

**CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY
OF ENROLLMENT OUTCOMES:
REFRAMING STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT
FROM THE ACADEMIC LENS**

Lynda Wallace-Hulecki (2007)

Introduction

As an active participant at national conferences on strategic enrollment management (SEM), I have noted a recurrent issue— that enrollment management was still viewed largely as a student affairs or institutional marketing matter; and that the academic community remained largely at arms-length from the process. Although the literature was replete with references to the importance of aligning SEM to the academic mission and to engaging the academic community in the SEM planning process, there was a paucity of information available about *how* to engage the academic community in assuming shared responsibility for enrollment outcomes, particularly within research focused institutions. As a graduate student specializing in the discipline of enrollment management, I embarked upon a study in the summer of 2007 to develop a deeper understanding of this issue. The study was designed to provide insights on how to engage the academic community in the SEM process in answer to the following five key questions:

1. At what stages of the SEM planning process was it most important to engage academic administrators and faculty?
2. What were the intended objectives for promoting academic engagement, and the associated outcomes and measures of success?
3. What strategies were employed, and with what success?
4. What were the conditions underlying success?
5. How relevant was the application of SEM theory to professional practice?

The study involved a purposive network sample of five SEM practitioners who were reputed for their leadership in advancing a SEM change process at medium-sized research-focused universities.

Among the many salient findings, the most surprising was that associated with question 2 — that a focus on ‘service to students’ was neither a primary motivator for, nor an outcome of the SEM process.

Results from this study were intended to assist SEM professionals, particularly within research-focused universities, in their quest to align SEM initiatives with the academic mission of the institution, to foster shared responsibility for enrollment outcomes, and to engage the academic community as active participants in the process.

About the Study

The primary research question under investigation was: *What processes and procedures were associated with successful SEM planning processes at research-focused institutions, in which the term 'successful' was defined by the ability to effect positive change through active participation by academic administrators and faculty in the process?* Study participants were invited to participate in a two-staged research process: a pre-interview survey, followed by a one-hour semi-structured interview. In considering that this study was about introducing change as a component of a strategic planning process, the constructs to frame the survey and interview processes were based upon an adaptation of Bryson's (2004) ten-step *Strategic Change Cycle*, and the *eight steps to introducing transformative change* advocated by Kotter (1995) and Owen (2001). In relation to each specific stage of the strategic planning and implementation processes, the study sought more depth of understanding in answer to the following four secondary research questions:

- What were the intended *objectives* for promoting academic engagement?
- What were the intended *outcomes* and *measures of success*?
- What *strategies* were employed, and with what success?
- What were the *processes and procedures* underlying the success?

Summary of Research Findings

- ***At what stages of the SEM planning process was it most important to engage academic administrators and faculty?*** There was considerable variability regarding which of the planning and implementation stages were rated of high importance. When considering high importance to be those items rated by four or more participants as a 4 or 5 on the five point Likert scale (where a rating of 1 is 'low importance' and a 5 is 'high importance'), and/or items with a mean score of 4 or higher, the most important stages included only three of Bryson's ten planning stages, and four of the eight transformative change stages advocated by Kotter and Owen, as follows:

| SEM PLANNING PROCESS STEPS | Importance | | | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|---|---|---|------|
| | Low | -----High | | | | Mean |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 1: Initiate and agree on a SEM planning process- the process of defining the purpose of the effort, who the decision makers are, who should be involved, steps in the process, expected deliverables, and governance structure for decision-making. | | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3.2 |
| 2: Identify organizational mandates- the process of clarifying the organization's formal (legislated) and informal (political) mandates in answer to the questions: who are we?, what do we do?, for who?, where?, when?, and how? | | | 2 | | 3 | 4.2 |
| 3: Clarify SEM mission and values- the process of clarifying the organization's SEM purpose (mission) and enduring values/beliefs. | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3.8 |
| 4: Assess the SEM external and internal environments- the process of conducting a SWOT analysis of the organization's enrollment-related internal S trengths and W eakness, and its external O pportunities and T hreats. | | | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3.8 |
| 5. Identify the SEM issues facing the organization- the process of identifying the policy questions or challenges that potentially will impact the organization's SEM planning foundations (e.g., mission, vision, mandate, values). | | | | 2 | 3 | 4.6 |
| 6: Formulate SEM strategies to manage the issues- the process of identifying strategies focused on what people value, their choices regarding what they are willing to pay for, what actions they are willing to take, and with what consequences. | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3.8 |
| 7: Review and adopt the SEM strategies or strategic plan- the process of review resulting in the approval to implement. | | 1 | | 3 | 1 | 3.8 |
| 8- Establish an effective SEM vision- the process of clarifying what success looks like. In some situations, this step may occur earlier in the processes. | | 3 | | 1 | 1 | 3.0 |
| 9- Develop an effective SEM implementation process- the process of developing an action plan that details who is to do what, by when, how, and includes expected results and milestones, accountability measures, mechanisms for data collection, and communications processes. | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3.0 |
| 10- Reassess SEM strategies and the strategic planning process- the process of review to determine what worked and what may need to be changed. | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3.4 |

