8-10-2021

Utilizing Academic Advising Services to Improve First-Year Student Retention Outcomes

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Abstract

Student retention is an issue that impacts most post-secondary institutions in Canada. For the majority of these institutions, the student retention issue is most acute in first-year students. This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) seeks to address the Problem of Practice (PoP) of poor first-year student retention outcomes within a mid-sized post-secondary institution in Ontario. Specifically, the vital role all academic advisors play in retaining post-secondary students is explored. With flat domestic enrollment numbers and challenges facing the international student market coupled with a restructured provincial government funding model, retaining students has become more important than ever before. Failure to adequately pivot to address the institution's challenges may result in significant, undesirable financial consequences for the institution. Unfortunately, in its current formation, the academic advisors are not well-positioned to optimally impact student retention outcomes. Central to this OIP are the recommended leadership approaches and the adequate framing of the PoP. Post-positivist theory is used as the over-arching theory to frame this OIP. Transactional and transformational leadership approaches will be implemented, and the problem is framed using Bolman and Deal's four-frame model. Resistance plays a central role within this OIP, and establishing ways to address it are explored through utilizing Kotter's Eight-Stage Change Process and Duck's Five-Stage Change Curve as a roadmap for the change. In addition, using a PDSA cycle to monitor and evaluate the success of the desired changes coupled with the implementation of a strong communication plan of the changes is central to the success of the OIP.

Keywords: student retention, academic advising, resistance to change, student attrition, transformational leadership, PDSA cycle

Executive Summary

In this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP), the issue of first-year student retention will be explored, specifically related to its impact on a medium-sized university in Ontario (hereafter referred to as University X). University X has had a long-documented struggle with student retention outcomes. Still, this issue has largely been limited to students transitioning from the first to second year of their programs. The literature is quite clear in its support that academic advising can play a central role in student success as a whole. Still, University X has not utilized this resource sufficiently in addressing student retention issues. The problem of practice (PoP) within this OIP is how to utilize academic advising services best to address first-year student retention outcomes.

In chapter one, an overview of the organizational context is provided. A review of the organizational structure is included, along with an overview of the organizational culture. Next, a review of the theoretical frame for the OIP is provided and the leadership approaches used to drive the recommended changes are provided, along with an overview of the use of Bolman and Deal's four-frame model for framing the problem of practice. Chapter one wraps up by exploring resistance to change and the questions that emerge from the PoP, along with a deeper investigation into the envisioned future state within University X and the overall change readiness within the institution.

Chapter two is primarily dedicated to the intended leadership approaches to change. Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process and Duck's (2011) five-stage change curve are both used for the intended changes and provide a valuable template to ensure the changes are successful. After a thorough investigation of the recommended change processes, this OIP outlines potential solutions to addressing the PoP. Specifically, three options are presented, and

the required resources for each option are thoroughly explored. This section ends with one of the three options selected as the desired solution, with a rationale for the decision. The selection involves both restructuring and revision of academic advising services. The chapter ends with a review of the ethical issues that need to be considered when pursuing changes that will inevitably impact many across the organization.

Chapter three outlines the change implementation plan, the goals and priorities of the planned change, and the anticipated limitations and challenges. Next, the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle from Langley et al., (2009) is used as a tool for the monitoring and evaluation of the desired changes within academic advising. The chapter finally looks at Klein's (1994) eight principles of organizational communication as a tool to help guide the communication process of the intended changes. The chapter wraps up with a section on building awareness of the need for change within the institution, which is already happening within University X, but needs to continue.

The OIP ends with a look at necessary steps that must be taken for the recommended changes to be successful and future considerations to be explored. The OIP is a vital document for University X, as it comes at a critical time for the organization, as many external threats have highlighted the urgent need for the recommendations to be actioned. Student retention is something that is a shared responsibility, but the role that academic advising plays cannot be overstated. The recommendations put forward within this document are both structural and theoretical in nature, and if implemented correctly, they can help University X address an issue that has required urgent attention for many years. The time for action is now, and this writer has every faith that implementing the recommendations will result in positive student retention outcomes.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the patience and understanding of my family throughout my doctoral journey. To my wife Maki and daughter Ruby, I wanted to thank both of you for your patience over the past three years. I also wanted to thank my parents for helping out with my daughter while I was unavailable throughout this process. I have pursued this doctorate degree mainly for my daughter, to role model many of the qualities I believe are imperative to success: dedication, sacrifice, persistence, and patience. While I hope I have achieved this, I also think I have learned and grown tremendously throughout this process.

Secondly, I would like to thank Dr. John Scott Lowrey. Thank you for your patience during my writing process and for being a sounding board for many of my ideas. Your dedication to students is something that is very much appreciated among the individuals you work with.

Finally, I wanted to thank the Provost at the post-secondary institution where I am employed. She expressed faith and trust in me that I have never experienced before in my working career. She encouraged me to pursue my doctorate and has always remained focused on the big picture related to student success. She has successfully modelled how to work with resistance and dissenting opinions, and I hope to continue learning and growing while working under her leadership.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Problem

This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) focuses on the issue of first-year student retention within a mid-sized university in Ontario (hereafter referred to as University X). Student retention is a multi-faceted, complex issue that impacts the overall success of universities within the province, as it is tied to government funding. While no one area of the university is solely responsible for retention outcomes, academic advising is well-positioned to positively impact results due to their close involvement with students. Yet, their abilities have not been adequately utilized to help collectively drive outcomes, as evidenced by the lack of coordinated efforts across faculties and the subsequent sub-standard retention results. This OIP explores how academic advising can positively impact first-year student retention outcomes.

Culture plays a significant role throughout the OIP, and it will be explored to identify how a culture shift within academic advising can help positively impact student retention outcomes. Throughout the research, there is little consensus regarding the definition of culture. A simplistic definition, which has been cited in many works related to organizational culture, has been Drennan's (1992) definition, which is "the way things are done around here" (p.3). To add more context to this, Schein's (2017) definition of culture is quite extensive and fits well as an operational definition of culture. He defined culture as "the accumulated shared learning of a group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration" (p. 6). This problem solving, according to Schein, has "worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel and behave in relation to those problems" (p. 6). This accumulated learning is a pattern or system of beliefs, values, and behavioural norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually are done subconsciously (Schein, 2017).

The problem of practice, a brief historical overview of the organization and its structure, and a review of the leadership position and lens through which the problem of practice (PoP) is being addressed are introduced in this chapter. The three questions addressed throughout the OIP and the leadership vision for change within University X are also highlighted in this chapter. Finally, the change readiness within the organization is reviewed.

Organizational Context

University X is a medium-sized university located in Ontario with a student population of over 10,000 predominantly undergraduate students spread across two campuses (University X, n.d.-b). The university has a relatively short history, as it has been in existence for less than 20 years, but has experienced exponential growth since its first opening to a student body of less than 1,000. The university was fortunate enough to have received recognition by Research Infosource Inc.as one of the top 50 research universities in Canada within the first five years of its existence, which was the youngest institution to have achieved this recognition (University X, 2008). Although University X has programs in various areas within seven faculties, it is predominantly a STEM-focused university (i.e., Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). The student population is diverse, and a high percentage of first-generation students are registered (University X, 2017).

The faculty and staff of the institution are young, demographically speaking, with few late-career professionals and with many having started their careers within the institution. This relative youth has proven to be helpful throughout the institution's short history, as it has helped the university in shifting quickly to accommodate the everchanging needs of the labour market without engaging in lengthy discussions related to historical precedence (Stokes, 2018).

Vision, Mission, and Values

The university's vision statement highlights the institution's rooting in science and technology (University X, n.d.-c). It also highlights an emphasis on social innovation and economic growth. This vision statement aligns perfectly with the university's STEM focus.

The mission of the institution (University X, n.d.-c) again highlights the desire to provide students with technology-enriched learning. It also highlights the goal of creating life-long learners and critical thinkers. Finally, within the institution's mission, it highlights a focus on research that is inclusive and one that solves problems resulting in social and economic innovation.

University X (n.d.-c) notes that it values qualities such as integrity and respect, honesty and accountability, dedication to quality and intellectual rigour, and the pursuit of innovation. These values have permeated all aspects of the institution, and evidence of adherence to these values is everywhere. Of all values, it is the pursuit of innovation that is most prominent, which again speaks to the technology focus within the institution.

Organizational Structure

At the top of the organization's senior leadership structure (University X, n.d.-d) are the President and Vice-Chancellor, three vice presidents, a chief financial officer, and a general council/university secretary. The Provost sits within the group of vice presidents, as they are also the vice presidents of academic affairs. The Provost/Vice President, Academic establishes the academic direction of the university and has all faculty deans reporting to them along with two of three assistant vice presidents. The other two vice presidents are the vice president of research and innovation and the vice president of external relations and advancement. The former is responsible for the university's research function in conjunction with the academic units and sets

the strategic direction for internationalization. The latter is responsible for the university's advancement, alumni, external communications, marketing efforts, and government and community relations.

As it relates to the academic advising unit, the structure is de-centralized. Each of the seven faculties has its own advising team. Each advising team has different reporting structures, with some reporting to managers of academic advising and others reporting to associate deans or managers of planning. The structure of each advising team is different, with some offices dedicated to a two-tiered model and others with dedicated first-year advisors. In addition, some offer program-specific advising, while others divide student caseloads by alphabetical order.

Organizational Culture

The organization prides itself on being agile and able to adjust to the needs of the global marketplace. There is an intense focus on continual innovation, as the institution seeks to stake its claim of being a leader in technology and innovation within the region. It can be argued that the organizational culture is divided between two areas of the institution: faculty and staff. The faculty members are heavily influenced by the distributive leadership approach, which is seen as participative and collaborative while acknowledging individual autonomy and supporting creative thinking (Jones et al., 2012). Leithwood et al. (2006) defined distributive leadership as decision-making and influential practices performed by personnel at multiple levels in an organization, instead of individual leaders at the top of an organizational hierarchy. Distributive leadership is the dominant leadership model among faculty and, therefore, the most pronounced leadership model within the institution as a whole. Within University X, each faculty member exhibits a high level of autonomy within their respective programs, and they frequently collaborate with colleagues to improve the program as a whole. Positional authority is not a

significant factor in the decision-making process, and collegial authority is very prominent. For example, the program directors make few independent decisions and defer to the program faculty members to make decisions regarding program changes or direction. Klein (1996) noted that those with collegial authority have a disproportionate impact on others' opinions and attitudes. This perfectly exemplifies the faculty culture within the institution. Finding a definition of faculty culture is challenging, as many people take exception to the perceived stereotyping that some associate with whichever definition is used. For this paper, faculty culture is defined as a wholly incompatible culture with authority-based administrative systems and one that remains focused on the needs of cooperation, consultation, and academic freedom (Musa et al., 2020).

Within the staff category, there is a distinct difference between staff within organizational units, such as the registrar's office, and staff working within the individual faculties. Both work within a hierarchical structure, but the influence of faculty culture is much more prominent within the staff who work within the faculties. This is evidenced by the adoption of many practices and norms observed within faculty circles. In contrast, non-faculty-based staff engage in work practices and processes that more closely resemble traditional workplaces. Standard procedures such as motions to approve meetings are absent, positional authority has greater control of meeting agendas, and those with differing perspectives may not be given the same platform as experienced by a faculty member. The influence of a distributive leadership approach poses both challenges and opportunities related to the staff culture within the institution. The challenges are primarily presented as disorganization and lack of ability to achieve consensus. For example, within a faculty setting, individuals with highly specialized knowledge in specific areas typically provide their professional opinions on dedicated topics. That professional opinion weighs heavily when the issues are deliberated in a larger group. There is an absence of

knowledge specialization within the academic advising group. This lack of expertise often leads to infighting and inaction as there are no professional opinions with which decisions can be based.

As for the opportunities created from the distributive leadership model, within the institution, there is a sense of egalitarianism where you find advisors working alongside organizational leaders on shared issues of concern through working groups or committees. Regardless of the job title, everyone can voice their opinion, which creates opportunities for differences to be discussed, which can lead to institutional changes to policies and processes.

Leadership Position and Lens Statement

This writer has been working in the role of Manager of Academic Advising within one faculty at University X. The writer has recently accepted a new position as Director of Academic Advising, which will be discussed in greater length in this paper. The Manager of Academic Advising acts as a senior administrator and collaborates with the dean, associate deans, program directors, and advising office team to ensure the effective and efficient planning, management, implementation, and evaluation of all matters related to the student experience within the faculty. Within the past year, the Manager of Academic Advising had been asked to take over two key initiatives for all academic advisors: (a) the training and development of all academic advisors within the institution and (b) to lead monthly academic advising meetings. While these are both helpful in achieving a level of equity related to training and disseminating information, it still lacks the overall authority to make significant structural changes across the institution. Currently, this authority does not exist within any specific role.

The challenges related to the current academic advising structure have caught the attention of senior leadership. There has recently been an announcement of a restructuring of

advising services, including creating the Director of Academic Advising role that this writer has recently accepted. This role will be directly responsible for the oversight of the entire academic advising team within the institution. It will also have the authority and agency to pursue many of the recommended changes within this OIP. Knowing that the opportunity to recommend structural changes is likely to happen is reassuring. Still, the successful implementation will be challenging, as will the shifting of culture within the academic advising unit.

Theoretical Frame for the Organizational Improvement Plan

The theoretical frame used for this OIP is post-positivist theory. Post-positivist theory has been selected, as it is known for challenging the traditional notion of the absolute truth of knowledge (Burbules & Phillips, 2000). Post-positivist theory notes that causes likely determine effects or outcomes and that there is a need to identify and evaluate the causes that influence outcomes (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) noted that data, evidence, and rational considerations are critical in shaping knowledge. This component of post-positivism is one that particularly resonated with this writer and permeated throughout this OIP. In making many recommended changes within the OIP, there was a strong appetite to collect and assess data to shape the direction within the newly formed department of academic advising. Creswell also highlighted the importance of objectivity within the inquiry process, which is something sorely missing within academic advising at University X. This emphasis on data, evidence, and objectivity perfectly encapsulates what this writer is trying to incorporate in order to adequately address the PoP.

An early manifestation of post-positivism within social sciences can be found in the work of Max Weber, who argued that "social realities need to be understood from the perspective of the subject, rather than that of the observer, and in totality, rather than in isolation" (Fox, 2008,

p. 3). Fox (2008) continued to note that Weber believed that "actors are active subjects who are productive of their social reality, not simply just objects of social forces" (p. 3). Finally, Fox highlighted how post-positivist theory views the stability of social order coming from customary habits of thought and shared meanings of actors that create a sense of continuity and order rather than from social structures and independent forces. This aspect was relevant to this OIP, as it attempted to deal with the challenges of first-year student retention. The over-arching perspective of this writer is that the student retention challenges have largely been created through the same "habits of thought" and "shared meanings" that Fox spoke about in his description of post-positivism. Within academic advising, many advisors hold shared beliefs related to the lack of responsibility for retention and graduation outcomes. When viewing the problem through this lens, the approach of inaction or indifference is not surprising.

Structural challenges are a major element within this OIP, but they are presented as organizational structural challenges, rather than social structures, that impede the university's ability to make progress in the area of first-year student retention. It is important to note that post-positivism explores the diversity of facts that are researchable through various types of investigations and that it respects and values all findings that are essential components to the building of knowledge (Panhwar et al., 2017). For this writer, these points are critical. Within the OIP, we are hypothesizing that a restructured academic advising model will result in improved first-year retention outcomes. Throughout the OIP, there will be greater details on what this restructure will look like, but ultimately, each element of the restructure must be researched and evaluated to either adapt, adopt, or abandon. Eventually, through the adoption of both transactional and transformational leadership models and the change management models of Kotter (2012) and Duck (2011), this writer will be able to shift the thought processes and shared

meanings within the group to one that values both the empirical evidence of positivism along with interpretivism which collectively form the foundation of the post-positivist theory .

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is the first of two leadership approaches implemented within this OIP. Transactional leadership occurs when leaders approach followers with the intent of exchanging something so that each person derives something of value (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Each party is giving something to the other in exchange for something they want, which creates a relationship of mutual benefit and dependence. With this mutually beneficial exchange, transactional leaders can accomplish performance objectives, complete tasks, motivate followers through contractual agreement, and improve organizational efficiency (McCleskey, 2014). On the other hand, followers can satisfy their self-interest, reduce workplace anxiety, and concentrate on clear organizational objectives. This leadership approach aligns with the more leader-centered decision-making approach, which may not be popular, but may be necessary in the initial stages of change, particularly with some of the less-experienced staff.

The transactional leadership approach will be valuable in achieving the OIP in several ways. First, the academic advising group has never had sufficient opportunities to grow within the organization. Due to a lack of alternatives, some find themselves increasingly frustrated in the same role for many years. The structural change would allow advisors the opportunity to move into different roles, such as first-year advising, where the job will focus heavily on regular contact with new students and finding strategies to motivate them through numerous initiatives. This role will look different from the traditional advising role, which will focus on identifying students at risk and developing deep relationships with them to motivate them to complete their studies. In addition, the creation of new management positions would provide others with an

opportunity to move into leadership roles, which may motivate some individuals to align themselves with the recommended changes.

Secondly, McCleskey (2014) highlighted how transactional leadership could help minimize workplace anxiety, as the interactions are largely straightforward exchanges based on mutual benefit. This point will be of particular importance, as the advising unit has demonstrated high anxiety levels, particularly related to organizational change. The simple, straightforward transactional leadership approach should help reduce anxieties, as expectations and potential rewards will become quite clear for the first time.

Finally, the concept of being able to concentrate on clear organizational objectives was critical within this OIP. The advising unit, as a whole, has not had clear organizational objectives, as their focus is solely on their individual faculties. The structural changes are aimed at making their roles and responsibilities much clearer. Transactional leadership involves managing in the more conventional sense by clarifying subordinate responsibilities (Prasad & Junni, 2016), which is currently missing within the advising unit. Utilizing this approach to help clarify organizational objectives and specific responsibilities will be imperative throughout the change process, but particularly in the beginning stages. Being very clear with academic advisors regarding the expectations of the role and their responsibilities is an example of how transactional leadership will be implemented within this OIP, and it also represents a drastic change from previous practice, where the advisors themselves, in many cases, determine their role's responsibilities and how their day-to-day work should be prioritized.

Most of the criticisms of the transactional leadership approach focus on the relatively shallow relationships that it builds, as it only achieves the temporary exchanges of gratifications, which may, in the long term, create resentments between the participants (McCleskey, 2014).

Also, transactional leadership is focused on short-term goals, standards, procedures, rules, and control, while creativity and vision are not addressed (Nikezic et al., 2012). These criticisms are valid, and the goal of its use as a leadership approach will largely be limited to the first component of change: the structural component of change within the OIP. When referring to the first component of change, or the structural component of change, this writer is referring to areas such as establishing reporting structures, hours of work, work and vacation schedules, allocation of financial and human resources, the creation of "sister faculty" partnerships, and the implementation of technology-based solutions. In order to lead the advising unit through all of the changes successfully, deep cultural changes will need to occur. For this to happen, a transformational leadership approach will need to be utilized.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership revolves around the leader's ability to motivate followers to accomplish more than what the follower planned to accomplish (Krishnan, 2005). Transformational leadership focuses on emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals (Northouse, 2016). These points are of particular importance to the academic advising unit, as they present as a group that is driven mainly by emotions and a sense of values. Many of the academic advisors have expressed both their emotional investment in their student's success and have demonstrated a strong sense of values throughout their involvement in committees such as academic appeals committees, where many advisors place a priority on their personal relationships with students, at times above and beyond institutional policies. Transformational leaders also tend to have more committed and satisfied followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006), which was important for this PoP, as academic advising satisfaction levels are currently perceived to be quite low.

