

Culture, Change, and Relationship: Successful Collaboration Between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs

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Abstract

Organizational structures, culture, assessment, and the realities of change and transition impact the success of collaboration. In this article, we use an initiative to promote earlier major declaration by undergraduate students and the collaborations that followed from it to illustrate these features and deepen understanding of how they apply in a higher education context. Our analysis highlights the importance of recognizing and accepting differences, assessment as a resource for mutual understanding, and continual investment in collaborative partnerships.

Keywords

Advising; Organizational theory; Retention; Case study; Collaboration; Leadership.

Introduction

When successful, collaboration can transform practice in a way that improves engagement with, and services to, students. Collaboration between Academic Affairs (AA) and Student Affairs (SA)¹ is especially important but may be especially challenging (Levy & Polnarev, 2016). Existing literature on leadership in higher education has established that effective collaboration requires reflection on organizational culture and goals, awareness of differences, and investment in mutual understanding and mutual support (Ferren & Stanton, 2004; Kezar & Carducci, 2009). In this paper, we examine the significance of four factors that influence successful collaboration between AA and SA:

- organizational structures
- culture
- assessment
- change and transition processes.

Using our experience at the University of Victoria (UVic) in British Columbia, Canada, we build on existing ideas in the literature to develop a more complex understanding of how these factors are interconnected.

The first part of our paper discusses distinctive challenges for collaboration posed by the higher education context. We then introduce a framework informed by existing literatures on leadership and organizational success in higher education. This framework emphasizes negotiating cultural differences across organizational divisions; the critical role assessment can play in developing a shared understanding; and the significance of change processes and the management of transition as part of successful collaboration. We use our experience of an initiative called Timely Declaration, and how it changed institutional culture, as a case study to illustrate this framework.

¹ In this paper, we follow the literature in using the term *Academic Affairs* to refer to academic administration and leadership positions. The terms *Student Services* and *Student Affairs* are used to refer to student supports and services. At the University of Victoria, the Division of Student Affairs includes the Office of the Registrar and Enrolment Management; Student Development and Success; Campus Engagement; and Wellness, Recreation and Athletics.

The description of the case study in this paper is based on our experiences of Timely Declaration and the collaborations that followed from it. Our experiences reflect how these collaborations looked from our respective positions as Director and Associate Dean in an academic advising centre². Although the case study focuses on university structures as they are, the authors are committed to decolonization and recognize that movement toward more just relationships will entail ongoing learning and changes to existing structures. We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples on whose land our university operates, and whose governance in and relationships with these lands are ongoing. As settlers working and living in the territories of the Ləkʷəŋən Peoples, the authors recognize that the university's operation and its organizational structures are implicated in and have been complicit with colonization.

The challenges of collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs

Three important and often underappreciated factors influence the success of collaboration: how organizational structures situate collaborative partners with respect to one another, how different experiences of an organization create differences in culture, and the fact that collaboration often includes transition for all the actors involved. These factors take a distinctive form in higher education.

Organizational structure

How an institution actually operates — in general, within specific units, and across multiple levels — impacts collaboration. Understanding the importance of reporting lines, institutional distribution of responsibilities, budgeting processes, communication practices, and operational constraints in partners' decision-making contributes to the development of trust. Seeing and accepting organizational differences shapes relationships, expectations, and what partners are able to do together. Operational differences are part of the context that collaborative partners must navigate.

There are distinctive aspects to organizational structures in higher education institutions. Most influential is the presence of a “dual authority structure”: professional staff and faculty members operate within two distinct types of authority structure (Clark, 1983; Kezar & Lester, 2011). SA units typically have clear lines of reporting, clear demarcations of authority, and established processes for making decisions. In AA units, such as faculties, schools, and academic departments, leadership is often short-term; lines of reporting are often unclear; boundaries around authorities are often fuzzy; and decision-making processes, including who is informed or consulted, may vary. In practice, people working in higher education typically give little thought to either the existence of these differences in authority structure types or their influence on capacities for action. This dual authority structure operates within a larger organizational context that has been described as “organized anarchy”, denoting multiple and overlapping sites of authority and a high degree of decentralization (Cohen et al., 1972; Maasen & Stensaker, 2019).

