee Engagement		
7	Providing Information to Help Student Decisions	General shift forward from Established to Mature Phase	<i>Internal Communication*</i> moved forward from Transitioning to Mature into Mature phase
8	Providing Information to Help Student Decisions	No movement on the spectrum	No movement on the spectrum
	New Procedural Behaviours		

*questionnaire item

Further investigation regarding a connection between the type of best practices intervention applied and forward movement on the culture of mobility spectrum revealed that of the seven participants who applied *New Procedural Behaviours* for at least one of their best practices intervention, 71% experienced forward cultural shifts. Conversely, of the four participants who applied *Providing Information to Help Student Decisions* as one of their interventions, 75% experienced forward movement on the cultural spectrum. One hundred percent of participants who used *Employee Engagement* as part of their intervention demonstrated forward cultural movement. A comparison with those participants who did not use *Employee Engagement* as part of their intervention resulted in the observation that only 50% of those institutions moved forward on the culture of mobility spectrum.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Exploring change in culture is necessary in supporting student mobility for Ontario's postsecondary education system. The present study's results revealed in the last year, all of the participating institutions experienced overall forward movement on the culture of mobility spectrum, although in specific areas, there was some backward movement. It was also discovered the participant group of institutions does not have a consistent method to track underutilized pathways. Responses to best practice interventions were moderate and varied for the participating group; however, *Employee Engagement* emerged as an integral variable to facilitate forward cultural change. Further research is needed to support theories that organizational change does not stabilize without member understanding and alignment (Branson, 2008; Weiner, 2009). Recommendations from these findings are as follows:

Recommendation One:

A method to track underutilized pathways be created and an inventory compiled with an assessment of why the pathways are underutilized.

Recommendation Two:

The survey tool used to measure cultural placement on the mobility spectrum be validated for further use with other institutions.

Recommendation Three:

Further research be designed to specifically examine *Employee Engagement* as a factor in culture of mobility change.