Burns (2012) highlighted the importance of what he referred to as *moral leadership* within transformational leadership. He noted that this was the relationship between the leaders and the led that was based not only on power, but also on mutual needs, aspirations, and values. This idea of moral leadership is relevant as is the differentiation between authentic and inauthentic leadership noted by Bass and Riggio (2006). The authentic transformational leader has a genuine interest in the desires and needs of their followers, which separates them from inauthentic transformational leaders who treat their followers as a means to an end (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Utilizing moral leadership along with authentic transformational leadership are both critical ingredients to the overall success of this PoP, as the academic advisors have demonstrated high levels of sensitivity around inauthenticity and are hostile to displays of power. Transformational leadership has been selected as a leadership approach within this OIP, as it has demonstrated, through numerous studies, a strong connection between its approach and appraised performance (Bass & Avolio, 1989; Yammarino & Bass, 1990; Yammarino et al., 1993). An example of how transformational leadership was utilized for this PoP focused on motivating people to change through engaging them in the change process itself. In the past, many advisors have either experienced change being dictated to them or being left to themselves to identify issues and establish the appropriate change(s) to resolve them. The implementation of transformational leadership needed to integrate the concept of a leader of the department who will make many decisions while also motivating and empowering staff to be involved, as much as possible, in decisions that impact them in their roles.

Transformational leadership has four components: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration

(Bass, 1985), which are commonly referred to as the four I's. The four I's are explained in greater detail in this section.

Idealized Influence

Transformational leaders should be charismatic and set high, idealized standards for emulation (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Transformational leaders need to promote ethical policies, processes, and procedures. They also need to commit to a continually enforced code of conduct (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), which helps reinforce their idealized status. Leaders should be solid role models for their followers. The writer has committed to high standards of conduct throughout his tenure at University X, but the quality and standards have not been able to gain idealized influence, as his work has, thus far, been limited to one faculty.

Inspirational Motivation

According to Bass and Steidlmeier (1989), "the inspirational motivation of transformational leadership provides followers with challenges and meaning for engaging in shared goals and undertakings" (p. 188). The inspirational, transformational leader focuses on the best in people and focuses, inwardly and outwardly, on the good that can be achieved for the group, the organization, or society they feel responsible for (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Enhanced team spirit is achieved by this approach (Northouse, 2016).

Within the academic advising group, this aspect of transformational leadership will be most challenging, yet rewarding. Upon interacting with the group, there is a sense of lingering frustration related to the organization and its direction. Leaders within the organization are regularly criticized for both action and inaction alike. With this theme, inspiring followers will be challenging; however, working toward shared goals and understandings will help alleviate

tensions. By focusing on the positives, the transformational leader will motivate others to follow the path toward positivity and collegiality.

Intellectual Stimulation

Transformational leaders should challenge followers to be innovative and creative to form new ideas for both the organization and themselves (Northouse, 2016). Within this quadrant, it is crucial to reward creativity and success and establish a culture of learning from mistakes, rather than invoking punishment as in the transactional leadership approach. For this category, the advising unit will likely flourish. There is a tangible sense of risk-aversion, which may simply reflect the leadership some members currently work within. Encouraging all members to bring ideas forward and reflecting and learning from mistakes is critical to the writer's leadership philosophy.

Individualized Consideration

Within this component, "the transformational leader treats every follower as an individual and provides coaching, mentoring, and growth opportunities with an authentic interest in developing followers into future leaders" (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 189). Leaders act as coaches and advisers while attempting to help followers become "actualized" (Northouse, 2016, p. 169). Several individuals within the academic advising unit present with skills that could make a great addition to the leadership team, and it will be imperative to help develop staff in accordance with their strengths and interests. Aside from grooming for leadership roles, there is a recognition that not everyone is interested in management. Personalized coaching and mentoring will be highly beneficial to the group and extremely rewarding to the leadership team, as it will help address some of the long-standing issues that have plagued this group.

Personal Leadership Approach

This writer's personal leadership approach mirrors precisely the combination of a transactional and transformational leadership approach that is being recommended within this OIP. This writer also values many of the elements of the post-positivist framework, specifically its scientific approach coupled with the perspectives of historical, comparative and philosophical analysis (Fischer, 1998) which will aid in tackling the first-year student retention challenges at University X. This writer strongly believes in the importance of rules, regulations, and structure that is emphasized within transactional leadership along with the power of extrinsic reward systems. However, through extensive working experience in private and public organizations, both within and outside of education domestically and internationally, this writer has learned that transactional leadership alone is insufficient to lead staff successfully over the long term. Transformational leadership is a critical part of this writer's personal approach, as intrinsic motivation is key to long-term success within a leadership role. Specifically, finding ways to motivate followers to do more than they thought was possible (Arenas, 2019) is imperative for the success within this OIP and is of key importance to this writer to successfully lead teams or departments. In addition, through taking a personal interest in others and being accessible, this writer aims to build solid relationships with followers, which Arenas (2019) noted is key to raising their levels of motivation and morality. Both transactional and transformational leadership are natural leadership approaches for this writer, and thus, implementing both will be seamless throughout this OIP.

In summary, both leadership approaches have something to offer the leader of this change initiative. Transactional leadership will be utilized initially to implement stability, rules, and processes and to create clarity around the new roles and responsibilities of the academic

advisors. This approach will be short-term, while transformational leadership will be a long-term approach with its emphasis on motivating staff and influencing them via modelling behaviour instead of threats of punishment. Both approaches will have their benefits and challenges, but together, they will offer the greatest opportunity to drive the desired change successfully.

Leadership Problem of Practice

With Statistics Canada (2020a) projecting that Canadian universities could lose between $377 million and $3.4 billion in revenue due to the impact of COVID-19, student retention is an area of concern for all post-secondary institutions. Of course, each post-secondary institution has a different set of variables to work with to achieve the desired outcomes. If institutions cannot meet student retention outcomes, they risk losing valuable funding from the provincial government. The current funding model is a confusing labyrinth of policies layered one on top of another after decades of minor changes (Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario, 2017), but for simplification, it can be said that government funding accounts for nearly half of the total revenue of Ontario universities. With the government's desire to significantly alter its funding model, retaining students will be more critical than ever before.

The majority of student attrition happens with students between the first and second year of their studies (Tinto, 1993), so the research had to focus on this specific transitional period. Research from multiple countries has suggested that between 40% and 70% of students who do not graduate within four to six years of commencing their degree leave the university within the first year of study (Harvey et al., 2006; Stiburek et al., 2017; Willcoxson et al., 2011). The PoP within this OIP is how academic advising services can improve student retention outcomes among first-year students at a medium-sized university in Ontario. University X has had challenges with student retention outcomes throughout its history. As of 2017, the university's

student retention outcomes (i.e., students retained from first to second year) sat approximately 10% below the provincial average (University X, 2020), which is entirely unsustainable. If not corrected, these issues can lead to job losses and a potential reduction in the available services to students, which could only exacerbate the problem further.

There is currently no specific unit within the institution with direct responsibility to improve year-over-year student retention outcomes. The institution is well-aware of the challenges that lay ahead of it, yet currently, there is no cohesive strategy being implemented to impact outcomes directly. One area that has been a focal point over the past several years has been academic advising and how it can help improve student retention outcomes. This focus has been outlined in several strategic documents, including the 2016 Provost's Advisory Committee on Integrated Planning discussion paper on student success, which highlights areas where advising was seen as having a positive impact on student success (University X, 2016). According to extensive research, academic advising is seen as one of the three main categories responsible for the most significant contribution to student retention (Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016; Habley & McClanahan, 2004). Coupled with connecting students to campus resources and offering first-year-specific programming, solid academic advising is a critical pillar in student success, with advising being the vital link in the retention equation (Drake, 2011). With the proper training and a restructuring of the service model, the advising unit at University X could be utilized to improve student retention outcomes, which would have a great impact across the institution.

The desired organizational state is to have the academic advising service unit restructured to better position the group to address student retention outcomes. This restructuring would include the centralization of advising services under one leader who would be accountable for

year-over-year improvements to student retention outcomes. In addition, this would involve

creating a team of advisors dedicated to first-year students, which was identified by Habley and

McClanahan (2004) as a second integral pillar of successful student retention programs. In

examining the impact of centralized advising on first-year academic performance, Chiteng Kot

(2014) noted that there is one consistent finding: Centralized advising had a significant positive

impact on first-year GPA, which would positively impact student retention outcomes, as this

would indicate a level of student commitment. High levels of commitment are an important

factor in determining student persistence in their post-secondary pursuits (Tinto, 1993).

Finally, this would include shifting the academic advising model from a current state of

reactive advising to a proactive model, where academic advisors are responsible for establishing

contact with students before problems arise. These changes will be structural in nature and

involve deep, second-order, cultural changes within the unit, requiring careful, considerate steps

to be successfully implemented. The topic of restructuring the academic advising model has been

discussed in numerous meetings within several working groups and committees as well as in

various internal discussion papers. Still, with the ever-changing landscape, the time to act is now.

Framing the Problem of Practice

The institution's challenges with student attrition are not new and have routinely been an

issue primarily isolated within the group of students transitioning from the first to the second

year of their educational pursuits (Government of Ontario, 2017). Having the most significant

proportion of student attrition occurring among first-year students is not a unique experience

within higher education (Tinto, 1999). This point was also highlighted in Childs et al.'s (2017)

work that noted the highest hazard dropout rate occurs in the first year, with more than half of all

dropouts occurring in the first year of study. Finally, Nelson et al. (2009) noted how the first year is foundationally crucial to student success in university.

A question that needs to be asked is why specifically does University X experience higher student attrition rates in comparison with its provincial counterparts. An internal research paper was completed in 2014 and utilized Swail's (2004) theoretical framework to separate the issue of student attrition into three broad categories (University X, 2014). Although the authors of the report found that it is difficult to pinpoint specifically why University X is failing to retain its students, through using Swail's frame, they focused its recommendations on the institutional factors that impact student retention, as this is the area where there is greatest opportunity to have a significant impact (University X, 2014). A visual is provided in Figure 1 to better understand the aspects of the cognitive, societal, and institutional factors that all institutions face when trying to address student attrition.

Figure 1

Factors Related to Student Persistence and Performance

Cognitive Factors
Subjects & courses taught in high school
Critical thinking ability
Aptitude
Quality of learning
Content knowledge
Study skills
Technology ability
Time management
Learning skills
Academic-related extracurriculular
activities

Social Factors
Educational legacy
Attitude toward learning
Attitude toward others
Rural/urban upbringing
Expectations
Family influence/peer influence
Social lifestyle
Teacher/counsellor influence
Financial issues
Religious background
Maturity
Social coping skills
Communication skills
Cultural values
Goal commitment

Institutional Factors
Financial aid
Academic services
Recruitment & admissions
Student services
Curriculum & instruction

Note. Adapted from Swail, W.S. (2004) *The art of student retention: A handbook for practitioners and administrators.*

Institution-specific data related to why students leave is often difficult to obtain, as students simply leave without indicating why they are leaving the institution. In addition, very few respond to exit surveys, which explains the lack of concrete data. What is understood is that most early leavers do so as a result of institutional factors related to academic penalties (i.e., suspension or dismissal) handed down by the university (University X, 2014).

Within the paper, the importance of creating an overall institutional culture centred on student success coupled with a focus on student engagement was highlighted, which are both found to be critical to student persistence (University X, 2014). To date, neither can be found, on a large scale, within University X. Overall, the operational model for student retention within University X called for the implementation of an early warning system; increased learner supports; remedial numeracy, literacy, and study skills; and a revamped advising model (University X, 2014). Some of these recommended changes are being explored in greater depth within this OIP due to their positive impact on student persistence.

One way of looking at first-year student attrition is through the lens of Bolman and Deal's (2017) four-frame model. These frames will help contextualize the factors that have created the institution's problems with which the institution is currently struggling.

Finally, to adequately address student retention via a restructured and repositioned academic advising unit, one issue that will need to be addressed is resistance. As per Kilicoglu and Yilmaz (2013), there are three possible types of resistance to organizational change: (a) blind resistance, (b) political resistance, and (c) ideological resistance. While blind resistance exists within the unit, along with some true ideological resistance, the majority of the resistance is rooted in political resistance, where some feel they will lose their power base, their status, and their role within the organization (Kilicoglu & Yilmaz, 2013). Goltz and Hietapelto (2002) suggested that threats to power are among the primary instigators of resistance to change. This threat to power is the main component of what is referred to above as political resistance. Stewart and Manz (1997) also highlighted that the reluctance to relinquish power is one of the primary factors for resistance. As the threat to power and prestige increases, so too will the level

of resistance (Oreg, 2006). For the PoP to be adequately addressed, dealing with resistance to change will be critically important.

Bolman and Deal's Four Frames

Bolman and Deal's (2017) four frames has been used to frame the PoP, as it fit well within this OIP and is a well-respected model within academic circles. The structural frame, human resource frame, political frame, and symbolic frame will be explored further and connected to the PoP.

Structural Frame

Bolman and Deal (2017) noted that the structural frame is grounded in "the confidence in rationality and faith that a suitable array of roles and responsibilities will minimize distracting personal static and maximize people's performance on the job" (p. 47). Goals and objectives and individual functions are the core of the structural frame. Within the institution, there has been a substantial period of growth, which has accompanied job creation and, unfortunately, some instances of blurred lines related to role responsibilities.

Specifically, within academic advising, due, in part, to the lack of a central voice, individual faculties have not been presented with a cohesive strategy as it relates to addressing student retention outcomes. Bolman and Deal (2017) addressed how establishing a boss with formal authority is a critical step within the structural frame, as they keep the actions of staff aligned with strategy and objectives. The advising unit does not currently have a formal authority that can collectively drive the group in a unified direction. Without it, the group has demonstrated a splintered approach to tackling the issue of student retention. This splintered approach is particularly unfortunate, as there is robust research suggesting that academic advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful experience in post-

secondary education (Drake, 2011). Swecker et al. (2013) suggested that the number of advising appointments students attended is a significant predictor of student retention. In one particular study, researchers explored the relationship between first-generation students and their academic advisors. Results showed that for every advising appointment attended by students, the odds that student was retained increased by 13% (Swecker et al., 2013). Shields (1994) also found that academic advising services positively and significantly impacted a student's enrollment status. Therefore, the critical importance of academic advising is understood, and the institution needs to establish a way to harness its power to better address student retention issues.

Centralization of academic advising services is becoming an increasingly popular approach, particularly in the United States, where 73% of schools had an advising centre dedicated to centralized advising services as of 2004 (Chiteng Kot, 2014). This format is meant to be a one-stop shop for academic advising services for students (Chiteng Kot, 2014). Creating this format for the academic advising unit at University X will be an important step in improving the university's services, which will improve retention outcomes.

Human Resource Frame

The human resource frame argues that "people's skills, attitudes, energy and commitment are vital resources that can make or break an enterprise" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 118). Bolman and Deal (2017) noted how the environmental elements allow people to survive and grow. The human resource frame is deeply committed to the voice of employees and to the ongoing attempts to motivate employees, as they are vital to the success of any organization. The human resource frame seamlessly frames the PoP by highlighting the misdirected and insufficient attempts that the organization has made in this area, which has, in turn, negatively impacted the student experience.

Bolman and Deal (2017) noted how it is essential for management to establish conditions so that people can achieve their own goals by directing efforts toward organizational rewards. Within the institution, the leadership approach has resembled a laissez-faire approach, where individuals are driven by their own goals, which may not coincide with those of the institution. A laissez-faire style is seen as an absence of leadership (Northouse, 2016) and is hands-off in nature. This form of leadership "does not take responsibility, delays decisions, and makes little effort to help followers satisfy their needs" (p. 172). With this being the predominant style of leadership that the academic advisors encounter within University X, it is not surprising to witness the current resistance levels, as they have essentially been forced to fend for themselves in the absence of leadership across the institution.

Tinto (2012) cited various studies that show individuals who received advising services three times within their first semester persisted at a rate 20% higher than those who only attended orientation programs. Literature also supported the argument that academic advising services are a central service that supports student success (Fricker, 2015). In another study, the research found that students who met with their academic advisor at least 3–6 times a year compared to students who met 0–2 times a year had a 13% lift in course and degree persistence (Fosnacht et al., 2017). Data such as this were pervasive, yet the lack of leadership within the advising unit appears to have been created by the current fragmented situation, preventing the institution from acting in a direct, intentional manner to address the issue adequately.

Political Frame

Bolman and Deal (2017) noted how the political frame views organizations as "roiling arenas, hosting ongoing contests arising from individual and group interests" (p. 184). Bolman and Deal highlighted the position of two antagonists that are central to the politics of

organizations: (a) partisans and (b) authorities. The differing perspectives of decision making (i.e., bottom-up vs top-down) are one way to distinguish partisans from authorities, as authorities make decisions that are binding on their subordinates, while partisans are agents of bottom-up influence (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Bolman and Deal effectively highlighted the challenges and risks of having either too much or too little power within each group. Within the context of academic advising, they found themselves at a perceptual crossroads, where they felt they did not have sufficient power within the organization. Yet, many others within the university saw the group as being too powerful and even challenging, which, in turn, created unhelpful narratives and self-fulfilling prophecies. Concerns within advising related to their perceived lack of influence have been visible in recent times with a robust and successful push toward unionization.

The issue of conflict was noted in Bolman and Deal's (2017) text, and the authors highlighted how poorly managed conflict can lead to infighting and destructive power struggles. Panteli and Sockalingam (2005) noted that "when conflict is poorly managed or avoided, people remain aloof, skeptical, and angry and become rigid, fixated, and ambivalent, which causes relationships to weaken and a disintegration of trust" (p.600). Panteli and Sockalingam also highlighted how poorly managed conflict can be catastrophic as it relates to relationships, as discussions can quickly become personal. Conflict tends to be indirect within the unit, but it retains the same level of destructiveness. For example, disagreements within the unit often lead to simmering levels of resentment as opposed to constructive engagement to establish mutual understanding.

In *Organizational Theory in Higher Education*, Manning (2017) highlighted the role of interest groups and coalitions and how their banding together gives those with limited power

increased influence. Within advising, coalitions have been formed within the political sphere, and this collective voice is quite powerful within the institution. The challenge is how to bring these coalitions in closer alignment with institutional goals related to student retention. At the root of the political frame is the concept of power. Manning highlighted five kinds of power: (a) coercive, (b) reward, (c) legitimate, (d) referent, and (e) expert. The current structure does not enable the institution to implement coercive power or reward power, as there is a fragmented leadership approach. The advisors do not see their superiors as having legitimate power over their affairs, and referent power may be powerful within some faculties while non-existent in others. Many advisors see expert power as something held within their group exclusively, which exacerbates the challenge of shifting the service model, as the current model is one they helped create.

Symbolic Frame

According to Bolman and Deal (2017), the symbolic frame "sees life as allegorical, mystical, and more serendipitous than linear" (p. 242). Within the symbolic frame, there is a particular importance of myths, visions, and values along with the important building blocks of a culture. With the institution being relatively young compared to many of its regional competitors, there appear to be gaps related to symbols that could be utilized to create a greater sense of purpose. The institution has not established its own set of myths and heroes, and there is an apparent lack of cohesive culture within the academic advising unit, which may be due, in part, to the higher levels of turnover in comparison with faculty members. These gaps create a strong sense that something is amiss within the unit, and it makes it more challenging to rally together to tackle shared challenges such as student attrition.

Resistance to Change

The challenges that lay ahead of the proposed changes are primarily rooted in resistance. In trying to overhaul the workplace culture within the academic advising unit, it is critical to understand the political theories of change, as this most closely aligns with the specific challenges with which the unit is confronted. Kezar (2018) highlighted how political theory suggests that resistance will continue to be an issue as individuals with differing interests continue to find the recommended changes at odds with their agendas. She further noted how this can become a more significant issue when alliances form in opposition to the proposed changes. This is precisely the situation that presents itself concerning the proposed changes within the advising unit. Salerno and Brock (2008) noted how resistance is common within stage two of their six-stage change cycle, which will be discussed further in chapters two and three, as it provides a valuable tool in moving individuals through the various stages of change.