In addition, there is often tension between higher education institutions' educational missions and hierarchical relationships between different parts of the organization. Education and the free exchange of ideas is central to the mission of universities; however, there is no denying the presence and effects of multiple status hierarchies. The tension within structures that these hierarchies create can lead to siloes and, unconsciously or consciously, jockeying for position. The effects of status hierarchies have been exacerbated by an historical relationship between academic

² The Director is a professional administrator in SA whose line of reporting connects to the Provost through an Associate Vice-President Student Affairs. The Associate Dean is a faculty member with AA responsibilities whose line of reporting connects to the Provost through the deans of the Faculties of Humanities, Science, and Social Sciences.

faculty, and faculty and staff involved in student support, in which the latter were often historically cast as subordinates or “as a diminutive but supportive partner” (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010, p. 17). One effect of this casting has been failure to recognize the educational contributions of faculty and staff involved in student support. The professionalization of SA in the last half-century is a change that has challenged this traditional casting, as has the growing role of SA in institutional leadership (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010; Hevel, 2016). Consequently, the tensions that sometimes manifest in collaborations between AA and SA can reflect a stage in Bridges’s (1986) model of transition when “the reorientation that is at the heart of transition is taking place” (p. 25).

Cultures and habitus

Different organizational cultures within a single institution are unavoidable and a significant factor in the success or failure of pan-institutional collaborations. Individual unit cultures are influenced by a tacit understanding of how the institution works. These tacit understandings influence perceptions and may be barriers to collaboration.

The relevance of assumptions grounded in experiences of structures can be understood using Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984) concept of *habitus*. *Habitus* describes how a person’s way of engaging with the world emerges from socially produced experiences. A person’s experiences shape expectations and contribute to the development of norms and shared modes of engaging with the world among people with similar social-structural situations. Although the concept traces back to Aristotle, as developed by Bourdieu, it captures how social situation and experience from within that situation shapes individuals’ understandings of how the world works (Calhoun, 1996; Gebauer, 2000). Shared *habitus* manifests in characteristic practices or ways of engaging with others and with the world. Calhoun (1996) describes *habitus* as “embodied capacities to hear and respond appropriately to what is being produced by others” (p. 304). This description makes clear how shared *habitus* produces and reflects a way of being.

The organizational structures typical of SA mean that decisions can take time and often require extensive research of logistical impacts, extensive consultation with units whose internal processes may be affected, and evidence of likely outcomes. Within these managerial cultures, people within a unit or a group of units are expected to work *as* a unit and/or *as* a group: to develop and commit to shared goals or act on the basis of common understanding of the task or tasks (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). Planning, action, and decisions are expected to run through units’ leadership structures and to support the institution’s strategic goals. Failure to be included in planning can be experienced as a lack of respect.

The organizational structures typical of AA mean that decisions often happen more rapidly. Who is informed or consulted may depend on the particular person making the decision, their leadership style, and their personal connections. People within an academic unit, faculty, or school are not expected to work as a single unit, and it is not always clear for what people are answerable and to whom they must answer (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). Within these academic cultures, planning, action, and decisions do not always run through a unit’s leadership structures and supporting the institution’s strategic goals can be treated as optional (Clark, 1983). Decisions are not always communicated, understood, or accepted by people outside of leadership and decision-makers may not be concerned about issues relating to implementation.

These differences in organizational culture may lead to perceptions of SA units as not supportive of change and of AA units as not supportive of the work involved in implementing changes. Where these perceptions reflect an absence of shared *habitus*, they will appear as differences in expectations of what a competent professional or academic leader, acting in good faith, would do. This can lead to situations in which initial misunderstandings and failures to communicate compound, creating new barriers to collaboration.

Change and transitions

The fact that collaboration often includes transition for all the actors involved is significant and often underappreciated. Change is always happening; change is just a fact. The transition that follows change is psychological and some transitions are bigger than others. Whether a change and transition are experienced as big or small may vary across groups and individuals within an organization (Bridges & Bridges, 2019, p. 15). In the complex university setting, paying attention to strategies for managing change and transition is especially important because even small changes can have implications for others and who is implicated may not be immediately apparent. How a person, group, or organization has experienced change and transition in the past, and what they believe about it, is also relevant. Associations with past changes may frame engagement with a new change and shape expectations of how others will engage, especially if the new change is reminiscent of a previous situation (Bridges & Bridges, 2016, p. 121). Individual relationships can be key to managing these effects (Levy & Polnariev, 2016).