Kotter (1985, 1995a, 1995b) highlighted the importance of relationship-building in addressing resistance, which will be essential for the overall success of this OIP. Battilana and Casciaro (2013) built on this concept by noting the importance of the structure and content of interpersonal relationships that change agents build, as it is known to increase social influence. The proposed academic advising leadership team will need to make efforts to engage all in the change process with sincere efforts to build more collegial relationships with a foundation of mutual respect. While all efforts will be made to engage everyone, it will be equally important to establish boundaries for acceptable displays of resistance. This will be done via upholding institutional policies related to workplace harassment and code of conduct, as there have been instances of enforcement being neglected, which may lead to feelings of a psychologically

unsafe workspace. Upholding existing policy should help create a more psychologically safe workplace, which Schein (1999, p. 491) noted is key in working through "learning anxiety."

Within the frame of resistance, the most common manifestation within the advising unit is passive-aggressive behaviour, which needs to be addressed. Passive-aggressive behaviour is defined simply as when individuals find concealed, covert ways of expressing their aggression (McIlduff & Coghlan, 2000). Individuals who exhibit passive-aggressive behaviour often present with this dysfunctional form of behaviour due to their dissatisfaction with themselves and/or their place within the organization (McIlduff & Coghlan, 2000). This point aligns with the observations of resistant behaviour within the unit and the observed political form of resistance outlined by Kilicoglu and Yilmaz (2013). McIlduff and Coghlan (2000) further noted that passive-aggressive individuals often dislike and are opposed to any requests or demands of increased output levels and oppose, often quite subtly, others who strive toward positive organizational change. This is also a concern within the unit and will need to be addressed for the proposed changes to be successfully implemented.

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Questions Emerging from Problem of Practice

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Several important guiding questions highlight the multifaceted nature of the PoP. The most important questions that need to be addressed are resistance, culture, and the advising model and mutual benefit.

The Question of Resistance

The first question is how will the resistance to change manifest itself within the academic advising unit. Secondly, to what degree can the resistance be overcome? As a group that is averse to change, the idea of implementing wide-ranging structural changes will likely lead to

some pockets of resistance. Knowing the different forms of resistance, how can the OIP help address the expected response to these changes?

The Question of Culture

The concept of *accountability culture* is not familiar to the academic advising unit. When referring to an accountability culture, Kotter (2012) defined culture as "the norms of behaviour and shared values among a group of people" (p. 156), while Adeyemi et al. (2012) noted that accountability is a way of being answerable or liable for one's actions and/or inactions and conduct. Therefore, for this OIP, accountability culture was defined as the integration of being answerable or liable for one's actions or inactions into the norms of behaviour and shared values among the group. With the increased pressure on the institution to address vital areas of concern such as student retention, a culture shift is needed. In addition to the questions mentioned above related to overcoming resistance, the culture will need to shift to adopt a more accountable approach to dealing with outcomes. This transition will not be an easy one, and the very mention of accountability will likely result in resistance. However, increased accountability will need to become part of the everyday working culture, and this OIP will need to establish evidenced-informed practices for shifting the traditional working culture within the unit. This goal of shifting the culture aligns perfectly with the institution's 2017-2022 strategic plan (University X, n.d.-a). Within the plan, a goal is to make the institution a remarkable place for work as well as having a goal of being a place where people can form better relationships. Most would agree that the current culture within the advising unit is sub-optimal, and, while challenging, establishing an accountability culture will be an opportunity to move the institution closer to its goals as outlined in the strategic plan.

The Question of Advising Model and Mutual Benefit

The OIP needed to answer how the shift in advising model can be mutually beneficial to both the academic advisors and the students. Currently, the model is built around reacting to student crises. The model is not intentional, but rather one borne out of necessity. Academic advisors are seen, by many, as the ones best suited to complete many administrative duties within their faculties. In addition, advisors are typically seen as central people used to answer student inquiries that often have little to do with academic advising. Therefore, completing unrelated administrative work prevents the academic advisors from adopting a proactive advising model. This arrangement has created a sense of frustration amongst the group. Most within the institution would agree that the current situation is not ideal and that changes are needed. Nevertheless, the desire to maintain the status quo can be quite powerful.

The need for a proactive advising model is clear, but there may be questions about the viability of such a model in the face of an ever-present pile of administrative work. The group will need to work collaboratively to identify all non-advising related tasks and determine how they can utilize technology to eliminate some of the work. Perhaps other work can be shifted to people better positioned to complete the work. Somewhat reminiscent of the *chicken and egg* argument, the OIP will have to answer how adopting a proactive advising model can lower the advising workload and lower the number of unhappy student interactions. Once this is clear, it may alleviate tensions within the unit, opening more to the opportunities that await them in working with a new model. This should, in turn, increase the satisfaction of students, which will ultimately be evident in the student retention outcomes.

Leadership Focused Vision for Change

Currently, University X has an issue with student retention. The university currently ranks near the bottom of all Ontario universities with respect to first-year student retention outcomes. It loses approximately twice the number of students between year one and year two compared to the provincial average (University X, 2020). The institution's academic advising team is currently disconnected from student retention, which is the result of poorly coordinated efforts. This is despite the institution's awareness that academic advising is seen as an integral part of student retention efforts (McFarlane, 2013; Tinto, 1993). In efforts to combat first-year student attrition, many universities have looked at how they can integrate academic advising into first-year transition programs (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). To date, no such efforts have taken place, at an institution level, at University X.

Envisioned Future State

The institution's desired future state is to maintain a retention rate on par with the provincial averages, which currently sits at approximately 90%. This goal means that University X will need to improve its institutional outcomes by approximately 10%. The goal will be for this to be achieved over the next 3–5 years. The recommendation is for the institution to better position academic advising services to help combat student attrition via a restructure of the advising unit, including establishing an advising team dedicated to first-year students and a re-envisioning of the service model. When viewed in isolation, this goal presents as being quite transactional in nature. While this is true, the plan for how the advising unit achieves this future state involves the implementation of transformational leadership practices that will elevate the department's service model and our reputation among both internal and external stakeholders alike. Specifically, through utilizing transformational leadership practices and motivating staff to

work above and beyond what they previously thought was possible, the institution will be able to shift the culture to one that is student-centred, engagement-focused, and outcome-driven.

Change Drivers

According to Whelan-Berry and Somerville (2010), change drivers are variables that influence the planning and implementation of the change process. They assist with organizational change by acting as catalysts, spearheading the change process (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). Two internal and three external change drivers that will be instrumental in the change process at University X are examined in this section. Specifically, restructured funding models, student attitudes toward education, senior leadership approaches to change, resistance levels, and the creation of a new management team will be explored in this section.

External Change Drivers

In 2019, the Government of Ontario announced its intention of restructuring the funding model for Ontario post-secondary institutions. The proposal includes a performance-based funding model that will tie over $3 billion to each institution's performance against a set of metrics determined by the government (Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, 2019). With a massive increase in the percentage of performance-based funding, it will be imperative that the institution act in an intentional manner in addressing this long-standing area of concern. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the provincial government had temporarily halted their plans to implement the new funding model. Still, this external influence will drive the institution's sense of urgency in having the recommended changes put in place.

Internal Change Drivers

The anticipated resistance level from the academic advising unit is an internal change driver. Should the vision be accepted, even by a few, there will be an opportunity to build on the

momentum of change and use small successes to exemplify how acceptance can be helpful. However, should there be a high level of blind resistance, more effort will be required to implement the changes. Research tells us that "acceptance of the vision is a key driver of individual employee change and widespread change implementation" (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010, p.180). Strong leadership will be required to work collaboratively with the advising unit to help implement the vision, as failure to secure buy-in will lead to skepticism of the changes and mistrust of the leadership team (Strebel, 1996). Given the current financial state of the institution, the group must move forward with the desired changes as quickly as possible, as potential layoffs loom should there be no change in the status quo.

Finally, the recommendations will require hiring a management team to oversee the successful implementation of the recommended changes. These will be internal hires from within the advising unit, as there is no budget for external hires. This fact means there will be a shift in available resources within some teams. Whelan-Berry and Somerville (2010) noted the importance of organizations allocating appropriate resources for change initiatives to be successful. The number of resources should be sufficient, but it will require a re-imagining of how to complete the work for the change initiative to be successful.

The creation of a successful management team will be critical in the overall success of the OIP, as they will be the individuals driving change and dealing directly with the resistance. The vast majority of the current advising complement do not have management experience; thus, it is likely that they will be assuming their first leadership role in trying to drive significant organizational change. Capacity building will be an important component of their training and onboarding in their new roles. Coupled with their lack of experience, these new managers will need to win over the trust of their respective teams, which could prove challenging. It will be

imperative for this new middle management team to actively support the change vision throughout the change implementation process (Cameron & Green, 2004). These managers will also need to act as model employees, while at the same time managing resistance to change (Cameron & Green, 2004). Much effort will need to go into the effective training of this management group to provide them with the best chance of success throughout this challenging transition. Organizational change readiness will be discussed in the next section.

Organizational Change Readiness

According to Weiner (2009), organizational readiness for change is a critical precursor to successfully implementing complex changes. He also highlighted how, according to some estimates, failure to establish sufficient readiness accounts for half of all unsuccessful change efforts. Stevens (2013) echoed Weiner's sentiments by highlighting how establishing change readiness may be one of the key factors in determining whether a change initiative will be successful or not. To ensure the success of the recommended changes within the academic advising unit, there needs to be a thorough understanding of the readiness within the organization to the large-scale recommended change. Armenakis and Harris (2002) highlighted how implementing organizational change is one of the most important, yet least understood, skills of contemporary leaders and how change readiness is one of the three critical phases of organizational change.

Cawsey et al. (2016, p. 105) highlighted the importance of answering the question "why change?" as a precondition to moving the organization forward with change readiness to begin to look at questions related to "what" and "how." Cawsey et al. (2016) provided an organizational readiness assessment tool used to evaluate University X's readiness for change. Upon completion of the assessment tool using the scale provided, University X (2017) achieved a score

of 21. The rating scale ranges from -10 to +35, which indicates that while barriers exist, the institution demonstrates a level of readiness to initiate change. As noted previously, University X's (n.d.-a) *2017-2022 Strategic Plan* outlines a goal of improving the institution as a place to work, which indicates an awareness of improvement needed and a readiness to engage in the change process. Reflecting on the organizational change-readiness assessment tool, the institution must address three key areas, which are identified in this section (a) the overall mood of the organization, (b) staff not believing they have sufficient energy to undertake the change, and (c) staff not believing they have sufficient resources.

Area #1: The Overall Mood of the Organization

Over the past few years, there has been a notable increase in the sense of negativity and cynicism within the institution. The sense of negativity has significantly increased with the current COVID-19 pandemic. This sense of negativity is reflected in faculty and staff being less willing to volunteer for special events hosted by the institution, which can have a negative impact on the success of events. Due to the pandemic, there were also limited-term lay-offs for most staff, which has led to increased reports of overall dissatisfaction with the institution. Qian (2008, as cited in Caruth & Caruth, 2013, p. 16) showed that "the perceived quality of the information provided to workers, the pessimism of co-workers, and the lack of trust in the administration could forecast workplace cynicism, which ultimately leads to intentional resistance to organizational change". This finding is important and particularly relevant to University X, as there have been several recent institutional changes where faculty and staff have expressed concern with the lack of communication. It will be critical for leadership at all levels within University X to recognize this perceived lack of communication and take concrete action toward remedying it to improve the negativity within the institution.

Area #2: Staff not Believing They Have Sufficient Energy to Undertake the Change

Energy for change initiatives is an area of concern within the advising unit. Frequently, change is attempted, but it is not seen through to the anchoring stage, which leads to some reverting to their old processes. The advising unit is essentially not responsible for this, as they have had numerous change efforts start, but have lacked the leadership expertise to help drive the change through all of the necessary stages. Using Kotter's (2012) eight-step change process will help motivate staff and invigorate them, particularly when the stages are done appropriately and the staff feel that they are an important part of the process.

Area #3: Staff Not Believing They Have Sufficient Resources

Concern about resources is the most common issue discussed within the advising unit—specifically, student–advisor ratios. Influential voices within the group have cited work such as the NACADA 2011 National Survey of Academic Advising, which notes that the median caseload of professional academic advisors is 296, meaning 296 students for every academic advisor (Robbins, 2013). This figure is up from the 2003 NACADA survey, which listed the median caseload as 285 and recommended that this number be adjusted downward (Iowa State University, University Academic Advising Committee, 2009). These numbers have been whole-heartedly accepted by some academic advisors, which is unfortunate, as it provides minimal context related to organizational structure, engagement numbers, advising needs of students, or whether or not the advisors are professional advisors with no other responsibilities or faculty with teaching and research responsibilities (Robbins, 2013). As opposed to looking at numbers in isolation, a goal of the leadership team will be to identify data that will provide better determinants of where resources are needed. Advisors will need to be educated in areas related to engagement rates and resources allocated in more equitable ways than what has traditionally

been done. In addition, the academic advisors should receive increased training related to the use

of technology, which should help develop new, more efficient ways of meeting with students.

With significant changes being recommended within the academic advising unit, the

management team members will need to undergo substantial training and mentorship to help

successfully lead the academic advisors through the various stages of change. Carlisle and

Murphy (1996) provided an in-depth review of skills they consider to be essential for managers

to possess in order to motivate employees. These include having managers who can

(a) communicate effectively, (b) address employees' questions, (c) generate creative ideas,

(d) prioritize ideas, (e) direct personnel practices, (f) plan employees' actions, (g) commit

employees to action, and (h) provide follow-up to overcome motivational problems. With

adequate preparation, planning, and training, it is believed that the management team will prove

to be a vital tool in better positioning the advising unit in their own readiness for change. This

proposed training of the management team will ultimately result in a better experience for

students, as they will have more consistency, stronger processes, and best practices implemented

across the institution when the managers are better equipped to lead the advising teams.

In April 2019, as part of its first budget, the Ontario government introduced its new

funding model for public post-secondary institutions, which included the proposal to tie 60% of

university and college funding to a set of outcomes or measures (Ontario Confederation of

University Faculty Associations, 2019). Since that time, senior leadership within University X

has been working diligently to prepare itself for the possibility of these proposals being

implemented. A part of this preparation has been a deep exploration of student success including

the establishment of a number of working groups and committees focused on identifying

institutional opportunities to improve our student retention outcomes. In late 2019, senior

leadership gathered a collection of staff and faculty from a number of faculties and departments within the university to provide an overview of the institution's challenges should it not re-examine its approach to student success. Within that group, several committees were formed to look at areas of importance, including first-year orientation, first-year instructors, and the possibility of a restructured academic advising model. The suggestion of a restructured academic advising model had stemmed from a long-held belief that academic advising services were not adequately positioned for optimal student success outcomes. Specifically, the conversations focused on practices and processes within academic advising that have held the advisors back from being more proactive and transformational in their approaches with students. Several committee meetings were held, and feedback was provided to the Provost, which all indicated a high level of change readiness to adjust University X's current systems and processes to focus on student success.

The current COVID-19 crisis will pose additional challenges to the finances of both the provincial government and the institution alike and will increase student and parent demands for increased accountability, as unemployment rates have increased from 5.6% in January 2020 to 10.6% in August 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2020b). In addition, employment rates are far below pre-COVID-19 levels for youth, which minimizes opportunities to finance educational pursuits. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic has reaped havoc on low-wage employment, with only 87.4% returning to work since the pandemic struck ("Employment remains far below pre-Covid", para. 2). Therefore, financing a university education may become more difficult, while not pursuing further education may pose additional challenges due to the pandemic impact on low-wage employment opportunities.

The remaining challenge that the institution will have is retaining all of the students with its current online format, noting that traditionally, attrition rates remain high for online courses as compared to traditional learning environments, "with figures anywhere from 10% to approximately 50% higher" (Kauffman, 2015, p. 2). As negative perceptions persist regarding online studies (Kauffman, 2015), University X will need to make substantial efforts to transform its support services to combat the adverse effects of online studies. These effects include unfavourable learning outcomes, including decreased motivation and persistence (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005).

Thus far, the organization has demonstrated a high level of readiness to implement the necessary changes, as senior leadership has already approved the proposal of an academic advising restructure to help with student attrition concerns. However, the structural changes only represent a portion of the necessary changes, and continued efforts are required to shift the overall approach to advising.

Chapter 1 Conclusion

A clear leadership problem is apparent at University X. Chapter one has highlighted the structural and cultural issues that need to be addressed in order to begin to address the PoP. It has also provided a brief overview of University X, including an overview of its governance structure, its mission and values, and a snapshot of the organizational culture, from the perspective of the Manager of Academic Advising within one faculty. Chapter one has also provided an appropriate framing of the PoP by using Bolman and Deal's (2017) four-frame model to better understand the scope of the problems that currently exist within University X. Drawing from both transactional and transformational leadership approaches, this OIP continues to anticipate the possibility of offering valuable insights into how the academic advising unit can

become a more valuable tool in the institution's drive to improve first-year student retention

outcomes. Finally, the leadership-focused vision for change has been clearly articulated, and the

organization's readiness to take on that change has been assessed to acknowledge areas that need

to be addressed to best position the institution to take its next step in the change process.

Leadership approaches to change, two frameworks that will be used for leading change, and

possible solutions to address the PoP will be explored in chapter two.

Chapter 2: Planning and Development

University X needs to undergo significant changes to be better positioned to deal with poor first-year student retention outcomes. The aim in this chapter is to outline what leadership approaches will be implemented to drive the change process and the framework for leading the change. In addition, a critical organizational analysis will be included to explore how the framework for leading change can be used to address needed changes, and possible solutions to the problem of practice will be investigated with a preferred solution identified. Ethical and relevant change issues within the problem of practice (PoP) are also analyzed.

Leadership Approach(es) to Change

As this document moves through a further examination of the change initiative, it is important to explain the leadership approaches that will drive the desired changes within this OIP. To move change forward and to meet the needs of students at University X, the writer envisions a combination of transactional and transformational leadership approaches being applied. An overview of both approaches and how they are best positioned to meet the challenges that are present at the institution is provided in this section.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership has its roots in the leadership ideologies of sociologist Max Weber as outlined in his book *Economy and Society,* which was originally published in 1922 after his death and included his belief that there were three types of authority that people will accept as forms of control: (a) traditional authority, (b) legal-rational authority, and (c) charismatic authority (Weber, 2019). Traditional authority is validated by custom, legal-rational authority by impersonal rules, and charismatic authority by the extraordinary qualities of the leader (Breuilly, 2011) Traditional authority depends on the loyalty and faithfulness of

followers, and the leadership is arbitrary rather than based on rationality (Nikezic et al., 2012).

Legal-rational authority is driven by regulations, strict discipline, and established agreements

with followers, who are led by pre-established conditions. Charismatic leaders are seen as heroes

and can build personal trust through their charisma, vision, and mission (Nikezic et al., 2012). In

summary, Weber (2019) developed basic principles of bureaucracy, which is a formal system of

organization and administration designed to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. These early-

twentieth-century ideas helped form the basis of what was later identified a transactional

leadership.

A key attribute of the transactional leadership approach is the expectation of reciprocity.

This expectation is an important one that will play a special role in the implementation of a

transactional leadership approach within the academic advising unit. Currently, few opportunities

exist within the advising unit, and there are minimal external incentives for the members to

perform above and beyond their standard job duties. This has resulted in a level of frustration for

some within the group. Using a transactional leadership approach, which focuses on extrinsic

motivations and an exchange-based relationship between leader and follower, the desired

outcome will be for the group to be exposed and motivated by a number of new opportunities,

including management or alternative advising roles. The selection criteria for filling these roles

will focus heavily on job performance, particularly for leadership positions where unionization is

not a barrier to hiring the most qualified candidate.

Transactional Leadership Meets Transformational Leadership

The core concepts of transactional leadership heavily influenced the bureaucratic style of

leadership throughout the mid-twentieth century. In 1978, James MacGregor Burns (as cited in

Bass & Riggio, 2010) conceptualized leadership as either transactional or transformational,

stating that transactional business leaders offer rewards for accomplishments and deny rewards for lack of productivity. Burns (2012) highlighted transformational leadership as an approach that inspires and stimulates followers to achieve outcomes and develop their own leadership capacity. The transactional leadership approach is heavily focused on an exchange and is predicated on the leader discussing the conditions and requirements that need to be met for followers to receive the desired rewards. This discussion between a leader and followers has been lacking within the advising unit. As a starting point, it will be imperative for the advising unit to understand what exactly the expectations of the role are. Rather than their responsibilities being open for interpretation or determined by the individual, these will be carefully outlined so that people can start to work toward achieving the desired outcomes.

While MacGregor Burns introduced the concept of transactional and transformational as being at opposite ends of a continuum, Bernard Bass took the research to the next level with his 1985 introduction of the charismatic/transformational leadership theory. Bass argued that transactional and transformational leadership are separate concepts and that the best leaders exhibit aspects of both approaches (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Bass created a full range of leadership development approaches, which outlined a number of behaviours that manifest transactional and transformational behaviours. This has undergone several revisions over the years, but for this OIP, the approach being used identifies five categories. These categories are also divided between passive and active and effective and ineffective. The approaches are laissez-faire, passive management-by-exception, active management-by-exception, contingent reward, and the 4I's of transformational leadership (Sosik & Jung, 2018). The first two approaches: (a) laissez-faire and (b)passive management-by-exception, sit in both the passive and ineffective sub-categories, while the remaining three progress, in order, toward the goal,

which is the most active and effective approach referred to as the 4I's of transformational leadership. The academic advising group has primarily been managed through either a laissez-faire or management-by-exception approach.

Laissez-Fair Approach

Leaders who abdicate responsibility through delay in responding to urgent requests and do not follow up on issues demonstrate laissez-faire leadership (Sosik & Jung, 2018). As the academic advisors report to various leaders in different roles, there are instances where they experience this leadership style. For example, associate deans may not be comfortable dealing with some of the unique challenges presented within the advising office and may also not possess the unique skill set required to de-escalate common issues that present themselves, leading, at times, to this style of leadership.

Passive Management-by-Exception

This leadership style does not get involved in issues unless there is a problem that needs to be resolved. The old adage "if it ain't broken, don't fix it" perfectly captures this leadership approach, and these leaders are always focused on putting out *fires* (Sosik & Jung, 2018). Again, due to differing priorities, skill sets, or comfort levels, this leadership approach is quite common within the oversight of the academic advising unit. Managers of budgets and planning are typically tied up with establishing class schedules and managing budgets for the upcoming academic year. There would seldom be an opportunity to engage in proactive measures to address historic challenges within their advising teams.

Active Management-by-Exception

This approach involves a leader who proactively looks for problems that need to be fixed. Often identified as *micromanaging*, this form of leadership has positive aspects. It differentiates

itself from the passive leadership approach by monitoring followers' behaviour, anticipating problems, and taking corrective action before behaviours create significant challenges (Hurst et al., 2006). A level of frustration is apparent within the advising unit with the management styles they have experienced, which is primarily dominated by both laissez-faire and passive management-by-exception, but active management-by-exception would come as a surprise to the group, many of whom have been left with a high level of self-governance over the years.

Contingent Reward

The contingent reward approach represents an exchange relationship between leader and follower. The leader sets goals and expectations, and the followers work to achieve the goals and expectations laid out for them. Research has shown that this style of leadership "is generally effective at establishing base levels of trust and commitment in followers and for meeting targeted performance levels" (Sosik & Jung, 2018, p. 11). There are opportunities to utilize this approach to leadership to drive change within the advising unit. As the changes commence, the contingent reward approach will be implemented to incentivize staff to work toward pre-established goals. In a study of how transactional and transformational leadership approaches impact the achievement of goals, Hamstra et al. (2013) found that transformational leadership can be instrumental in promoting followers' adoption of mastery goals, while transactional leadership can be instrumental in promoting followers' adoption of performance goals. As it will be critical for the academic advisors to adopt the newly established performance goals, it will be advantageous for the leadership team to utilize the contingent reward approach to transactional leadership to help achieve this change.

Knowing that the contingent reward approach has limitations, its use will be limited to the first phase of change. It should help, initially, as structural changes occur and people are

motivated to assume different roles. It will be prudent for the leadership team to look toward the 4Is of transformational leadership to inspire and motivate staff when shifting both the culture and approach to advising, particularly due to the importance that motivation and inspiration plays within the advising unit.

<div align="center">**Framework for Leading the Change Process**</div>

Leading change is never a one-size-fits-all approach, and the change process is often filled with emotional peaks and valleys. Two different frameworks for leading the change process will be explored to outline how University X will change. First, Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process will be utilized due to its highly structured step-by-step process, which will help the newly established leadership team walk through the clearly outlined steps. This will be compared with Duck's (2011) five-stage change curve, which has been selected as it focuses on people and the range of their emotional reactions to change (Cawsey et al., 2016). This point is particularly important, as the advising unit could be characterized as being quite emotionally driven, which can be seen as a quality characteristic, given their job duties.

Kotter's Eight-Stage Process

Kotter (1995a) developed the eight-stage process of change following observation of over 100 companies trying to re-make themselves into better organizations. His eight stages outlined vital actions organizations need to take to make fundamental changes that are required to cope with an ever-challenging marketplace (Kotter, 1995a).

Kotter's first step of creating a sense of urgency is aimed at addressing potential complacency and moving employees from a sense of invulnerability to vulnerability (Cawsey et al., 2016). Kotter (2012) referred to major opportunities and to crises as causes for creating urgency. His second step, creating a guiding coalition, is related to establishing a leadership

group that can help lead the change process. Petrescu (2010) noted that this coalition needs to be led by a powerful group that possesses leadership skills, credibility, communication skills, analytical skills, and a sense of necessity (p. 4).

The third step in Kotter's (1995a) eight-stage process is to develop a vision and strategy. This step is dedicated to explaining how the future will differ from the past and how it can be transformed into reality (Petrescu, 2010). The vision must be meaningful, ethical, and inspiring. Kotter (1995b) also noted that a vision must be imaginable, desirable, feasible, focused, flexible, and communicable. Next is communicating the change vision. Kotter (1995a) noted that this is done by using every possible vehicle to communicate the vision and strategies. This is a critical step, as under-communication is often the reason behind the failed change (Kotter, 1995a).

Step five is dedicated to empowering employees for broad-based action. Large numbers of employees need to embrace the change for the change to be successful (Cawsey et al., 2016). Empowering employees includes listening to them, investing in them through education, and making them responsible for major accomplishments (Gupta, 2011). Step six is to generate short-term wins. These short-term wins will be important in highlighting the clear benefits of staff's efforts (Nitta et al., 2009). These wins need to be visible, unambiguous, and clearly connected to the change (Nitta et al., 2009).

Step seven is dedicated to consolidating gains and producing more change. Gupta (2011) noted the importance of using initial successes as the foundation for expanded, greater innovation successes. He noted how initial wins should be looked at "as seeds that need to be watered and nurtured to become trees of innovation" (p. 7). The final step in Kotter's eight-stage process is anchoring new approaches, which is vitally important by ensuring that the change is embedded in the organization's cultural norms and values (Cawsey et al., 2016). Gupta (2011)

likened anchoring to hard wiring one's brain for innovation. This will undoubtedly require a significant amount of time and effort, but following Kotter's steps outlined in this section will help move the culture toward a greater acceptance of the change.

Duck's Five-Stage Change Curve

In her book *The Change Monster*, Duck (2011) described how "changing an organization is inherently and inescapably an emotional human process" (p. 24). Duck argued how emotions are data that are just as powerful as any other tangible aspect of organizational performance and that as an organization embarks on change, it has to address the onslaught of emotions and human dynamics that are impacted by that change. Duck's five-stage change curve includes the stages of (a) stagnation, (b) preparation, (c) implementation, (d) determination, and (e) fruition (Cawsey et al., 2016). Each step is described in greater detail in this section.

Duck (2011) noted how stagnation, the first stage in the five-stage process, can be caused by a number of factors, including poor strategy, lack of leadership, lack of new products or services, and outdated technology or processes. At the stagnation stage, organizations collectively ignore the need for ongoing innovation and change. Duck also noted that this stage can only be ended with a "forceful demand from someone in a position of power and authority" (p. 36). Stagnation is the current stage where the advising unit sits within Duck's five-stage change curve. The next stage, preparation, requires a significant amount of work, including designing the new organizational structure, defining roles and responsibilities, and determining which products or services will be essential going forward (Duck, 2011). This is the phase where the emotional reactions begin. It is common for people to experience emotions such as anxiety, excitement, betrayal, or hopefulness. This is when alignment among the leadership group is critical, as misalignment can lead to disastrous effects on the change plan (Duck, 2011).

Stage three is the implementation phase. In this phase, many of the emotions that first appeared in the preparation phase are now out in full force. Leaders need to help the followers believe that the change plans will work and to ensure implementation is being appropriately executed (Duck, 2011). Determination is stage four, and this is the phase Duck (2011) referred to as the most critical phase of the change process, as the initiative is at the most danger of failing. This is the phase where people may experience "change fatigue" and revert to their old ways (p. 47). During this phase, people start to recognize that the change is real and that they will have to live their work lives differently, which may be hard for some to accept (Duck, 2011).

Finally, stage five is the fruition stage. This phase is where all of the hard work pays off, and the organization seems new (Duck, 2011). Employees are optimistic and energized and feel confident in their new reality (Duck, 2011). Cawsey et al. (2016) noted the importance of not becoming complacent at this phase, as this would only invite future stagnation.

Critique of Kotter and Duck's Work

Both frameworks for leading change are relevant and contain components critical to the overall success of this OIP. Kotter's eight-stage process has been criticized for his work lacking outside sources and only relying on his personal business and research experience (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Despite this, Kotter's work has become hugely influential in the world of change management, and much work has been done in support of his original framework.

Another criticism of Kotter's work has been the sequential order with which he insisted the steps need to be completed. Sidorko (2008) was critical of Kotter's insistence on the ordering of steps, arguing that establishing guiding coalitions needs to be done numerous times to deal with different aspects of the change process. Other criticisms of Kotter's work include the fact that some steps are not relevant in all cases, insufficient depth for challenging cases, difficulty in

implementing all steps, and difficulty with evaluating the success of all steps (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Appelbaum et al. (2012) concluded that, overall, Kotter's work stands up when reviewing his work and how his later work validated the work he had completed in 1995 and 1996. Despite the criticisms of Kotter's work, his eight-stage process provides the most applicable framework for leading change within the academic advising unit, as it includes many steps that have been attempted and proven to be successful within the group as well as steps that have been omitted, which may speak to the failure of previous attempts to lead change.

Much of the criticism of Duck's (2011) five-stage change curve is limited to short book reviews. First, there is criticism that the author's professional role as a consultant limits her overall perspective in the change process and that there is little mention of the forces that fuel the actual change throughout the book (Carnall, 2001). Carnall (2001) noted how it lacks details of how to handle change using the tools described, but never detailed within the book. Dodson (2001) also took issue with the author's career in consulting by highlighting how the book's dependence on personal and corporate "anecdotes" are disorienting to the reader as it is too dependant on "war stories" that are too difficult to thread together and place in a neat context. Dodson posited that this style of writing, written by consultancies, is largely for the purpose of promoting the work of those consultancies (p. 73).

Second, and more importantly, is the criticism that Duck's (2011) book does not offer anything significantly different than what currently exists within the dozens of books dedicated to the genre of change management. This is important, as this writer found many strong similarities between Duck's five-stage change curve and Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process. Both cover similar topics, and there is a significant amount of overlap between the two author's work. Duck's *Change Monster* is important to this OIP, as it delves more deeply into the

emotional aspect of change, focusing on the importance of gaining commitment and successfully addressing anxiety related to change. In contrast, Kotter's work presents as more prescriptive and linear, which may be particularly useful, given the context of new managers driving much of the change within the academic advising unit. Ultimately, Kotter's eight-stage process will be used as the main framework for leading the change process, but Duck's five stages will be used to supplement, as they provide valuable additional emphasis on the emotional impact of change.

Using the work of both Kotter (2012) and Duck (2011) as desired change management frameworks aligns nicely with the leadership approaches that have been selected for this PoP. The transactional leadership approach will be used in the early phases of change management. Within Duck's change curve, transactional leadership will be utilized in the stagnation phase, which requires a strong leadership approach to move people out of the non-productive state. It will also be used in the preparation stage that focuses heavily on tasks such as defining roles and responsibilities within the desired change. As for Kotter's eight-stage change process, transactional leadership will be utilized in the first three stages. This will transition to a transformational leadership approach, as communicating the change vision will need to incorporate methods of motivating staff intrinsically. Similarly, within Duck's change curve, the implementation phase will be the moment where transformational leadership approaches are implemented, as the structural changes will be in place, and the focus will shift toward how staff can be motivated to perform above and beyond traditional expectations. This is not to say there will not be employee engagement in the early phases of each model. Rather these phases will present opportunities to utilize a contingent reward approach to leadership, as this is the period when many new options will be available for the advising group to pursue. Therefore, this writer

hopes to capitalize on the opportunities in the early stages of change before transitioning to more transformational approaches throughout the change process.

Critical Organizational Analysis

In chapter one, an organizational readiness assessment tool was utilized to identify the level of readiness for change within University X and potential areas that needed to be addressed. Two main areas for improvement were identified through the assessment tool, which were communication and workplace culture. Workplace culture is used as an umbrella term to capture the flagged concerns related to the level of motivation to change and the idea that staff do not feel adequately resourced for change. Using Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process along with Duck's (2011) five-stage change curve, the writer hopes to outline the current state at University X and the steps needed to move to the future, desired state.

Establish a Sense of Urgency

This step has largely already occurred via a meeting held by the Provost in late October 2020, where she had laid out the challenges that lay ahead of the university and the interest in restructuring the academic advising unit to be better positioned to help address issues related to student retention. The communication was clear and concise, and she offered the group the opportunity to provide feedback. This was the initial step in the process, and feedback was initially quite positive, as the messaging included increased resources for the academic advising unit. Kotter (2012) noted the importance of providing evidence for the required change. He also explains how, in over half of the companies he worked with, they were unable to create enough urgency to prompt action. Without motivation, people will not help, and the change process will go nowhere (Kotter, 2012).

Most academic advisors recognize the need for change. Typically, reports of financial struggles would not be sufficient to motivate the group. However, coming off of a round of seasonal layoffs, it is anticipated that staff do not wish to repeat this process. The institution has already demonstrated its intent should further layoffs be necessary, and the disproportionate burden was and will continue to be placed on student services to endure losses should the institution's financial situation not improve. Therefore, the sense of urgency should be firmly established within the group. This aligns with Kotter's first suggestion of ways to create urgency. He noted the effectiveness of allowing a financial loss as a way to create urgency (Kotter, 2012). While the institution's financial loss has not been "allowed," it does provide a unique opportunity.

In Duck's (2011) book, *The Change Monster*, her first step (stagnation) closely mirrors Kotter's (2012) work around complacency. At University X, the academic advising group falls into what Duck referred to as "depressive stagnation," which is defined as having no sense of direction or purpose (p. 57). Duck noted that this state of stagnation can only be ended by someone in positional power and authority, which is precisely the reason behind the restructure and establishment of a director role. There have been varied efforts over the years to address stagnation, with little success. Kotter's eight-stage process has been criticized as being largely a top-down approach (Galli, 2018), which mirrors the aforementioned point regarding Duck's emphasis on positional power and authority in moving out of the stagnation stage. While this criticism may have some merit, it may also be necessary at this phase of change due to the institution's history of failed change attempts.

Create a Guiding Coalition

It is suggested that these people be fairly powerful in terms of their positions and the reputations and relationships they have (Coutts, 2011). This group will be tasked with helping continue to drive the messaging that there is urgency behind the need for change. This step may pose challenges due to the previously noted non-positional authority that exists within the group. Some members have expressed the opinion that leadership positions should be filled based on seniority of staff, which does not align with the writer's worldview: Competence, demonstrated ability, and experience in driving change should be of primary importance when selecting candidates. Folger and Skarlicki (1999) noted that when organizational decisions and managerial actions are deemed unfair, the affected employees experience feelings of anger, outrage, and a desire for retribution. This is precisely the type of reaction the department is hoping to avoid, but which may arise throughout stage 2 of Kotter's (2012) change process. To best combat this potential reaction, it will be imperative to follow Kotter's suggestion to focus on building a team based on trust and a common goal. Trust building will be a critical focus in establishing the management team, and they will be strongly encouraged to work tirelessly on establishing trust within their respective teams.

Develop a Vision and Strategy

This step highlights the importance of developing an inspiring future, including solid implementation plans and steps (Cawsey et al., 2016). Currently, there is no overarching vision or strategy within the advising unit due to the de-centralized nature of services. Kotter (2012) highlighted the importance of clarifying the direction of change; he noted that, more often than not, people either disagree with the direction, they are confused, or they are unsure whether change is necessary. The clarity in messaging will be critical with the advising group. Over the

years, they have received little support regarding the purpose of their roles, their specific job

duties, and the over-arching vision for the services they provide. The message will clearly

articulate that the service exists to ensure that University X becomes a provincial leader in

student success, student satisfaction, and student retention outcomes. Everything the advisors do

moving forward should be deeply connected to those three pillars. In addition, the importance of

taking a scientific approach to the recommended changes will be integrated into the messaging.

Regardless of past experiences or habits, the leadership team will seek to identify what

approaches have empirical support for continuing and remove practices that can not provide

evidence of actually helping our students.

Communicate the Change Vision

As communication was identified as one of the main issues within the organizational

readiness assessment tool, this step will be of critical importance to the success of the overall

change implementation. Kotter (2012, p. 92) noted several key elements in the effective

communication of vision: (a) simplicity (b) metaphor, analogy, and example; (c) multiple

forums; (d) repetition; (e) leadership by example; (f) explanation of seeming inconsistencies; and

(g) give-and-take. These key elements will be followed, as they provide a useful template for the

leadership team. Also, Kotter noted the importance of simple and direct messaging, which is

vital to re-set the standard pattern of communication, which tends to be inconsistent, indirect, or

multi-layered, which causes people to lose focus.

Much of what is noted in Duck's (2011) second phase (preparation) mirror the steps

outlined in Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process, specifically creating a guiding coalition,

developing a vision and strategy, and communicating the change vision. Duck's emphasis on the

emotional aspect of change is particularly relevant, as she defined anxiety as caring about an

outcome, but being unsure of how things will turn out. She later noted how adding hope to anxiety results in the creation of anticipation. This highlights the importance of positivity throughout the entire change process, which will be a top priority for the leadership group to implement throughout all of their interactions with staff.

Empowering Employees for Broad-Based Action

This step will undoubtedly be the most challenging, as it relates to successfully implementing the desired changes at University X. Kotter (2012, p. 106) suggested a number of main obstacles to the empowerment of employees: (a) structures, (b) skills, (c) systems, and (d) supervisors. As for the structural barriers, Grites et al. (2016) noted how academic advisors may be marginalized from the organizational hierarchy, which prevents them from having a meaningful impact on the creation of policy or structural changes. Within University X, the academic advisors have a strong presence and are typically heavily involved in working groups and committees dedicated to reviewing policies or practices within the institution. The structural barrier appears to persist within the leadership structure itself, as each faculty's advising team has its own interpretation of what academic advising should be. This wide range of differences makes it difficult for the group to speak with a united voice, particularly in addressing the long-standing issue of role clarity. Without addressing role clarity, advisor's roles continue to be open to interpretation depending on the current leadership within their faculty. This undoubtedly impacts their empowerment, as advisors spend a considerable amount of time and effort comparing and contrasting each other's roles, either excitingly or with high levels of concern.

The second barrier to empowerment is not having adequate skills, which is a legitimate barrier within the advising unit. Kotter (2012, p. 112) noted how people are often "taught technical skills, but not the social skills or attitudes needed to make the new arrangements work".