Timely Declaration and what followed

This analysis of challenges to collaboration in higher education and successful strategies for overcoming them can be illustrated with a case study drawn from our experience at UVic³. This experience began with an initiative called Timely Declaration and grew into an institutional practice of AA–SA collaborations focused on student support and retention. Timely Declaration was an initiative to encourage students in UVic’s Faculties of Humanities, Science, and Social Sciences (the Tri-Faculty) to declare their program early in their academic career. The goal was for the majority of Tri-Faculty undergraduates to declare as soon as they are eligible; for most students, this is after they have completed their first year of studies. The Tri-Faculty has a shared advising model (Pardy, 2016). In addition to professional advisors (AAC advisors) located in the Academic Advising Centre (AAC) who report through SA, there are academic unit advisers (AUAs) who are faculty members in academic units providing program-specific advising⁴.

Origins of Timely Declaration

Timely Declaration was motivated by a desire to improve students’ academic experiences and progress toward degree completion, as well as retention. The Tri-Faculty had identified the timing of major declaration as a factor influencing student success. Large numbers of students in the Tri-Faculty were not declaring their program until immediately before graduation, which could lead to problems such as missing program requirements and delayed graduation. Many students missed out on program-specific opportunities either because they were unaware of those opportunities or because they were ineligible as undeclared students. In addition, not knowing who their students were made it difficult for academic units to create a sense of belonging. Late declaration also affected time to completion of degree. The Tri-Faculty had reason to believe that having more and better information about students’ plans for their degrees would improve academic advising both in the AAC and in academic units.

In the fall of 2012, a small AA working group developed a discussion paper on declaring a major. Reflecting AA decision-making practices, this working group proposed regulation changes that

³ With close to 22,000 students and over 5,000 employees, UVic is small enough for people to build relationships that support connections but large enough that those relationships have to be cultivated.

⁴ In the Tri-Faculty, students are admitted to a faculty, not to a program, and students manage their own registration; once admitted, students can register themselves in any courses as long as they have the pre-requisites. Students may seek support when registering for courses from either AAC advisors or from AUAs. At the time Timely Declaration was developed and implemented, the student to professional advisor ratio in the Tri-Faculty was 1,600:1.

would have taken effect in a short time frame; implementation had not been fully considered. These regulation changes would have had disruptive unintended consequences, including negative impacts on many operations in AA and SA units, and significant disruptions to student planning and course registration. In discussion of what was required for implementation, it became clear that a larger working group including leadership from both AA and SA was necessary. In addition to the Director and the Associate Dean of Academic Advising, this larger group included associate deans from each faculty of the Tri-Faculty (AA), the Registrar (SA), staff from the Office of the Registrar (OREG, SA), staff from the AAC (SA), and a project manager from University Systems (neither SA nor AA). This working group created a space where all those who would have to play a role in implementation could discuss how to realize the goal of earlier declaration. Inclusive membership brought forward fresh perspectives on issues that would have to be navigated, such as adoption of new technology. As a result, the group stepped away from the initial AA proposal, which focused on changing regulations, to start afresh with a new and more inclusive process.

The evolution of the working group can be understood using appreciative inquiry (AI), although this approach was not self-consciously adopted. AI is an approach to collective change that focuses on the “positive core”, a departure point for actions characterized by openness to co-create change (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2020, p. 2). AI encourages partners to “redefine the narrative, eradicating the focus on what is wrong, and enhancing aspects that are right” (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008, p. 223). Timely Declaration ultimately came to reflect what Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2020) call the “problem-solving paradigm”, which recognizes that, rather than ignoring problems, it is better “to surface the desire behind the problem or reframe it as what is wanted” (p. 17). Although there were initial challenges, new relationships emerged through problem-solving discussions and reflections on the process. The success of the collaboration led to different ways of pursuing institutional change as these relationships became building blocks for further collaboration.

The Timely Declaration working group focused on two goals: increasing the number of students who declared at the end of first year and significantly reducing the number of students who delayed declaration until just before graduation. Focusing on these goals (problems to be solved) redirected attention from what was stated in the academic or university calendar⁵ to processes and ways of engaging students. Partners were encouraged to think about how their practices and processes intersected with the common goals of Timely Declaration. Embedding the new regulations in an explicit plan for shifting the norm for when students declare supported this new approach to implementation.

Changing the group’s dynamic

The inclusion of a project manager from University Systems positively impacted the group’s dynamic. In discussions of technology, the group had to educate themselves about the practicalities of declaration processes and how technology could be applied. This learning was crucial in establishing a shared understanding of the issues and a clear set of mutual priorities. Grappling with the possibilities and limitations of technology focused the group’s attention on balancing the benefits (for example, where automation would enhance service to students) with administrative realities (for example, costs). Each partner was able to bring to the working group a clear set of objectives, including where automation would enhance service to students, that then informed the

⁵ At UVic, the academic or university calendar is the official guide to all programs, courses, services, and regulations of the university. It includes information about faculties, academic departments, programs, and courses, as well as institutional regulations, fees, and important dates.

development of the working group's shared priorities. In this, technology proved to be a common ground.

The new focus allowed each member of the working group to identify smaller initiatives within their own unit that would contribute to achieving the goals of Timely Declaration. Members became true partners as described by Jacoby (2003) in that all in the collaboration benefitted, each saw their own goals reflected in the shared priorities, and collectively they "learned about themselves and others" (pp. 6–7). This learning was especially important as it was the first time a joint AA and SA group worked in this way.

The dynamic changed from partners putting forward global solutions (from both AA and SA perspectives), which often involved recommendations for actions others should take, to putting forward local solutions informed by local knowledge. This approach respected the autonomy of each unit and acknowledged their respective priorities and responsibilities outside of Timely Declaration. It also allowed units to integrate the priorities of Timely Declaration into their other strategic priorities and move towards a more interdependent conception of their relationships.

Accepting differences

Perhaps most crucially, committee members came to recognize and accept differences in practices and expectations and began to develop a new, more inclusive *habitus* based on shared experiences of the collaboration. For example, although at UVic, SA and AA both report to the Provost, differences in structure, processes, and contexts within these divisions produce differences in experiences of the university and its mission, resulting in differences in *habitus*. In the process of creating a shared vision, members became aware of these differences in expectations, norms, and practices. Developing awareness of their respective differences in understanding of the university and in cultures was important in mitigating the effects of differences in their respective *habitus*. Members came to recognize ways in which their own situation within the university shaped their understanding of Timely Declaration and contributed to differences in expectations and (mis)interpretation of others' engagement. Reflection on and acceptance of these cultural differences was crucial in the successful development of a common language and a shared understanding of what working together required.

Timely Declaration outcomes

By May 2015, most barriers to declaring majors and minors had been removed. Calendar changes had been implemented that clearly communicated the expectation that students would declare no later than the end of their second year and students were given the ability to submit declarations electronically. The AAC, academic units, and OREG had identified and implemented significant changes to administrative processes for applying declarations to student records. A number of communication strategies were developed and implemented, including an email campaign, outreach from both the AAC and academic units, and a declaration of program event. Reports on proportions of students who had declared at various stages of their academic career were generated by OREG at regular intervals and were used in working group assessments during this period. Since 2015, the numbers of students declaring by the end of their second year has steadily increased to the point where declaration of program by the time a student has achieved third-year standing is now the norm⁶. In short, the initiative was a success.

In addition to being successful in its own terms, Timely Declaration also led to a change in institutional culture. It established a set of relationships and a way of doing things that fostered dialogue and made collaboration the norm. For example, including OREM in discussions of

⁶ As part of ongoing assessment, the AAC generates annual reports on declaration which are shared with the Tri-Faculty.

significant regulation changes, early in the process, is now a standard operating practice for AA units. Another example is the establishment of a standing meeting of SA representatives and associate deans where administrative changes and institutional initiatives can be brought forward and discussed. Recognizing the importance of collaboration with the Tri-Faculties, the AAC now invests significant staff resources in training and support materials for AUAs and consultation services for curriculum development. These investments have led to an improved experience for students.

The relationships that were established in Timely Declaration launched further collaborations. For example, as a direct result of her experiences with collaboration in Timely Declaration, the Director formed an ad hoc committee on advising and student exchange. This group, which includes leaders from the AAC, International Centre for Students, the Tri-Faculty, and, more recently, Undergraduate Records and Graduation Services, has become an important space for frank and open discussions of practices and problems. It has also become a space for envisioning new approaches to problems and identifying opportunities for further collaboration, such as the establishment of a Students at Academic Risk Committee (STAR) in 2023. STAR includes both AA and SA units and consults broadly across campus. In all these respects, the collaboration at the heart of Timely Declaration has evolved into a knowledge community which continues to influence practices and discussions.