University X has made considerable attempts to upskill the advising unit with varying results. As per Kotter's observation, the subjects appear to be taught in relative isolation with little follow-up or connection to a bigger picture, which inhibits the ultimate success of the institution's attempts to upskill to meet the unique challenges of the role.

The third and fourth barriers to empowerment are needing to align systems to a vision, and dealing with difficult supervisors has not been addressed, as there are no current systems in place to align to a vision, nor are there supervisors who have been hired to date. However, both areas must be considered within the objective of empowering employees for broad-based action.

Generate Short-Term Wins

Kotter's (2012) emphasis on demonstrating that efforts are paying off through the establishment of short-term wins is important, as large-scale changes, such as the desired changes of restructuring academic advising, will take a considerable amount of time to be fully actualized. Within Duck's (2011) five stages, her third stage, implementation, also emphasizes celebrating wins, no matter how small. Kang et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of authentic short-terms wins to show that the contributions to the change process were valued, which fosters further buy-in, which may seem trivial or obvious, but authenticity will be crucial in securing buy-in from the advising unit. Efforts that are seen to be inauthentic can easily derail progress (Calegari et al., 2015), and all efforts need to be dedicated to moving forward in the change process.

Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change

For this step, Kotter (2012) emphasized the importance of not letting up prior to the new state being fully solidified, as regression can begin, and its momentum can be hard to stop once it starts. Kotter highlighted the problem with interdependence within the workplace and how

individuals being asked to change typically have numerous competing forces pulling them in different directions, which can slow or stop change from being successful. Kotter noted the importance of ending unnecessary interdependencies, which often slows down the change agenda, but will ultimately make change easier. Cleaning up the historical interdependencies within University X will be a major focus, and although it may slow down the change agenda, it will be prudent, as this step will ultimately involve more change, not less.

For Duck's (2011) fourth stage, determination, she noted how this stage is where people really start to question their current place and the organization related to the change(s) happening around them. Duck also noted how every organization goes through a determination phase and that the nature and duration of the phase can vary, but it largely depends on the actions and behaviours of leadership. This phase resembles Kotter's (2012) consolidation step, as he, too, noted that the step could be slow and painful if not handled appropriately. As noted previously, deliberate attempts to keep messaging and the atmosphere positive will be critical to the successful implementation of the desired changes.

Anchor New Approaches in the Culture

Kotter (2012) defined culture as "the norms of behaviour and shared values among a group of people" (p. 156). Kotter explained the extreme difficulty in "killing off" an old culture and creating a new one, which is why, he believes, cultural change happens at the end of the change process, rather than at the beginning (p. 164). Culture change occurs only after people's actions have been shifted after the new behaviour produces some benefit and after people see the connection between the new actions and the new business improvement. Knowing that changing a culture typically happens at the end of the eight-stage process rather than the beginning is important, wasting time and effort trying to shift the culture prematurely and focus on shifting

the actions could be avoided. This aligns with the proposed changes, as it will start with a

reporting restructure and evolve, over time, to include a complete rethinking of how advising

services are provided.

Duck's (2011) fifth stage, fruition, offers two distinct opportunities: (a) to cement the

trust and unity that have been gained throughout the organization and (b) to embed the

capabilities and attitudes that have produced the success (p. 303). Duck highlighted the

importance of rewarding and celebrating achieving the fruition stage and reminded the reader

that those who reach fruition should not rest on their laurels for long. Duck and Kotter both

highlighted the importance of ensuring that the appetite for change is institutionalized.

Using Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process and Duck's (2011) five-stage change

curve, a plan of what needs to change and how it will change has been identified, addressing the

issues identified in the organizational readiness assessment tool. A visual of the proposed

alignment between the two selected change management frameworks is provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The Alignment of Kotter's Eight-Stage Change Process with Duck's Five-Stage Change Curve

Note: Compiled from Kotter (2012, p. 23) and Duck (2001, p. 32).

Possible Solutions to Address the Problem of Practice

University X could take three approaches to resolve this (a) maintain the status quo; (b) implement structural changes alone, which includes a dedicated team of first-year academic advisors; or (c) implement a full structural change along with a full revision of the service model to a case management model of academic advising. In this section, the human, time, and financial resource requirements will be explored along with the benefits and consequences of each potential solution.

Solution A: Status Quo

In October 2020, the Provost announced the creation of a director role of academic advising and the idea of restructuring academic advising to better address student retention. The writer has accepted an offer to become the next director, but the role has just commenced as of the time of writing. To date, there have been no formal changes; hence, the situation within academic advising technically remains the same. The announcement of the director position and potential structural changes have created a level of turmoil and anxiety within the advising unit, as the proposed changes would impact their jobs significantly.

Human Resources

Maintaining the status quo would not require any additional human resources, as there would be no change to staffing, aside from the previously announced director role. There would continue to be approximately 20 academic advisors and two managers of academic advising. In addition, there are currently three faculties that have administrative assistants working directly within the academic advising units and other managers or directors that oversee the advising portfolios in some faculties.

Financial Resources

Continuing with the status quo would involve no additional expenses aside from the aforementioned director role. However, maintaining the current situation would do nothing to address the significant financial concerns outlined in chapter one, specifically the financial impact of losing twice the provincial average number of students due to attrition. Coupled with an increasingly competitive market for students domestically and the loss of international students, maintaining the status quo could be devastating to the long-term financial viability of the institution.

Time Resources

Maintaining the status quo would require no additional time resources. The newly established director role could simply ask the academic advisors to prioritize specific groups such as first-year students and students identified as "at-risk" through the early warning system, which is currently being done, to some extent, within some of the faculties. Aside from a few additional meetings, the time resources would essentially remain unchanged.

Benefits and Consequences of Solution A

An obvious benefit to maintaining the status quo would be maintaining relative harmony within the academic advising unit. Several advisors have expressed dissatisfaction with the idea of restructuring the academic advising unit; therefore, maintaining the status quo could align with the Bolman and Deal's (2017) human resources frame that notes leaders of organizations should serve human needs (in this case, the academic advisors) as opposed to organizational needs (Holmes & Scull, 2019). This group of individuals would likely be relieved to hear that there would be no change. This would also mean that students would not have to learn a new academic advising system and would be able to maintain the personal relationships with the

advisors they currently have. Vianden (2016) highlighted the importance of the personal advisor-advisee relationship, noting that it is critical to positive student outcomes. McGill (2016) also believed that the process of creating a strong relationship between a student and an academic advisor will increase student retention. Walker et al. (2017) highlighted that a major dissatisfaction with students was that advisors did not know their students and made little effort to get to know them. This happens within some institutions during centralization. Maintaining the status quo will leave the current advisor–advisee relationships largely intact, which could be helpful in retaining students.

Secondly, in his book *Change Leadership in Higher Education*, Buller (2015, p. 57) introduced the concept of action bias, which he notes is "the fallacy that it is always better to be doing something rather than nothing". Perhaps the action bias is at play within University X. Taking decisive action needs to be rethought, and maintaining the status quo is more advantageous than initially believed, specifically when you consider the positive impact that the personal advisor–advisee relationships are reported to have on student retention outcomes.

Of all of the potential consequences of Solution A, none are more prominent than the lack of addressing the financial pressures that University X faces. Losing students through attrition hurts the institution's bottom line. Increased government pressure on achieving outcomes related to student success will only exacerbate this issue. Furthermore, Whisman (2009) noted the increased importance of institutional brand for today's post-secondary students. Students want to go to elite institutions that are highly regarded. With the increased prevalence of information available to students online, institutions with poor student satisfaction levels and high attrition rates may feel their financial situations magnified, should they elect not to take decisive action.

Finally, the hiring of a director was done for the purpose of driving needed changes. Maintaining the status quo outside of the director's hire would leave the role in a relatively powerless position. The director could ask that each faculty attempt new processes or best practices, but with the advisors reporting to their individual faculties, ensuring compliance could prove challenging. Failure to establish key initiatives such as a dedicated first-year advising team could limit the impact on retention outcomes, which was a key driver in the establishment of the director role when it was created.

Solution B: Structural Change Only

As noted in the discussion of Solution A, message regarding structural changes within the academic advising unit has already been released, and the director position has been posted and filled. This proposed solution would follow through only on what was announced previously, including the addition of a director, the creation of a team dedicated to first-year student advising, and the reorganization of faculty advising teams into two larger teams.

Human Resources

For Solution B to occur, it would involve the creation of a director role and one new manager role. Currently, there are two managers of academic advising, but this number would increase to three, as two managers would split the faculties between them, with the third being dedicated to managing first-year advisors. Other than that, the human resources requirement would stay the same.

Financial Resources

The financial requirements for Solution B to become a reality would be limited to the hiring of two additional staff. To adequately prepare the staff for better alignment with the strategic initiative of improved student retention outcomes, additional professional development

training sessions would likely be required. The Provost has assured the Director of Academic Advising that there will be continued access to previously approved funds to pursue professional development opportunities related to the unit's restructuring.

Time Resources

Within University X, change tends to happen slowly. Outlining the structural changes and realignment of the staff to certain managers could happen relatively quickly, but the time needed to solidify the changes and to have staff fully transition to the new structural framework would be extensive. In discussing Bolman and Deal's four frames, Schoepp and Tezcan-Unall (2017) identified that the structural frame represents goals, policies, roles, and responsibilities within an organization. Changing the academic advising unit structure would require an extensive amount of time resources, particularly in preparing the group for change. As noted by Morin et al. (2016), Kotter's (2012) fifth stage of change highlights the importance of empowering employees; therefore, it is critical to provide them with the training and resources to cope with the demands created by the change. One option would be to start with initial training related to change management itself, which will allow staff to recognize the personal stages of change, which could help reduce some initial resistance. Salerno and Brock's (2008) change cycle training program captures the thoughts and feelings one experiences as one moves through change and has a heavy emphasis on personal accountability for one's reactions to change. Salerno and Brock outlined six stages of change: loss, doubt, discomfort, discovery, understanding, and integration. A brief overview of the anticipated feelings, thoughts, and behaviours of each stage within the cycle are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

The Six Stages of Change as Identified by Salerno and Brock (2008)

Stage	Description
1: Loss	Participants may feel lost in this initial stage, thinking cautiously and behaving in a paralyzed manner.
2: Doubt	Participants may feel resentment, think skeptically and demonstrate resistant behaviours.
3: Discomfort	Participants may demonstrate feelings of anxiety, exhibit signs of confused thought processes and behave in unproductive ways.
4: Discovery	Participants may have feelings of anticipation, demonstrate thoughts of resourcefulness and show signs of being energized.
5: Understanding	Participants may have feelings of confidence in this stage, along with pragmatic thoughts and productive behaviours.
6: Integration	Participant's feelings are typically that of satisfaction at this stage, and they are focused and generous in their thoughts and behaviours

Note: Compiled from Salerno and Brock (2008)

This direct, easy-to-understand training style is particularly relevant, but will require time to complete, reinforce, and ultimately adopt. A similar style of training sessions would also need to happen for the newly created team dedicated to first-year advising. This group specifically would be targeted for more training, as their roles will be slightly different than that of a traditional academic advisor. As first-year students experience the highest rates of attrition (Walker et al., 2017), it is imperative that this group recognize the critical importance of communicating with these students, as communication is a key factor in the students' perception of the value of academic advising services (Walker et al., 2017).

Benefits and Consequences of Solution B

The first benefit that would be recognized with the implementation of Solution B would be establishing a united voice to speak on behalf of the academic advising unit. Currently, the advising unit is the only unit divided across all faculties and does not have a united voice when major institutional changes are being implemented. At times, their interests are represented by deans, associate deans, managers, or directors, but those individuals do not have academic advising as their primary focus, and it is common to hear, among the advising group, that those individual roles do not fully understand the role and its intricacies completely. Through the implementation of structural changes, the newly created director role will have a platform to work with other senior leaders within the institution, and they will be able to bring forward the concerns and challenges that exist within the unit in an attempt to improve their working experience. There will be a clear process for *filtering up* concerns, with accountability on the director to advocate for their unit.

Coupled with the establishment of a united voice, the restructure of advising services will allow for the increased consistency related to the student experience. Within University X, too many inconsistent approaches exist related to the student experience. Requirements for processes such as deferred exams differ between faculties, which is an issue, as many students take courses across faculty lines. The structural change will allow the director to work with faculty deans and their management teams to establish consistencies in all advising-related matters, which should address an issue that students have raised numerous times over the years.

Finally, Solution B presents an opportunity to make changes, but the transition to fully implementing those changes is not expected to be particularly challenging. This change would be categorized as a first-order change, which Kezar (2018, p. 71) noted involves "minor

improvements or adjustments". While the changes may seem significant, this structural change would not change the core roles and responsibilities of the academic advising unit. Although they would be given extra training and their reporting structure would look different, there would be nothing that would challenge the existing assumptions and beliefs to better align with the environment, which is a trademark of Kezar's (2018) second-order change. Thus, the changes outlined in Solution B would require less time and effort when compared with Solution C.

Solution C: Structural Change and a Full Revision of Academic Advising Services

Solution C presents the most extensive changes of all options, as it aims to shift the model of academic advising services and will represent deep, transformational, second-order change, which Kezar (2018) defined as "change so substantial that it alters operating systems, underlying values and culture of an organization or system" (p. 85). This option will be the most resource-intensive of all of the options.

Human Resources

The human resources required for Solution C mirror that of Solution B with the addition of a director and a new manager. Other than that, the resources would shift in accordance with that of Solution B—a team dedicated to first-year students and two teams for the other students.

Financial Resources

Essentially, this, too, would mirror that of Solution B. The main difference would be the increased demand for professional development funds, as academic advisors would require the training outlined in Solution B. Additionally, they would require training related to proactive/intrusive advising, which will be a cornerstone of the new case management model. The training related to proactive/intrusive advising will not be completed in one session, but

rather in several sessions and potentially involve a number of different resources, as advisors will need to have a deep understanding and appreciation for the positive impact of this model.

Time Resources

The time resources required for the successful implementation of Solution C far exceed that of Solution B. The time required for deep, transformational change can be very time-consuming (Mavrinac, 2005), and this perspective aligns with the anticipated time that will be needed to shift the model of advising services. The time required for Solution C largely depends on the amount of time spent in Kotter's (2012) consolidation step, or Duck's (2011) determination phase, but is estimated to take 3–5 years to be successfully implemented. If the preceding steps in each model are successful, the complete restructure should fall within the aforementioned timelines with demonstrated results to support the success of the changes. A summary of the three options and the required resources along with expected outcomes is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Possible Solutions to Address Problem of Practice

Option	Human Resources	Financial Resources	Time Resources	Expected Outcomes
Solution A: Status quo	No change	No change	No change	Student retention outcomes to continue to decline. University X to continue to be among the poorest performing institutions in Ontario
Solution B: Structure changes only	An increase in human resources required	An increase in financial resources required	Increase in time resources required (~1 year)	Slight increases in each of the noted resources may be offset by slightly improved student retention outcomes
Solution C: Structural changes plus full revision of advising services	The same increase in human resources as Solution B	An increase in financial resources to support hiring and increased professional development	A significant increase in time resources when compared with Solution A or B (3–5+ years)	Significant improvement in student retention outcomes when compared with solution A or B

Preferred Solution and Rationale

To address the PoP, Solution C is being selected as the option, as it provides the

institution with the opportunity to address many historical issues that have held the institution

back from becoming a leader in student retention outcomes. Solution C is preferred, as it will

address centralization, issues related to the availability of academic advisors, the implementation

of a case management approach to first-year students, the creation of a proactive advising model,

and the improvement of accountability within advising. Chiteng Kot (2014) found that

centralized academic advising services positively and significantly impacted student GPA.

Knowing this is critical, as Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that GPA is the best predictor

of student persistence.

Steingass and Sykes (2008) reviewed the situation at Virginia Commonwealth University

when they centralized their advising services and implemented many of the recommendations

that are being recommended in Solution C, including the development of advising goals and

objectives (i.e., accountability), implementing a proactive advising approach, and increasing the

professional development of academic advisors. They reported a 14% increase in students

expressing high levels of satisfaction with advising services (i.e., student satisfaction), a record

number of students (76%) ending their first years in good academic standing (i.e., student

success), and a record percentage (82%) of students returning for a second year (student

retention) (p. 20). These findings align precisely with the pillars with which Solution C is

founded: student success, student satisfaction, and student retention. Finally, in reviewing

various academic advising models, King (1993) concluded that there is an ideal advising model,

which includes a full-time director and full-time, well-trained academic advisors. This is

precisely the model recommended within Solution C.

For managers in academic advising, a complaint often heard is regarding the lack of

availability of advising appointments. This is of particular concern for students who are in

distress. Solution C will seek to increase the availability of advising sessions through a

combination of cross-program training and technology. Currently, many advisors oversee

independent programs, which is good for building relationships, but often results in inequities

related to workload, which impacts availability. This is also an equity issue for students, as it

leaves some students without adequate access to advising services. Each of the advisors will

receive adequate cross-program training so that they can serve students across programs within

their respective faculty. In addition, staff will incorporate technology to integrate information

sessions, group advising sessions, and town halls to increase their interaction with students. Mu

and Fosnacht (2019) found that for each meeting with an academic advisor, there was an increase

in self-reported gains as well as an increase in grades. Lowe and Toney (2000) also found that

students ranked availability of academic advising as a top priority and recommended that there

be an increase in the assigning and selection of advisors to meet the student's unique needs.

Addressing the issue of accessibility will be achieved through Solution C and the full revision of

advising services.

The revision of academic advising services will include a transition to a case

management model of advising, particularly for first-year students, as this is the area where

attrition is most likely to be an issue. In explaining what is meant by *case management*, Smith

(1995, p. 2) highlighted universal functions related to case management: (a) identifying and

attracting clients, (b) completing intakes and assessments, (c) developing a coordinated service

plan, (d) advocating on behalf of the client(s) while brokering and linking different services

together, (e) implementing and monitoring service delivery, and (f) continually evaluating and

adjusting the service delivery plan while determining outcomes clients are or are not achieving.

These are many of the universal functions that need to be implemented through the revision of

advising services. Somme et al. (2012) defined case management as involving assessment, an

individualized plan, and monitoring. While this definition is focused on a healthcare setting, it

also provides a solid foundation of how case management can be used within academic advising at University X.

Next, Solution C will include a transition to proactive advising, also referred to as intrusive advising. With intrusive advising, the academic advisors intentionally seek out students for advising contact, and, in many cases, the advising contact will be mandated such that student failure to fulfill advising obligations results in academic punishments (Schwebel et al., 2012). Thus far, the institution has resisted any steps to make advising services mandatory, but in the face of the current retention crisis, the director will be responsible for engaging senior leaders within the institution to argue for stronger measures to be implemented. Cruise (2002) stressed the need for advisers to initiate communication with students, follow up if students fail to respond, and meet with students on a regular basis. In its current state, the academic advisors react to student issues rather than proactively working with students to help them prior to a crisis arising. Solution B creates a new structure, but does not provide the transformational change recommended in Solution C, which is the ultimate goal, as it will empower staff to play a more productive role in addressing student retention-related issues.

Finally, Solution C is being recommended as it will provide an opportunity to create a culture of accountability. Through a revision of the academic advising job description, advisors will have specific accountabilities integrated into their roles. The director will be responsible for year-over-year improvements related to student success, satisfaction, and retention through the restructure. Metrics will be used to measure management performance, and the advisors themselves will have these *pillars* integrated into their annual performance evaluations. By providing sufficient professional development, the advising unit will become more comfortable with an increased emphasis on achieving institutional goals. Increased accountability from

academic advisors was found to contribute to student responsibility, student self-efficacy, student study skills, and perceived support (Young-Jones et al., 2013), which are some positive outcomes the department hopes to achieve. Items such as study skills should positively impact GPA, which, as noted earlier, is the greatest predictor of student persistence. Overall, it will be imperative to remove any negative connotations associated with the term accountability to reduce resistance. Lewis (2017) suggested making the word accountability synonymous with the word ownership. This ownership can be demonstrated by having leaders clarify the end results the teams must achieve, but each person needs to develop their own plan for how they will achieve the goals (p. 13). This approach should help with the development of a culture of accountability.