Elements of successful collaboration

Collaboration in a higher education context requires a recognition of the hierarchical and siloed nature of university culture; that partners may be fearful; and that once established, collaborative relationships need to be maintained, which takes time. It also requires letting go of aspirations of control and accepting that planning, including succession planning, is required to embed collaborative practices within an institution's culture. Assessment, data, and benchmarking are important and often untapped resources that can break down siloes and contribute to building trust, managing change, and supporting collaborative practice.

Assessment as an opportunity

Existing literatures emphasize that successful collaboration requires a shared goal and having a plan of action with measurable benchmarks and a timeline for completion (McHugh, 2003). Kuh and Banta (2000) focus on assessment as "one of the few institutional activities to which faculty and student affairs professionals can contribute equally" (p. 5). The case study shows that establishing concrete measurable targets is important in at least four ways. First, it creates a framework for partners to assess their own practices. Second, having concrete, measurable targets as a reference point informs questions about potential solutions. Third, concrete, measurable targets facilitate mutual understanding and the development of a common language within which to express and discuss goals. Fourth, assessment plans highlight areas about which partners need to know more.

In Timely Declaration, the implementation of new technology made it necessary to develop a plan and process for data collection. For example, partners did not know students' declaration patterns, including when in the academic year and when in a particular student's program of study students were most likely to declare. To understand the impact of Timely Declaration, and whether specific interventions were making a difference, these patterns had to be benchmarked and tracked. The process of identifying benchmarks and developing assessment tools forced conversations about which project goals were priorities and why. In the course of these conversations, partners came to recognize the different narratives that provided a foundation for discussions of technology, student behaviour, and declaration processes. Once these cultural differences were illuminated, partners were able to develop a more nuanced understanding of the multiple perspectives that were relevant

to Timely Declaration. Discussions of assessment, benchmarking, and technology facilitated openness to other perspectives and became vehicles for developing shared understanding.

Technology was a neutral zone that made it possible for partners to articulate their own challenges and constraints in implementing Timely Declaration and to hear the challenges and constraints others were articulating. In discussions about technology, partners were able to bring forward operational constraints, such as the processes that technology would not address, and budget and staffing considerations that were important in the context of each partner's institutional mission and responsibilities. The working group developed a practice called "the tech reality check" when discussing the value of technical contributions. Asking whether the adoption of new technology could increase the number of students declaring led to a mapping of the declaration process that made clear where technological interventions were practicable and effective. The need to balance the benefits of technology with the costs of implementation provided the group with a common set of experiences and a common understanding.

Organizational structure, culture, and transition

Literatures on shared leadership often emphasize the importance of shared cognition, the development of similar mental maps, and integration into an overarching organizational culture (Kezar & Carducci, 2009, pp. 8–9; Pearce & Conger, 2003, pp. 12–13). However, accepting the value of differences and resisting the urge to suppress divergent perspectives and objectives — resisting the perceived necessity of assimilation — promotes richer, more complex collaborations.

In Timely Declaration, partners' places within the structure of the institution, and the *habitus* they developed from that placement, became resources for the project. The influence of the university's hierarchical structures was apparent in the origins of the initiative. The limitations the hierarchy imposed were ultimately overcome by conscious acceptance of differences. Timely Declaration took place in the context of a reorganization of the AAC that established a new partnership between the Tri-Faculty (AA) and SA. This link supported and facilitated movement beyond a narrow conception of what AA–SA collaboration could look like. It also created an opening for reimagining how action by SA partners could positively impact students' academic success. The fact that the initial committee was a small AA working group reflected a siloed approach to issues such as student retention at that time. This changed with intentional collaboration at the senior leadership level that reset and broadened the working group's membership.

Initially, discussions were limited by collaborators protecting and asserting localized practices and priorities in supporting student success. It was only when there was recognition and acceptance that practices and support of academic success are diverse, and that all partners had such practices, that a richer conversation became possible. Reimagining roles and relationships in student support enabled collaboration and not just coordination. It changed the orientation from process revision to constructive problem solving and co-creation.

Change is intrinsic to intentional collaborations, so is transition. Bridges and Bridges (2016) note that "It isn't the changes that will do you in; it's the transitions" (p. 3). How collaborative partners navigate the psychological aspects of transition will be informed by their position within an organizational structure as well as the culture of the institution in general and of particular units. For Timely Declaration, the change was pushing students to declare their program early in their studies and enabling them to do so independently through a new online portal. The transition for staff (SA) and faculty (AA) began with the plan to encourage earlier declaration and continued until immediately following the activation of a new declaration portal. As Bridges and Bridges (2016) observe, "Letting go of the old ways and old identity" (in this case existing practices that influenced declaration and how AA and SA worked together) "is when you need to help people to deal with their losses" (p. 5). At the beginning of Timely Declaration, all partners recognized that some form

of change was necessary and inevitable. The initial approach to achieving that change did not work. A successful outcome required letting go of preconceived ideas of what the change process would look like. Finding a way forward involved creating an environment where it became possible for everyone to let go of aspirations of control.

Those aspirations of control were at least partly rooted in fear. For example, from the perspective of AA, there was fear of not being able to influence processes that practically and concretely impacted students. There was concern about the capacity of faculty members, academic units, and AUAs to provide students with key information about degree progression and to identify and support students who could benefit from assistance. Ironically, this fear about impact on students was shared by the Tri-Faculty, the AAC, and OREG but was expressed differently and focused on different aspects of the process. Focus on the student experience led partners to recognize this shared concern and to reconfigure discussions and working relationships to emphasize the common goal of providing better support for students. In hindsight, improving the student experience was what Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2020) call the desire behind the problem that, once surfaced, enabled partners to focus on what was wanted. Recognizing this shared aspiration motivated change and gave partners confidence that a shared solution was possible.

The case study illustrates that letting go of old ways and old identities is not the same as letting go of cultural differences. In Timely Declaration, collaborative partners experienced transformations in their own cultures without this resulting in cultural convergence across partners or what is sometimes termed “shared cognition” (Pearce & Conger, 2003, pp. 12–13). Cultural convergence is not necessary and sometimes not desirable.

Accepting differences in culture

True collaboration requires a willingness to engage in the messy business of acknowledging and addressing assumptions and accepting differences in culture. It requires openness and opportunity to accept and incorporate others’ understandings and priorities in advancing the project. Successful collaboration includes making meaning in a new way.

A significant challenge in all organizations is failure to recognize the different expectations and interpretations of events and facts that may result from differences in *habitus*. This echoes Cockell and McArthur-Blair’s (2020) observation that “When people interact with each other, they often think that everyone is seeing the world in the same way that they are. This is usually the underlying cause for interpersonal conflict in higher education” (p. 19). When these different ways of seeing the world are understood in terms of *habitus*, it becomes clear that eliminating them is neither realistic nor desirable. Recognizing and appreciating differences in *habitus* enriches collaboration and opens partners to unexpected outcomes.

In Timely Declaration, AAC and OREG articulated the practical challenges that would be involved in moving the initiative forward and the need to investigate how proposed changes would play out in the processes currently in place. This was sometimes perceived as unwillingness to support or engage in the *change* process. Meanwhile, articulations from the Tri-Faculty of the importance of the project and the need to move forward quickly were sometimes perceived by SA as unwillingness to support or engage in the *process* of change.

The importance of improving the student experience and supporting and enhancing student success brought people together. There was recognition that AA and SA share a strong commitment to student learning and positive student outcomes. When collaboration focused on this commitment and students’ experiences, it became possible to develop a common interpretive framework. This common interpretive framework reflected the shared *habitus* of the university as a teaching institution, within which the experience of students is central.

Reflections

Awareness of and sensitivity to the scope of other units' institutional responsibilities and internal constraints can mitigate the barriers posed by differences in operations and institutional roles. Attention to organizational structure can even turn these differences into a resource for the partnership. Reflecting on the experience of barriers posed by organizational structure can also highlight when structures don't work, and intentional restructuring can change relationships. Changes of this type can create or be created by a common purpose (Kezar, 2012). For such changes to be positive, attention to what Bridges describes as the "messy middle" of transition is necessary.

These features can be seen in the case study. In Timely Declaration, collaborative partners' learning about one another and their respective organizational structures was part of developing mutual understanding and a shared orientation to the project. Assessment, data, and benchmarking were crucial to this process. Mutual respect, personal commitment, and trust allowed differences to become a strength without assuming or requiring cultural convergence. The mutual understanding and shared orientation developed through Timely Declaration has supported further collaborations that continue to benefit the institution.