Leadership Ethics and Organizational Change Issues

When making recommendations that involve large-scale changes, ethical considerations need to be addressed. The ethical considerations related to hiring selections, a new leadership approach, and the issue of control will be explored. These issues have been selected, as they will either be the most contested or may create the biggest challenges for the advising unit to accept. Therefore, ensuring a high level of ethical standard will be of critical importance. In addition, any issues related to organizational change will be examined.

Hiring Selection

The director will have the moral obligation to hire the right candidate(s) for the management positions within the advising unit. Along with having the moral responsibility to hire individuals of high ethical standards, diversity will be an important characteristic, as benefits of diverse workplaces include greater innovation, higher staff retention, better decision making, higher quality employees, and an improved public image (Villegas et al., 2019). Berg et al.

(2003, p. 45) highlighted what they referred to as "mission attentive" hiring along with the importance of hiring individuals who align, whole-heartedly, with the institution's values. Hiring individuals based on their alignment with the institution's mission and values and prioritizing high ethical standards and diversity may not align with some staff's focus on seniority and individuals with non-positional power. This issue related to organizational change needs to be addressed through a solid change implementation plan, coupled with the selection of managers who will be accountable for adhering to the five principles of ethical leadership outlined by Northouse (2016 p. 341), which are "respect, service to others, justice, honesty, and community building". These five principles have been selected, as they provide a foundation for developing sound ethical leadership (Northouse, 2016). They also align with the writer's goals to forge solid working relationships within the advising unit.

The concept of fairness is important in the hiring process, as there may be concerns over the hiring process being unfair or biased. The goal of fairness in hiring is not just for individuals to secure formal access to a position, but rather to actually be considered for an open position without the interference of the hiring manager's self-interest (Villegas et al., 2019). Northouse (2016) noted that leaders should place fairness at the centre of their decision-making, which will be at the core of the hiring process. While the decisions may not appease everyone, rooting the decisions in fairness will allow the director the opportunity to start this transition on a solid ethical foundation.

New Leadership Approach

As previously noted, the academic advising unit is heavily influenced by the distributive leadership approach prominent with faculty members. While a transformational leadership approach is widely accepted as being "unavoidably ethical and value-based" (Groves & Larocca,

2011, p. 514), transitioning between distributive and transactional leadership may prove challenging due to the perception that transactional leadership is not ethical in nature. This perspective is captured in the foundational belief that transactional leadership is grounded in a world view of self-interest (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) argued that transactional leadership is devoid of moral legitimacy and that it uses control strategies through the exchange of valuable resources solely for the purpose of establishing compliance, again, for their self-interests. Nevertheless, there is support for the link between transactional leadership and ethical leadership. Ofori and Toor (2009, p. 542) found that "ethical leadership is positively related to the contingent reward component of transactional leadership". Keeley (1995) also argued that transactional leaders behave in a moral way when they bring the greatest satisfaction to the greatest number of people.

An issue related to the new leadership approach may be whether the transactional leadership approach can be used to motivate employees. Popli and Rizvi (2009) found a positive association between transactional leadership and employee engagement, noting that many found it motivational to employees. Furthermore, the association between employee engagement and transactional leadership was particularly strong among those who are younger employees or earlier in their careers. This point is vital, as the advising unit is made up of predominantly younger employees with limited previous working experience.

Ethics of Performance Management

For many, the recommended organizational change will represent the first time they have experienced actual performance management that is based on accountability measures. Winstanley and Stuart-Smith (1996, p. 66) highlighted four ethical principles that need to be built into the performance management process: (a) respect for individuals, (b) mutual respect,

(c) procedural fairness, and (d) transparency of decision making. These principles align with the transformational leadership approach, as transformational leaders may enhance individuals' perceptions of procedural justice by emphasizing group solidarity (Pillai et al., 1999). Transformational leaders instill pride, faith, and respect using their charismatic influence (Cheung & Wong, 2011). Transformational leaders also "emphasize individualized consideration, provide support, and show respect for individuals' needs for development" (Dong et al., 2017, p. 442). Therefore, in utilizing the transformational leadership approach, Winstanley and Stuart-Smith's recommended ethical principles could be successfully integrated into the performance management process. Beyond the principles, being consistent with messaging and intentional in communication will help to ensure that performance management becomes an everyday part of people's jobs, rather than an annual anxiety-provoking event.

Chapter 2 Conclusion

Using both transactional and transformational leadership approaches to change was discussed in chapter two as well as an overview of the core components of each approach. Next, there was a review of the two frameworks for leading change at University X: (a) Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process and (b) Duck's (2011) five-stage change curve. A critical organizational analysis next looked at how implementing both frameworks could effectively address the needed changes within the institution, followed by potential solutions to the PoP. Next, a solution was identified, which includes a complete restructuring of the academic advising unit, coupled with a revision of the advising model to be more proactive in nature. Finally, ethical considerations were reviewed alongside any potential issues related to the intended organizational change. In chapter three, a further investigation of how the change will be implemented at University X will take place.

Chapter 3: Implementation, Evaluation and Communication

In chapter two, the preferred solution of restructuring advising services and revising the academic advising model was determined along with the leadership approaches, the frameworks that will be used for leading change, a critical organizational analysis, and finally, some ethical considerations for leading the change process. A detailed implementation plan for the preferred solution to this PoP as to how to utilize academic advising services to help improve first-year student retention outcomes will be outlined in this chapter. Next, the tools to be used to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the changes will be explored, and a comprehensive communication plan to communicate the intended changes will be outlined. The desired leadership approaches and applicable stages of the change management models will be highlighted throughout the implementation, evaluation, and communication plans. Finally, a brief overview of the next steps and future considerations will be provided.

Change Implementation Plan

University X is currently losing approximately two of every ten new students prior to the start of their second year of studies. As noted previously, this is not only undesirable, it is also unsustainable, particularly when coupled with the provincial government's plan to link funding to performance outcomes (Government of Ontario, 2017). Although academic advising alone will not resolve the issue of student retention, it has a positive influence on student retention (Drake, 2011), and it needs to be better utilized to impact these outcomes within the institution. Corts et al. (2000) highlighted the connection between quality advising services and student satisfaction, while also noting the connection between student satisfaction and student retention. With a better positioned, more-focused academic advising service model, the institution will be able to pivot toward successful outcomes (i.e., improved first-year student retention outcomes)

and avoid the negative consequences (i.e., decreased government financial support) that may result from the provincial government's new funding model.

Goals and Priorities of Planned Change

The primary goal of this OIP is to improve first-year student retention outcomes through the re-imagining of academic advising services. This will allow the institution to continue on its path of growth and prosperity, while also enhancing the overall image and reputation of the institution. Enhancing the image and reputation of the institution should also assist in the recruitment efforts of University X that will also provide the institution with a more solid financial footing, which will be imperative, particularly with the funding changes that post-secondary institutions are facing.

Ultimately, cultural change is required and is an over-arching goal, both within the advising unit and throughout the institution, with the goal being a more-focused, accountable culture that works collaboratively and decisively to address the challenges that the institution faces. This desire for a culture of accountability aligns with the post-positivist theory used to frame this OIP, as accountability will increase when University X begins to approach challenges in more of an empirical manner rather than a political one. However, for cultural change to occur, the change implementation plan will need to be successful. Its success should reduce overall anxieties around change in general, as fear of change drives the culture of resistance to a large degree. This perspective aligns with Kotter's (2012) concept of anchoring new approaches within the culture. The goals and priorities of the planned change and the specific stakeholder responsibilities within the change process are outlined in Table 3. This will be followed by a more detailed analysis, which will outline the stakeholder responsibilities and the resources required to ensure that achieving the goal is possible. Information presented in Table 3 reflects

the PoP/Goal to restructure/re-imagine academic advising services to improve first-year student

retention outcomes at University X

Table 3

Goals and Priorities of Change/Stakeholder Responsibilities

Priorities	Stakeholder Responsibilities
1. To establish a team of first-year academic advisors covering all faculties	*Director*: To hire an appropriate manager of first-year advising and to work with that manager to establish the appropriate team of advisors dedicated to servicing first-year student needs
2. To restructure faculty advising teams into larger, cross-faculty teams and to cross-train the advisors to assist across traditional faculty boundaries	*Director*: To put a management team in place and to fill vacated advising positions
	The leadership team (i.e., managers and director): to establish teams by aligning faculties with appropriate "sister" faculties.
	Leadership team to establish a time for advisors to work with each other to learn about other programs and faculties within their newly established teams
	Academic Advisors: To work with each other to ensure they sufficiently learn about each other's faculties and programs
3. To support academic advisors with increased skills training to meet the needs of the modern-day student	*Leadership Team*: To collaborate with various stakeholders to identify key areas where training is required and establish a schedule to initiate the necessary training.
	Leadership Team: To work with the Continuous Learning Department to identify opportunities to utilize internal solutions for the training needs of the advising unit
4. To implement a new, proactive service model of academic advising	*Leadership Team*: To work with advisors to educate and train the unit on the principles of proactive advising, utilizing the Continuous Learning Department, guest speakers, and previously trained academic advisors as needed.

In relation to stakeholders, it will be imperative for this writer to dedicate a sufficient amount of time and energy toward building solid working relationships with all of those connected to the recommended changes. Aside from the advisors and new advising leadership team, the faculty deans, the registrar's office, student life, and the senior leadership team will all need to be consulted at various stages throughout the priority changes recommended within this OIP. Of all stakeholders, building trust-focused relationships with the faculty deans will be paramount, as the recommendations represent a loss of resources for these individuals. Only through demonstrating solid communication skills and added value to the faculty deans will strong relationships develop. Once the faculty deans are in agreement and can clearly recognize the benefit of the recommended changes, their influence can be utilized to help transform scepticism into optimism within their respective faculties. This will be similar across the other stakeholder areas, but no area holds the same critical importance as the faculty deans, so adequate attention will need to be paid to ensuring they are comfortable or at least understand the rationale behind the changes.

The first recommended priority will be establishing a team of first-year academic advisors who will work with first-year students across the faculties. This begins with selecting a manager of first-year academic advising and then establishing a team of dedicated academic advisors who demonstrate a passion for assisting first-year students. As Tinto (1993) noted, academic advising is a key component of a successful first-year experience. First-year students bring a unique set of challenges with them, and it will be imperative for University X to recognize that and have the appropriate resources available to meet those challenges.

This team of first-year advisors will cover all faculties and will be connected with the faculty, but will report directly to the manager of first-year academic advising. This will enable

the advisors to have faculty and program-specific knowledge, while also approaching these students with a unique, first-year student-centred approach. In addition, the first-year advisors will complete tasks such as the development and implementation of pre-enrollment orientation sessions, which have largely been ignored within the institution in the past. Pre-enrollment orientation and pre-enrollment contacts are areas identified as key to the success of first-year students (White et al., 1995). This is the most critical priority within the OIP as it is believed that this will make the greatest impact on first-year student retention outcomes.

As it relates to resources required for the first priority, this will require the human and financial resources of hiring an additional manager. The time resource required will consist of the time needed to build a team and train them in the various processes and procedures that the leadership team wants to implement for first-year students. The initial time required to build the team and provide a baseline level of training should be no more than three months in duration, but having the team working at an optimal level may require six months or more. When referring to new teams working at an optimal level, Klein et al. (2009) highlighted the main components required for team building:

- Goal setting: The team members become actively involved in identifying ways to achieve goals.

- Interpersonal relations: Develop trust in one another and confidence in the team.

- Role clarification: Team members understand their role and the respective roles within the team.

- Problem-solving: Members become involved in action planning and creating solutions to problems, and evaluating those solutions. (p. 187)

Klein et al.'s (2009) description of requirements for team building adequately captures what is desired for this newly established team. Having observable results that point to progress in each of these areas within the first six months will signal that University X is moving in the right direction with the changes within advising. The training mentioned will consist of change management training, training needed for each academic advisor to familiarize themselves with all programs within their respective faculty, and some interpersonal skills-focused training to enhance the trust and communication between new team members.

For the first priority to be successful, a transactional leadership approach will be utilized during the initial phase of change, as this moment provides an opportunity to motivate employees through extrinsic rewards such as salary increases and promotions. The early stages of change also require a strong focus on establishing the appropriate expectations for the role, which is a strength of transactional leadership. In moving through Kotter's (2012) eight-stage approach, all stages are necessary for the success of this priority and all of the identified priorities. For the first priority, there will be a significant focus on Stages 1, 4, 5, and 6. Establishing a sense of urgency will be paramount; without it, it will not be possible to get a group together with enough power and energy to create and communicate a change vision (Hackman, 2017).

Being able to communicate this vision effectively (i.e., Stage 4) is essential because failure to adequately articulate the vision will result in confusion and may hinder forward progression. Stage 4 will see the transition of leadership approaches; a transformational leadership approach will be utilized throughout the remainder of the change process. This will be used to inspire and motivate staff to work toward a shared goal that aligns with their values. This is where the leadership team hopes to elevate staff beyond the point of self-interest and create a

psychological attachment to the team with all of the advisors, which Zhang et al. (2011) noted are key within the transformational leadership approach.

Empowering employees (Stage 5) is equally important. For some, they have had little empowerment within their roles, and others have functioned in a self-sufficient manner over the years. When the vision is communicated, the leadership team will need to identify as many opportunities as possible to integrate the voice of the academic advisors. When this is done, generating short-term wins (Stage 6) will be prioritized to help celebrate the successes and show the advisors that their contributions are resulting in positive change both for the students and for the institution.

The second priority is to restructure the advising unit by establishing two separate teams and then to train the staff to work across traditional program and faculty boundaries. As a manager within one of the faculty advising offices, the most common complaint was the lack of advisor availability. By bringing the advising offices closer together and training them to work across program and faculty boundaries, the institution can ensure greater accessibility of services. Again, this is an issue of equity, as it relates to both staff and students. Staff will receive more equitable workloads, while students will receive more equitable access to advising services.

The establishment of larger advising teams will also benefit from sharing best practices and reducing the relative silos that exist within specific faculties. Frequently, one faculty or another will come forward with a creative solution to a common issue, but a faculty-first mindset often prevents its successful implementation, as the conversations frequently steer toward why the solution won't work within their specific faculty. Rogers (2001, p. 16) wrote of the "sacred silos" of higher education and how changes in work demands coupled with decreased resources are forcing higher education institutes to be more collaborative and consider more cross-

disciplinary solutions to the challenges they face. The emphasis on training of the advisors will

address the lack of advisor availability, which can lead to student dissatisfaction and ultimately

student attrition (Khali & Williamson, 2014). Academic advisors will continue to work in their

respective faculties, but they will also be trained to service all programs rather than being

program-specific. In addition, each faculty will have a "sister faculty" assigned to them, with

whom they will be trained to assist in case of emergency. This will allow both the continuation

of relationship building within a respective faculty while also increasing versatility and

availability of advising services.

Resources required for the second priority are relatively minor. There are no additional

human or financial resources required to assembling cross-faculty teams. As for time resources,

the academic advisors and their teams will require adequate time to learn about the new

programs and faculties they will be partnering with. Currently, there are seven faculties within

University X. One team will consist of four faculties, and the other will have three. The team

with four faculties will have each faculty partner with one sister faculty. The team with three

faculties will have a triangle-style sister faculty arrangement, where each faculty will be trained

to assist one other faculty, but they will not necessarily have that exchange in learning. Overall,

the academic advising teams will need to be provided approximately four weeks to adequately

learn about the other programs within their faculties. They will also be given three to six months

to learn more about their sister faculty so that service levels are not significantly impacted at one

given time. It is important to reinforce that the concept of training across faculties is for

emergency purposes only, which is particularly important given recent situations where a

program-specific advisor was unavailable, and no other advisor was able to assist. The training

across programs and faculties will provide the institution with a much-needed contingency plan

by empowering a number of people with the same access to necessary information, thus enabling us to respond to emergencies.

A transactional leadership approach will be utilized in the early stages of the second priority. This will assist in the work that simply needs to be done in a specific way and in the establishment of clear guidelines around this priority. Both are strengths of the transactional leadership approach. Again, all of the stages within Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process are necessary, but Stages 1, 4, 5, and 6 will be of particular importance for the same reasons as the first priority. The leadership approach will again shift from transactional to transformational throughout the stages of change. Once the change has approached Stage 4: communicate the change vision of Kotter's eight stages, a transformational leadership approach will be implemented. This is due to the fact that accepting a vision of the future can be both a challenging intellectual and emotional task. Therefore, utilizing the 4I's of transformational leadership will be of particular importance during this stage.

The third priority is related to skills training for the academic advisors. Currently, the academic advisors do not have a consistent baseline level of training related to their roles. In addition, many lack the necessary skills in dealing with issues related to cultural diversity and mental health, which impacts the students they are dealing with. Ensuring the academic advising unit receives consistent, ongoing, high-quality training is a priority within this OIP; without it, the advisors can unintentionally be negatively impacting student retention outcomes. Lee and Metcalfe (2017) noted that while academic advisors view themselves as professional educational service providers, their skills and expertise need to be updated, much like any other respected profession. With the newly established management team in place, they will be responsible for working with the advisors themselves to establish a comprehensive training program. This will

also include consultation with various stakeholders within the institution to ensure that those within the department of academic advising are addressing the needs of students, advisors, and the institution as a whole.

No additional human resources are required for this priority to be addressed. The financial resources required may be somewhat significant, but the training must align with the relatively restrictive budget that University X currently faces. While faced with financial austerity, it will be imperative for the unit to think *outside the box* to solve this issue. Sending one advisor for training to pursue a *train-the-trainer* format may be financially more prudent than training the entire unit, particularly when some sessions pay a fee per participant. Also, the advising leadership team will need to look within the institution for individuals who possess the skills and competencies required for training and negotiation in order to secure the necessary training at little or no cost. The time resources required for this priority will be ongoing, but it will be important for all advisors to achieve a baseline level of training over the next one to two years.

For the third priority to be successful, a transformational leadership approach will be utilized. Transactional leadership will not be utilized as an approach, as there will be limited process and guideline-related changes required, and the advisors are already aware and open to this priority. With this being an accepted priority, there will be less of a need to establish a sense of urgency around this priority. Stages 3, 5, and 8 will be important within this priority. Stage 3: developing a vision and strategy is something that can be done with significant advisor involvement, as there is widespread acceptance of this priority. Stage 5: empowering employees will need to happen on an ongoing basis, as the employees will be shaping the direction of this priority. For Stage 8: anchoring new approaches, it will be important for the academic advisors

to not only sit through training sessions, but they must also anchor the changes into their daily practice in order to enhance the quality of service provided to students.

The fourth priority will be implementing a proactive advising model in which all advisors will work to address student issues before they become urgent crises. Currently, the academic advisors function very much in a reactive model. Student issues fester and often go unnoticed, as there is a lack of availability of academic advisors. Students then present to the advising offices in a state of crisis, at which point, the likelihood of retaining that student is in jeopardy. A big part of this issue is the amount of administrative and transactional work that the academic advisors are tasked with. Therefore, this priority will need to be managed in two phases. The first phase will be to address the administrative and transactional work by reassigning some work to other administrative professionals better positioned to handle the non-advising tasks that have been with academic advisors for far too long. The second phase will be focused on implementing a proactive advising model in a way that is comprehensive and flexible to adjust to the specific needs of the students and faculties that the academic advisors serve.