In Timely Declaration, the intended change was a change to student behavior, which was supported by both SA and AA. Bringing about this change (instrumentally) required operational changes, which were sources of tension both across and within units. This was because operational changes involved transitions for staff and faculty. The successful collaborative process through which these operational changes and transitions were developed and managed effected positive changes in relationships between AA and SA. It was this observation (that collaboration had brought about positive change which, in turn, fed into more successful outcomes) that led us to the framework developed in this paper.

Understanding the context in which a relationship is unfolding is important in overcoming challenges and barriers. Part of understanding the context is understanding each other's *habitus*. Demonstrating a commitment to understanding each other's *habitus* builds trust and respect, which are necessary to secure successful outcomes over the long term. Trust and respect enable the development of shared orientation. Concrete goals and milestones can advance this process by anchoring relationships. As understanding of another *habitus* deepens, so can a tacit understanding of why things happen the way they do within that culture.

Another element of accepting and recognizing differences is taking on the role of communicator within a partner's own community. Partners can become bridges across the different cultures that exist within an organization. It is possible to leverage relevant experiences and a shared interpretation of the world within one's own *habitus* to consolidate and expand relationships across the organization. Interpersonal trust can help build inter-organizational trust.

In the case of Timely Declaration, a barrier to advancing the project was misinterpretation of actions and intentions. This changed as relationships between partners evolved. Understanding one another became part of the collaborative process. By asking questions about other units from a place of curiosity and on the assumption that others have reasons for what they do, partners were able to unpack processes, structures, and differences in *habitus*. This is essential to AA and SA seeing themselves as institutional partners.

Successful collaborations recognize the potential of a partnership beyond the original purpose. Collaboration can serve as a building block when attitudes toward partners move beyond immediate interests and goals. In the case of Timely Declaration, a significant but unexpected outcome has been the establishment of extensive, deeper, and more varied collaborations across AA and SA.

The authors also observed that these relationships and ways of doing things must continue to be nurtured. Successful collaboration can be very powerful, but it can also be very fragile. It takes time to build and maintain relationships, which can be challenging given the pressures of competing priorities. In the context of a large institution with multiple demands on time and attention, it can be hard to find the time to maintain and develop relationships in the absence of some immediate problem or spur. However, investment of time and attention, and creating institutional support and encouragement of collaboration between roles creates a resource that can be drawn on when unexpected challenges arise. At UVic, relationships between units and leadership roles that were seeded in *Timely Declaration* have contributed to navigating unexpected challenges, including those associated with the recent pandemic.

The personal dimension of relationships should also be considered. Because relationships involve actual people, there is a risk of collaboration, and the exposure to other ways of being in the organization that collaboration brings, being tied to specific individuals and not built into the roles those individuals occupy. This is something that should be taken into account in succession planning and in thinking about how institutional processes and practices support or discourage relationships between and across units. One strategy is to widen the net of people involved in a project, from both SA and AA. Another strategy is to write collaboration into role descriptions in both AA and SA.

Conclusion

Timely Declaration shows how effective collaboration between SA and AA can inform and shape organizational structures and cultures in ways that improve the student experience. Emphasizing an institution's educational mission and the relationships with students that are at the heart of this mission shifts the focus away from the relative positioning of SA and AA units towards the common purpose of the collaboration. When successful, this facilitates collaborations and leads to "new beginnings" between collaborative partners.

Change is an inevitable part of life, including the life of an institution. Fortunately, good changes create good foundations and, for this reason, successful collaborations across AA and SA can lead to a more resilient organization. In *Timely Declaration*, accepting the legitimacy of concerns in other partners' units and making a concerted effort to understand where concerns were coming from helped to build trust. The collaboration created space for partners to address concerns within their own portfolio rather than having solutions imposed by the project. This produced more consistent practices; more effective uses of increased capacity; and clearer, more transparent policy. Ongoing assessment informs how projects proceed. When assessment is integrated into the collaborative process, it can help develop a shared framework that deepens relationships and changes practices for the better.

Institutions that invest in collaborations between and across units encourage people to build skills necessary for inter-organizational relationships to flourish, so that inclusion and consultation with other units becomes a standard operating procedure.

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