Proactive advising, often referred to as intrusive advising, involves intentional contact with students for the purpose of building solid working relationships (Varney, 2007). A vital tool for the model to be efficient is the proactive monitoring of grades (Varney, 2007), and an early warning system will be an important component of ensuring the success of this priority. University X has attempted an early warning system over the past few years, but again, acceptance and implementation of the system varied from faculty to faculty, thus diluting its overall effectiveness. According to Varney (2012), proactive advising involves:

- deliberate intervention to enhance student motivation
- using strategies to show interest and involvement with students

- intensive advising designed to increase the probability of student success

- working to educate students on all options

- approaching students before situations develop. (p. 1)

This transformation of advising models will not be easily accomplished. The human resources required will consist of finding other employees in the university to assume some of the administrative work that actually belongs with the faculty itself, but has been housed with academic advising for the purpose of convenience. This will not be an easy task and will likely result in a significant amount of resistance, which will be further explored later.

There are no anticipated additional financial resources, but this could change depending on the amount of administrative work that needs to move away from the advisors. In addition, training could be done in-house, as several members within the unit have had training related to proactive advising and can be utilized as a starting point to upskill the others, as needed. The time resources will be extensive. Within University X, work processes are slow to change, and when change commences, it often brings unintended consequences. Many roles will be impacted, to some degree, with these changes, including management roles, administrative roles, advising roles, and even deans' roles, who may be wary of how this will impact the overall operations within their faculties. The time required to address the restructuring of the administrative work is expected to be approximately six months, but this could increase with resistance, which is expected. The training required will not be extensive, but the overall change in work practices may take up to one year to become standardized and normalized.

Adjustments to the previously developed early warning system may be required to provide academic advisors with a system that provides more accurate information, but a baseline level of change acceptance will be necessary prior to moving forward with revisions. This

baseline level of acceptance will be achieved through the management team consulting with their respective teams to better understand why advisors have been reluctant to use the system and address the preliminary concerns to move forward. Overall, the fourth priority will also take a considerable amount of time. It is likely to be achieved within a year of the academic restructure.

A transactional leadership approach will be utilized in the early stages of change to help establish the expectations of the proactive advising model. Once the service model has been established and the expectations are clear, a transformational leadership approach will emerge. Regarding Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process, the most critical to this priority will be Stage 1: establishing a sense of urgency. This stage has been identified, as many within advising are in a state of complacency and do not fully appreciate the connection between advisor units' current practices and poor student retention outcomes. Kotter noted nine main sources of complacency. Among them, the most applicable to the advising unit appear to be (a) the absence of a visible major crisis, (b) the lack of sufficient performance feedback, and (c) a low-confrontation culture. Much work still needs to be done in these areas in order to help move all of the priorities forward. With any change initiative, limitations and challenges are not only considered, but are expected.

Limitations and Challenges

The goals and priorities outlined in this chapter will result in a significant amount of change, not only for the academic advisors, but also in the overall operations of the faculties in which they currently work. Overall, the limitations and challenges can be assigned to two specific categories: (a) resistance to change and (b) limitation of resources.

Stakeholder Resistance to Change

Throughout the OIP, the issue of resistance has repeatedly been highlighted as a significant challenge to the overall success of the PoP. This resistance is not limited to the academic advising group; it is also prevalent throughout the institution, specifically among key stakeholders who are vital to the overall success of the change initiatives. As noted by Salerno and Brock (2008), in the second stage of change, individuals feel resentful, think skeptically, and display resistance. Even as preliminary steps have been taken to move toward the change, there have been many examples of this resistance: Specifically, people who have spent inordinate amounts of time thinking about why the change won't work rather than thinking about how it can work. McBride (2010) referred to these types of personalities as "naysayers" and highlighted how these individuals often sabotage change efforts out of fear, self-interest and a lack of trust.

The academic advising group is being provided with specific training in change management to be aware of the change cycle and the natural thoughts and feelings attributed to each stage. The director will work closely with others impacted by the change to facilitate a smooth transition and ensure they feel heard with their specific needs addressed throughout this process, ensuring they do not feel alienated or uninvolved.

The Provost is keenly aware of the challenges related to resistance to change and has committed to building collaborative relationships between all key stakeholders. As noted by Duck (2011), "Changing an organization is an inherently and inescapably an emotional human process" (p. 9). Therefore, it will be imperative to be cognizant and empathetic to the emotions that some may express related to the change and nurture effective working relationships to ensure effective communication between parties. Without effective communication, change is impossible and is doomed to fail (Barrett, 2002).

Through the aforementioned training and relationship-building process, the majority of the resistance should be addressed. However, there will be those who will demonstrate levels of resistance that will be ongoing. For this portion of the academic advising unit, robust performance management will be required. The goals and priorities identified within this section focus on improving first-year student retention, which is a concern noted within the institution's strategic mandate agreement (Government of Ontario, 2017). As this is an institutional priority, the entire unit will be responsible for aligning its efforts with that of the university. As performance management is a collaborative process within the institution, managers will work closely with academic advisors to ensure the goals they identify at each performance cycle are aligned with the institutional goals: specifically, improving student retention outcomes. Aligning the academic advisors' goals with the goals of this OIP will provide a solid foundation from which managers can ensure even the most resistant staff are working toward shared goals.

Limitation of Resources

Within the second priority of restructuring the academic advising teams (captured in Table 3), a significant amount of change will take place. The aim is to purify the workload of academic advisors, which will enable the third priority (implement a proactive advising model) to be successful. This means critically reviewing the work currently being done and dividing the work into three categories: (a) administrative component, (b) academic advising component, and (c) decision-making component. Currently, within many advising offices, the academic advisors are responsible for all three components of a large number of processes. This restricts their availability to meet with students, particularly during critical times such as the start of each term, when they receive grade results. The aim to purify workloads means that others will need to

assume work that historically has been done by academic advisors. Currently, three academic

advising offices have shared administrative support with their faculties. Others have no support.

The Provost has indicated funds are available to provide two additional administrative

support staff within the academic advising unit. Unfortunately, as changes are being discussed,

some faculties are presenting with different needs related to administrative support, leading to

competing priorities. Unfortunately, this situation will likely lead to conflict. For the purpose of

this OIP, conflict is defined as "an interactive process manifested in incompatibility,

disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities" (Rahim, 2002, p. 20). Using the

Thomas-Kilmann conflict handling model (as discussed in Islam & Rimi, 2017), the goal of

these resource-focused negotiations will be to reach a compromise, which is defined as either a

win-lose or lose-win situation and may be appropriate when both sides have equally important

goals (Islam & Rimi, 2017). This will likely be the result as opposed to collaborating, which,

according to Islam and Rimi (2017), requires high levels of trust. As these decisions need to be

made in a short period of time, establishing trust in an environment of extreme suspicion and

some level of hostility may prove challenging. However, if both parties can recognize the others'

need for resources, a compromise can be reached, which will mitigate the challenge to this

priority.

It is important to highlight that the anticipated conflict and resistance is a natural reaction

to change. Those impacted will be demonstrating natural responses to change, and it will be

necessary for this writer to recognize where each individual sits within the stages of change so

that the approach to discussions can be tailored specifically to their needs. As per the Salerno and

Brock's (2008) change cycle, the earliest stages of change often require assurances of security

(Stage 1) and information (Stage 2). The director will be able to identify where each faculty's

leadership team sits within the change cycle and address their security needs by reassuring them that this change is not intended to take away authority, but rather to collaborate with them on important decisions.

The need for information will be addressed through regular explicit conversations, where the objective will be on ensuring that the deans are not left with any lingering questions, which may develop into doubt. By addressing the individual needs within these early stages of change, conflict and resistance will likely be reduced.
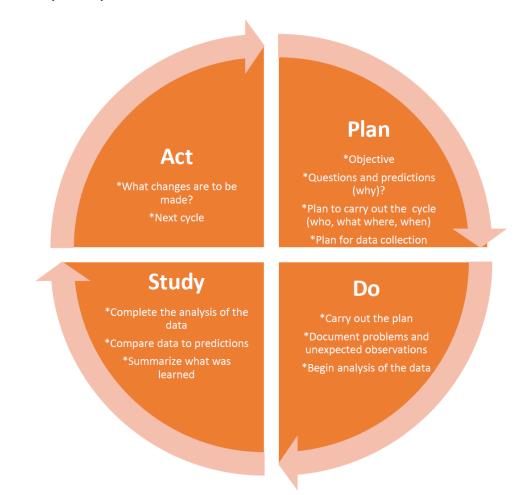
Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation

Continued monitoring and evaluation of the change processes at University X will ensure that positive change is occurring and that this OIP remains targeted on its goal of improving first-year student retention at the institution. In the context of this OIP, monitoring refers to tracking change process implementation, progress, and outcomes, while evaluation refers to forming judgements about program performance (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). The importance of effective monitoring and evaluation cannot be overstated, as it will help us in identifying what is and is not working within the change process. The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle will be used, as it provides a scientific method to answer the question of how one knows that the change created is an improvement (Speroff & O'Connor, 2004). This scientific method will be useful; concrete evidence will be needed to justify the added expenses associated with the recommended changes, particularly during a period of financial uncertainty. According to Speroff and O'Conner (2004), the model "advocates the formation of a hypothesis for improvement (Plan), a study protocol with the collection of data (Do), analysis and interpretation of the results (Study), and the iteration for what to do next (Act)" (p. 17). The PDSA cycle fits perfectly with the post-positivist theory used to frame this OIP, and it also aligns with the two selected leadership

approaches to change frameworks: (a) Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process and Duck's (2011) five-stage change curve, which is being coupled with Kotter's process largely due to its focus on handling the emotional aspect that will undoubtedly accompany the change process. Specifically, Langley et al.'s (2009) PDSA cycle was used and the process is reflected in Figure 3. This PDSA cycle is widely accepted within the field of change management and is also used for the purpose of identifying the monitoring and evaluation of change processes.

Figure 3

The Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle

Note. Adapted from Langley et al. (2009, p. 97).

The Plan Stage

The PSDA cycle is used to turn ideas into action and connect action to learning (Langley et al., 2009). In this stage of the model, Langley et al. (2009) noted the importance of including the questions that are to be answered, predictions of the answers to the questions, and a plan for data collection.

The plan stage of change aligns with the first four stages of Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process which are largely focused on positioning the change for success. In predicting the outcomes of the change in the planning stage, one can focus their attention on refining the questions that they want to have answered throughout the process, thus making them more relevant and targeted toward the overall objective of the change.

The data collected throughout the plan stage were compiled through a variety of formats, such as focus groups, check sheets and focus groups and will be collected from academic advisors, current students, and former students who are willing to engage in activities such as surveys and focus groups. Currently, students who leave the institution are sent a survey, but responses to the survey are minimal. Unfortunately, the institution does not adequately follow up in an attempt to collect this valuable data. This creates the problem of lacking important information that could help better understand why students choose to leave University X. With the new restructure, there will be an increased emphasis on following up with students who have left the institution, and their participation will be incentivized monetarily (i.e., gift cards) to encourage greater levels of feedback.

Regarding the appropriate leadership approach during the *plan* stage, a transactional approach can be utilized in the early stages of Kotter's eight-stage change process, specifically the first three stages. When Stage 4: communicate the change vision begins within the planning

stage, transformational leadership approaches will need to start being implemented, with a strong focus on idealized influence and inspirational motivation.

The Do Stage

In the *do* stage, the changes that have been identified are implemented. It is important to do this within a specific period of time and carefully record the pattern of data (Donnelly & Kirk, 2015) so that the data are relevant to the original planning that took place. Documenting problems that arise, unexpected changes, or unanticipated consequences of the change is critical in this stage as it will assist in the next stage. This is a vital stage of monitoring the impact of the changes that are being made, so it will be critical to engage with students and advisors, at several points throughout each term, to capture what is happening, from their perspectives, while they are engaged in the change process. Failure to adequately capture and understand different perspectives throughout the term could result in us moving in the wrong direction or missing important opportunities to *pivot* to enhance the student experience. Within the do stage, empowering employees will be important; they will need to feel that they are part of the change, particularly since they are the ones doing the work. Generating short-term wins will also be critical to help elevate the collective spirit of the group as they encounter the aforementioned challenges and consequences that are experienced throughout implementation. As for leadership approaches, incorporating the 4I's of transformational leadership will be important at this stage and throughout the remainder of the change process, as transactional approaches will not be sufficient in maintaining motivation during the final three stages.

In this stage, the advisors will be divided into three teams, with one team dedicated to first-year advising and the other two representing several faculties in each. Training the advisors to work across different programs will be ongoing as will professional development for the

advisors to enhance their skillsets and develop their knowledge and understanding of proactive

advising approaches and best practices.

The Study Stage

This stage is focused on analyzing the data collected during the prior stage. This is the

stage where the implemented change is evaluated and a determination is made regarding whether

an improvement has been achieved or if more change is required (Crowfoot & Prasad, 2017).

Donnelly and Kirk (2015) noted the importance of asking the following questions as part of this

stage: "Was the outcome close to what you predicted? Did it work out as planned? What were

the lessons learned?" (p. 2). This significantly aligns with the scientific approach of the post-

positivist theory used to frame this OIP. Transformational leadership approaches are required

during this stage, as both the management team and the advisors themselves will need to feel

comfortable coming forward with concerns that emanate from the *study* stage.

It is expected that the recommended changes within this OIP will present challenges.

Many areas that will be impacted are interconnected with others, who will also experience an

impact to their roles. For example, one area of interest for the director is to purify the work of

academic advisors to enable them to engage in a proactive model of academic advising. This will

result in increased workloads for administrative staff within each faculty. In addition, there are

no additional resources to take this overflow of administrative work within some faculties.

Therefore, it will be critical to carefully study the incoming data on a regular basis to ensure the

process is on track to make a positive impact on student retention. It must be remembered that

the changes being recommended will come with consequences to other individuals and units.

Without careful analysis, the proposed changes run the risk of causing significant disruption

within the organization and high levels of dissatisfaction. When the data indicate that the impact

of a decision may have been overlooked or underestimated, serious reflection will need to be undertaken to determine next steps. However, it is fully anticipated that the priorities noted in this section will yield desired results. Generating short-term wins is important to maintain motivation levels within the team in the study stage. Identifying and celebrating processes or practices that warranted positive results will be important during this stage to build confidence in the advising unit.

The Act Stage

This stage focuses on what should be planned for the next PDSA cycle since improvements may not occur during the first cycle (Leis & Shojania, 2017). This should incorporate any modifications determined to be necessary from the 'study' stage that may lead to an improvement (Gillam & Siriwardena, 2013). Donnelly and Kirk (2015) recommended asking whether a clear pathway to success exists, what modifications are needed, and the state of readiness to make another change within this stage. This stage is very much focused on preparing for subsequent PDSA cycles, which is important, as its implementation aligns with the last two steps of Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process of consolidating gains and producing more change and anchoring new approaches (Amin & Servey, 2018). The alignment is evident in their focus on looking to the future for additional change opportunities. This also aligns with Duck's (2011) fifth stage, fruition, which highlights how the "monster" has been subdued during this stage, but that this is only temporary, and organizations need to continue to work hard to avoid falling back into a state of stagnation. Figure 4 provides an overview of the implementation of the planning stage of the PDSA cycle for this OIP.

Figure 4

The Plan-Do-Study-Act Template

<table>
<tr>
<td colspan="2" align="center">**Plan**</td>
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Objective of this Cycle

The idea or change to be tested: Restructuring the academic advising unit will help improve first-year student retention outcomes by improving the quality and accessibility of service and the dedication of service to first-year students within the institution. Results should be observed when comparing the next academic year (2021-22) with the current academic year (2020-21)

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Questions – What questions do you want to answer?

1. Will a dedicated first-year advising team positively impact first-year student retention outcomes?

2. Will restructured advising teams improve advisor morale, cohesion and consistency?

3. Will the adoption of a proactive advising model positively impact student retention outcomes?

</td>
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Predictions – What do you predict are the answers?

1. Yes, there will be a positive impact on student retention outcomes when year-over-year results are compared.

2. Yes, the restructure will result in advisors reporting higher levels of cohesion and morale, and greater consistency of approaches should be observable. This should have a positive impact on student retention.

3. Students will report greater levels of satisfaction with the new advising model

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Testing Strategy
What will be tested: Retention outcomes will be compared on a year-over-year basis to determine the effectiveness of the change (quantitative measure). Student and advisor levels of satisfaction and engagement related to the restructured service will be assessed through focus groups, surveys etc. (qualitative measure)

Who is responsible: The Office of Institutional Research and Analysis will collect retention-related data. The advising management team will collect data related to student and advisor engagement and satisfaction levels. The Director of Academic Advising will be responsible for the ongoing monitoring of the data and, in consultation with the management team, the overall evaluation of the data to ensure the changes remain on track to positively impact first-year student retention outcomes.

Where will it be done: It will be done both online and in-person (if permitted).

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Data Collection Plan
How data will be collected (check one option):
       ❒ Data Collection Forms   ❒ Written Surveys   ❒ One-on-one Meetings
       ❒ Check Sheets   ❒ Focus Groups

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</table>

Note. Adapted from *The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Worksheet* (p. 4), by Health Leads, 2019.

http://healthleadsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Health-Leads-PDSA-Worksheet.pdf

Langley et al. (2009, p. 147) noted the importance of reviewing the following points during this period of evaluation:

- Adapt: We will modify the test strategy and/or widen the test conditions based on our learnings.

- Adopt: We will implement and spread the change strategy across our program.

- Abandon: We will stop testing and move on to a new change strategy.

These three points resonate with this writer and ultimately form vital pillars for the evaluative process within the OIP. Adapting approaches, adopting proven strategies, and abandoning items that are not working will help move the evaluative process forward without prejudice, which will ultimately help enhance the student experience. As for the intended leadership approach during the act stage, transformational leadership will be utilized. This will be important, as those involved in the change process will need to feel connected to the change and confident in their respective roles, which should happen through the mutual respect provided with a transformational leadership approach. If staff are feeling isolated or not confident in their roles, making decisions to abandon certain practices can raise alarm and put the change process at risk.

Early Warning System

An early warning system is an important tool that can be used to identify struggling students before they reach a point where their academic success and status are threatened. The goal of using an early warning system is to assist academic advisors in their objective of helping students proactively. Within the context of this PoP, the early warning system can be used to monitor the effectiveness of the priorities that have been identified in this chapter.

For advisors working proactively with students, it is anticipated that there will be a positive impact on grades, leading to fewer students identified on the early warning system,

which typically runs around the mid-point of the semester at University X. Abelman and Molina (2001, 2002) found that proactive advising success depends on the level of intrusiveness, with greater intrusiveness correlating with better GPA outcomes. The plan for the first-year advising team will be for them to advise in a very intentional, proactive manner, which represents a dramatic shift in approach within the institution. Although the research related to the direct correlation between student grades and intrusive advising remains inconclusive, the intrusive model will result in a significant increase in meetings between students and their advisors, which was supported in literature for directly impacting student grades. As noted by Frame and Cummins-Sebree (2017, p. 52), "students who attended a greater number of adviser meetings (three to eight) significantly improved their GPA when compared to students who attended zero to two adviser meetings" within an academic year. Hester (2008) also echoed this fact in noting that students who frequently interact with their advisors demonstrate both higher GPAs and higher levels of satisfaction and greater knowledge of the institution and its resources. Therefore, with the recommended changes being implemented, it is expected that this will positively impact students' grades. This will, in turn, result in fewer students identified on the early warning system.

Data Collection and Analysis

The goal of this OIP is to improve first-year student retention outcomes. This is ultimately measured through quantitative research, which is about collecting numerical data to discuss a particular phenomenon (Yin, 2016). Qualitative analysis will also be used in evaluating the impact of the advising restructure on the overall number of students identified through the early warning system; earlier intervention should decrease the number of students flagged as needing assistance. Qualitative analysis will be used to evaluate data collected through focus

groups, surveys, one-on-one meetings, and other tools. Creswell (2014) explained qualitative research as an approach to discovering and understanding the participants' meaning while interpreting the difficulty of a situation.

Therefore, using a few mixed methods will help determine the effectiveness of the recommended changes. Creswell (1999) defined a mixed-methods study as "one in which the researcher incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis in a single study" (p. 455). The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection aligns with the post-positivist theory which aims at investigating both objective and subjective phenomena (Panhwar, 2017). Implementing a few mixed methods for collection and analysis will allow the Director of Academic Advising to continue collecting and monitoring incoming data through qualitative data analysis and evaluating the effectiveness of the approach through the analysis of the quantitative data, which will be available on a less frequent basis. This approach will collectively help monitor and evaluate the overall success of the recommended changes within this OIP. In addition, the adoption of mixed-methods approaches will allow for the use of triangulation, which will help the advisors better understand the issues that arise in the research from multiple perspectives. For this OIP, triangulation is defined as the concept of considering an issue of research from (at least) two points or perspectives (Flick, 2018). Understanding and having a greater appreciation of the different viewpoints is critical in the overall success of this OIP. It will better equip the leadership team in making the necessary adjustments to the change implementation plan.

In summary, the PDSA cycle will be an important tool that will be used to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the recommended changes within this OIP. It encourages asking the necessary questions to focus change efforts as well as appropriate reflection to ensure that there

are continued adjustments to improve as future changes are pursued. In the next section, the approach to communicating the change plan is explored.

Change Process Communication Plan

Within University X, the staff have recently voted to unionize. One of the key factors in their decision to pursue union representation was reportedly the perception that the communication between the employer and staff was poor and that employees often felt shut out of the decisions that impacted their daily working lives. Therefore, the communication plan for the recommended changes within this OIP will be critical. Communication is a vital ingredient in the overall success of change initiatives, which was supported by the research of Beatty (2015), who found a high correlation between change success and communication efforts. Armenakis et al. (1993) considered communication important in building change readiness, reducing uncertainty, and as a key factor in gaining commitment. Conversely, poorly developed and implemented communication plans may contribute to the receipt of messages different from that which was intended, general misconceptions, negative attitudes, and increased resistance adversely impacting the change effort's success (Klein, 1994, 1996).

Knowing the pivotal role that communication plays within the change process, Klein's (1994) eight key principles of organizational communication will be utilized within this OIP as a template for communicating change. Klein's eight principles are:

- Message redundancy is related to message retention.

- The use of several media is more effective than using just one.

- Face-to-face communication is preferred.

- The line hierarchy is the most effective organizational sanctioned communication channel.

- Direct supervision is the expected, more effective source of organizationally sanctioned information.

- Opinion leaders are effective changers of attitudes and opinions.

- Information that is consistent and/or reinforces basic values and beliefs is effective in changing opinions and attitudes.

- Personally, relevant information is better retained than abstract, unfamiliar or general information. (p. 26)

Klein's eight principles are next described to better demonstrate how they can assist with the communication plan within this OIP. In addition, it is important to note that Kotter's (2012) eight stages of change are all important throughout the implementation of this communication plan. However, some specific points have been highlighted throughout this section to emphasize their importance within each of Klein's (1994) principles.

Message redundancy is related to message retention. Klein (1994) noted how the data clearly support that repetition of a specific message helps with the recipient's ability to remember what is being communicated. This is very much connected with Kotter's first stage of establishing a sense of urgency. Stephens et al. (2013) conducted research in the area of message redundancy and found that multiple redundant messaging through any channel increases the perceived sense of urgency. The overarching objective of improving first-year student retention needs to be repeatedly communicated and connected with moving the academic advisors from a state of comfort to discomfort with the status quo by highlighting the institution's financial challenges, should it not directly address student attrition. Message redundancy is also a key part of Kotter's fourth stage—communicating the change vision (Hackman, 2017). The government's transition to performance-based funding and its potential to significantly impact the institution's

financial health needs to also be repeatedly communicated so that the advisors have a better understanding of how their work fits within the institution's grand scheme of enhancing student success.

The use of several media is more effective than using just one. To increase the likelihood of the message being retained, it will be important for senior leadership to utilize a multitude of options in delivering communication related to change. Using electronic communication (e.g., emails, weekly reports), social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, blogs), face-to-face communication and printed format (e.g., newsletters) will all serve an important role in communicating the changes to the advising unit, fellow faculty and staff and students alike. Stephens et al. (2013) supported Klein's work with findings that using multiple communication platforms resolve overload perceptions of redundancy. Overreliance on one method of communication will result in poor implementation of communication efforts. Within the era of COVID-19, there has been an over-reliance on electronic communication, which has had a notable negative impact on the overall communication within University X. However, it is expected that when restrictions begin to ease, opportunities for other communication platforms will allow for greater overall communication effectiveness. This second principle is also connected with Kotter's (2012) first stage of establishing a sense of urgency. Presenting the messaging related to the need for change through a multitude of formats will increase the likelihood of the advisors absorbing or at least recognizing the issue as one that requires urgent attention. In addition, Hackman (2017) highlighted how important using different forms of media is for Stage 4: communicating the change vision of Kotter's eight stages.

Face-to-face communication is preferred. Klein (1994) highlighted how face-to-face communication has a greater impact on communication than any other medium. Currently,

within the era of COVID-19, face-to-face communication is limited to virtual meeting platforms, which negatively impacts communication overall due to several factors. Bitti et al. (2011) noted how a listener does not usually remain passive during a conversation, as they send a multitude of feedback signals through the face, body movements, gestures, vocal cues, for example, so that the speaker realizes their level of comprehension, allowing the speaker to adjust their behaviour accordingly. "This exchange between the speaker and the listener is not wholly effective in a videoconference because the feedback signals are rather rapid and subtle" (Bitti et al., 2011, p. 92). This results in a partial loss of fluidity in communication. Also, Bitti et al. noted how in face-to-face conversations, each participant regulates turn-taking in interpersonal exchanges via a multitude of strategies and signals. Whereas, in a videoconference conversation, the regulation of turn-taking is more complex, which generates more pauses and interruptions, leading to increased time needed to convey the same amount of information as a face-to-face interaction.

The area most impacted by University X's current communication format is non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is often used to express thoughts and make your message more appealing and interesting to the person with whom you are speaking (Phutela, 2015). Newman et al. (2020, p. 456) noted how "nonverbal communication cues and the ability to use informal communication approaches are absent in most virtual team communications". To make matters worse, online cameras are often turned off in meetings, and there is no set standard for staff to have them turned on. Phutela (2015) noted how physical communication is the most common form of non-verbal communication, and again, this has been negatively impacted with the transition to working virtually. While working virtually will likely become part of the overall strategy moving forward, even after the dangers of the virus are largely mitigated, it will be important to utilize opportunities to still engage with people, in person, to communicate

important messages, specifically as they relate to large-scale changes such as those proposed within this OIP. In addition, establishing norms related to camera use will improve the ability to use and read non-verbal communication moving forward.

As it relates to Kotter's (2012) eight stages, utilizing face-to-face communication is applicable to all of the stages, but most specifically Stages 1 through 6. Communicating face-to-face will help in the communication process by utilizing non-verbal communication strategies for others to recognize the urgency behind the need for change. In addition, empowering employees and generating and communicating short-term wins, in person, may be more effective, as it is a more complete form of communication.

The line hierarchy is the most effective organizational sanctioned communication channel. Klein (1994) noted the importance of the hierarchy within organizations and the critical role that line management has in legitimizing outgoing messaging. He also highlighted how this use of authority in no way negatively impacts participative or consensus-based processes (Klein, 1994), such as the current leadership approach that permeates throughout University X as well as most post-secondary institutions. Klein (1994) noted the key role that the supervisor plays in the communication process: They are viewed as well-informed and accurate transmitters of information. This hierarchical view of communication aligns well with the desired leadership approaches within this OIP as well as being aligned with Kotter's (2012) second step in his eight-stage process: building a guiding coalition, which focuses on finding strong leaders with positional power, leadership skills, and high credibility. This principle also connects with Kotter's third stage: developing a vision and strategy, as the leadership team will need to clearly articulate a vision so everyone can understand why they are being asked to change.

Within the context of University X, the Provost has already communicated the decision to hire a Director of Academic Advising. This is to be followed with the director announcing the hiring of managers of academic advising, which will then be followed by the managers communicating further changes with staff that are applicable to them, which aligns with Klein's (1994) next principle that notes: "Direct supervision is the expected, more effective source of organizationally sanctioned information" (p. 26). This principle aligns with Kotter's (2012) fourth stage: communicating the change vision. University X's vision for change will need to be imbedded in everything staff do. In all of the challenges and concerns raised by the academic advisors, the leadership team must tie their responses back to the vision in order to ensure it stays at the forefront of people's minds and to prevent the spread of misinformation.

Opinion leaders are effective changers of attitudes and opinions. Fortunately, within the current recommendations for change, there are several manager candidates who hold a significant amount of collegial authority within the advising unit and would be effective in their transition to management, particularly as it relates to the dissemination of information. In this sense, the recommendations to hire managers from within the advising unit will serve as an effective tool to utilize opinion leaders in changing dissenting opinions and attitudes related to recommended changes. Newman et al. (2020) highlighted how a vital component of effective communication is established trust, which will be a strength of the proposed plan as the aim is to hire opinion leaders from within the advising unit. This principle aligns with a number of Kotter's (2012) eight stages, specifically creating a guiding coalition, creating a vision for change, communicating the vision consolidating gains, and producing more change along with anchoring new approaches. Kotter noted that there are four key characteristics of effective guiding coalitions: (a) position power, (b) expertise, (c) credibility, and (d) leadership (p. 59).

The opinion leaders who will likely be selected as managers will need to have these characteristics in order to guide their teams through change effectively. The leadership team can also utilize non-management opinion leaders in creating helping to communicate the vision for change. In this way, the messaging will not be presented in an entirely top-down fashion, and the staff will feel that they are a big part of the change process as a whole. Opinion leaders will be an effective tool in the goal of consolidating gains and producing more change, as they themselves will be largely responsible for the tone and pace of the change. They will also be utilized to anchor the new practices; they can help demonstrate to followers the superiority and benefits of the recommended changes, which Kotter noted is key to the anchoring stage.

Information that is consistent and/or reinforces basic values and beliefs is effective in changing opinions and attitudes**.** The academic advising unit is comprised of individuals who demonstrate high levels of compassion and empathy toward the student population. These qualities speak to the student-centred approach that some have in their roles. Unfortunately, at times, approaches or actions that are seen to be helping students result in having unintended negative consequences. It will be critical for the leadership team to tap into these basic values as the organization moves forward in the change process. Undoubtedly, the recommended changes will consist of vastly different approaches to the daily work of the academic advisors, as they will be transitioning from a reactive model to a proactive one. Still, pre-emptively assisting students with challenges aligns with the core values of many within the unit.

Dedicated first-year advising also aligns with the core values and beliefs of the advising unit, as it is focused on helping students. At the same time, the advisors strongly value work-life balance, and there is a fundamental concern related to peak periods within advising. Many indicate that it puts them in a compromising position, as they are not always able to help those in

need in an expedient manner. Therefore, the messaging will have to be positioned in a way that clearly highlights how the recommended changes can help not only students in need, but also the academic advisors themselves. Kotter's (2012) fifth and six stages of change are applicable to this principle of organizational communication. Kotter noted that the four biggest obstacles to employee empowerment are (a) structures, (b) skills, (c) systems, and (d) supervisors. The empowerment will prove challenging, as the advisors currently believe lack of resourcing prevents them from providing adequate service to students. The leadership team will need to work to remove the structures currently in place that create strain on resourcing. The leadership team will need to communicate with the advisors so that they know their concerns have been heard and that the institution is working to resolve the chronic challenges that inhibit their ability to effectively handle all of the responsibilities of their role. In working to remove the structural challenges, advisors will be empowered to work more effectively, thus allowing them to get back to helping students, which is a core value of the group.

Generating and celebrating short-term wins can be seen as demonstrating proof of concept (Gupta, 2011). As the leadership team works through change and identifies evidence to demonstrate that the recommended changes are yielding desired results, the team will have to ensure that it aligns with the core values and beliefs of the advising unit. For example, framing the feedback in terms of how much money was saved will not sufficiently motivate staff to continue forward with change. It needs to be framed in relation to the number of students advisors were able to help avoid negative consequences or how many additional students were able to graduate. Any short-term wins or attempt to prove the superiority of a new process or approach will need to connect with what resonates with the advising group in order for them to continue to move forward with the vision.

Personally, relevant information is better retained than abstract, unfamiliar, or general information. There is a firmly held belief within the academic advising unit that the institution is not a business and that business principles should not be integrated into their daily work. Ideas around metrics, predictive modelling, and efficiencies create high levels of anxiety within the group, as they are either seen as unrelated or unfamiliar to the group. Detailed discussions around the university's financial status appear to be abstract for many, as a high percentage do not have an interest in understanding the deeper complexities involved in the university's operations as a whole. Therefore, while the advising leadership team will need to understand and integrate many of these concepts into the daily life of advising, the communication will focus largely on how the changes in processes and practices positively impact the student experience. Communicating these changes mirrors the recommended approach for the previous principle of communication. Therefore, Kotter's (2012) fifth and sixth stages are again particularly important. The unit appears to favour practical information, which is focused on how the change will benefit both the students and the advisors. Therefore, it will be essential to frame the upcoming changes in precise language that highlights both parties' benefit, without veering into abstract theoretical underpinnings that aim to rationalize the change itself.

In using Klein's (1994) eight principles of organizational communication, the Director of Academic Advising will ensure that the messaging is handled effectively. There will undoubtedly be challenges to the communication plan, specifically related to the siloed manner with which communication is shared institutionally and the competing interests across departments and faculties. However, by adhering to the principles, the communication plan will have the best opportunity for success. Many of the principles (e.g., reliance on communicating through hierarchies, making effective use of opinion leaders, etc.) align nicely with the desired

changes within this OIP and will only work to reinforce the importance of acting on the recommendations.

Building Awareness of the Need for Change

Klein's (1994) principles of communication are important, but do not specifically address the importance of building awareness around the need for change. Much of the awareness around the need for change will come through the first of Kotter's (2012) eight-stage process: establishing a sense of urgency. Luckily, this is already underway, with the institution heavily focusing its communication around the need to allocate attention and resources to student success. The President and Provost have been hard at work highlighting the financial challenges the institution faces in light of flat enrolment numbers and challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have already pinned student success as a key initiative in the battle to stay financially robust. Within this key initiative, academic advising has already been identified as a key area of interest. Therefore, much of the awareness around the need for change has commenced. It will be important for the Director of Academic Advising to align the recommended changes with the Provost's messaging. People are already aware, but will need more specifics of how the changes within this OIP connect with the organization's strategic interests. This is where Klein's first principle of message redundancy will be effective in using the Provost's messaging repeatedly and infused with messaging around specifics within advising to increase message retention. Once the urgency has been established, the leadership team can work through Kotter's stages to ensure that there is sufficient awareness of the need for change. Creating a guiding coalition (Stage 2) will be important in order to develop the vision and strategy (Stage 3), which is then communicated to the employees (Stage 4). In summary, the awareness around the need for change already exists, but will need to be repeated and connected

with Kotter's change process in order to ensure that the stages progress through to the final anchoring stage.

Chapter 3 Conclusion

In chapter three, the goals and priorities of the desired changes within this OIP were explored, along with the potential limitations that may be faced. Although challenges exist, this OIP has outlined clear priorities that are focused and achievable for University X. Next, how the PDSA cycle will be used as a monitoring and evaluation tool to track change, gauge progress, and assess the effectiveness of change overall was reviewed. The PDSA cycle aligns well with the post-positivist theory being to frame this OIP, which will help the drivers of change avoid stagnation and encourages the continual evolution of process and procedure. Finally, how Klein's eight principles of organizational communication will be used to ensure that the messaging related to change is effective and resonates with its intended recipients was outlined.

Next Steps and Future Considerations

This OIP has presented a change plan designed to positively impact first-year student retention rates at a medium-sized university in Ontario. It has identified a problem that has long plagued the institution and has only become more urgent for the institution to address, given the present-day challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the provincial government's proposed new model of performance-based funding. The academic advising unit is well-positioned to act as an effective tool in addressing the first-year retention issue, but a few key steps need to be addressed for the changes to be successful. They will be outlined in greater detail in this section.

As noted within this OIP, many of the recommended changes are already being discussed or in various stages of planning. The Director of Academic Advising has already been hired, and

the Provost has already focused her attention on academic advising as playing a pivotal role in improving student retention and student success. At the time of writing, the Director of Academic Advising has the agency and has been given final approval to establish the desired management team to begin the advising restructure. This will include a dedicated first-year advising team. Therefore, the first and most immediate next step that needs to occur is hiring the management team and the division of academic advisors into three cross-faculty teams. This step will inevitably create challenges, as it will result in reporting changes, changes in student populations, and changes in team structures. However, once this next step has been taken, the academic advising unit will be better positioned to impact student retention outcomes.

Another important step that will need to be taken is to engage in meaningful consultation with the faculty deans. They have agreed, in principle, with the idea of restructuring the academic advising unit, but have recently presented with very different ideas of how specifically this should look. One of the primary objectives of the restructure is to achieve a level of consistency related to the student experience. The Director of Academic Advising will need to work closely with the deans to help create a transition plan that all parties are satisfied with and one that aims for a higher level of consistency, while also respecting the individual cultures of each faculty.

A third step that needs to be taken is to engage in discussions with both human resources and the union to communicate the changes and the potential impacts to staff. Initial discussions have occurred, and both parties have expressed initial agreement with the concept of restructuring the academic advising unit, but there are many details within this change plan that will impact some employees quite significantly. The Director of Academic Advising will need to work closely with human resources to ensure the situations such as the re-housing of work does

not result in grievances or significant disparities in workload. The union, too, will have a voice that will need to be respected throughout this process. It will be important to note that failure to adequately address the student retention issues at University X will likely result in staff layoffs, which no party desires.

The final next step to be addressed will focus on education. The academic advisors and managers will need to be educated in new programs and faculties they have never worked with before. As the goal is to ensure staff are fully competent in their new areas of practice, this step will be time and resource-intensive. In addition to educating the academic advisors, students will also need to be educated on the changes and how it impacts them. The changes will not represent a change for incoming students, but this change may not come easy for upper-year students.

For future considerations, the institution needs to explore the issue of resourcing. University X has had historically high student-advisor ratios, which does not adequately capture workload issues, but does provide some information to demonstrate a level of inequity among advisors as a whole. As mentioned previously, this creates an equity issue for students also, as there is greater access to advising services in some programs in comparison with others. Addressing the issue of resources will provide greater flexibility for adopting more time-intensive advising strategies such as motivational interviewing. Many strategies involve the advisors meeting with students on a regular basis and forming close connections with their students. While the proactive advising model will attempt to move in this direction, it simply will not be possible, with some advisors overseeing caseloads approaching 1,000 students. Within this consideration, the institution needs to determine how to effectively utilize metrics and establish standards within academic advising to understand better what an appropriate workload looks like and not solely depend on student–advisor ratios. The institution will need to carefully

consider how far they wish to go, as it relates to the implementation of neo-liberal, business-oriented metrics that can be used to address resourcing concerns, which may not align with the cultural norms of University X. When the next steps and future considerations have been addressed, University X will be well-positioned to utilize academic advising better to impact first-year student retention within the institution positively.

In conclusion, the issue of first-year student retention outcomes needs to be considered through the lens of social justice, specifically as it relates to equity. Equity is defined as the quality of treating individuals fairly based on their needs and requirements (Nedha, 2011). In one study that looked at the characteristics of "dropout" students in higher education, Mortagy et al. (2018, p. 265) noted that "first-generation African-American students had a dropout rate of 46.15%". Woodfield (2017) also noted how certain groups of people are more likely to drop out in comparison with others, highlighting lower socio-economic class, being a mature student, and being Black, and being from a minority background as some indicators of higher attrition rates. As University X has a high percentage of students who fall into at least one of the high-risk categories of student attrition, the changes recommended within this OIP should better assist these students who are most in need of the institution's assistance through more direct, intentional intervention. Viewing the issue of first-year student retention through the lens of equity, it is clear that the institution has a financial obligation and a moral obligation to assist the most vulnerable portion of our student population in helping them throughout their educational journey.

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