Source: Based upon Bryson's (2004) ten-step *Strategic Change Cycle*.

| SEM IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS STEPS | Importance | | | | | Mean |
|--|------------|-------|---|---|------|------|
| | Low | ----- | | | High | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 1. Establish a sense of urgency | | | 1 | | 4 | 4.6 |
| 2. Form a powerful coalition | | | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4.5 |
| 3. Create a vision for change | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3.8 |
| 4. Communicate the vision | | | 2 | | 3 | 4.2 |
| 5. Empower others to act on the vision | | | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3.8 |
| 6. Plan for and create short-term wins | | | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3.6 |
| 7. Consolidate improvements, and produce still more change | | | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3.8 |
| 8. Institutionalize new approaches | | 1 | 1 | | 3 | 4.0 |

Source: Kotter (1995) and Owen (2001) – eight steps to introducing transformative change

In considering what factors may have contributed to the variation in responses, two recurrent themes emerged in the in-depth interview process that provided insight, at least in part, to this result.

1. That in practice, the planning and implementation processes were less structured and delineated than suggested by the theoretical constructs; and
2. That the stages identified most frequently as being of high importance reflected stages in which the level of the dean was most often involved in the dialogue. The less highly rated items may reflect those that were more often delegated to other bodies or constituents.

- ***What were the intended objectives for promoting academic engagement?***

Consistent with change theory as articulated by Hossler (1990), and subsequently by Kotter (1995) and Owen (2001), all Chief Enrollment Managers (CEMs) in this study spoke to an enrollment and/or an enrollment-related financial crisis as the catalyst for change. It was the connection between enrollment and institutional budget, and the relationship between enrollment and the institution's national ranking (a quasi indicator for market positioning) that created the sense of urgency.

In many respects, the objectives articulated by the CEMs resembled Kalsbeek's (2006) constructs associated with various SEM planning orientations (i.e., academic, administrative, market-centred, and student-focused), with one exception – *a focus on students*. Results

from the interviews indicated that although all five CEMs articulated objectives that reflected an academic orientation, other factors relating to market positioning and/or balancing “revenue, prestige, and access” were also important, and in some cases appeared to be more significant, depending on the institutional objectives at hand.

- ***What were the intended outcomes and measures of success?*** To illustrate the apparent linkage of objectives, outcomes, and measures to Kalsbeek’s four planning orientations, Kalsbeek’s constructs for SEM planning were used to organize results on outcomes and measures of success. Specifically, the following observations associated with Kalsbeek’s constructs for SEM planning orientations were drawn from the CEMs’ comments:
 - One CEM articulated the planning orientation to be ‘academic’ in nature, where the primary outcomes and measures focused on the student profile, student preparedness, progress, and outcomes;
 - Two of the CEMs articulated a more ‘market-centred’ planning orientation, where the primary outcomes and measures of success were associated largely with the repositioning of the institution and its ranking within the nation;
 - Two of the CEMs suggested that the planning orientation was more ‘administrative’ in nature, where the primary outcomes and measures of success appeared to be associated more with net revenues, and return of investment from administrative units; and
 - None of the CEMs suggested that the primary planning orientation of the university at the onset of the SEM initiative was ‘student-focused’, where enhancing student engagement, satisfaction, and academic success were the targeted outcomes. Although there was no substantive information resulting from this study to attribute this finding to any specific reason, the following may be plausible:
 - The number of participants involved in the study was insufficient to represent the four planning orientations; and/or
 - Within research-focused universities (as compared to primarily teaching-oriented institutions), student engagement may be more of a by-product of SEM planning than a driver.

When queried about *how* the academic character and values of the institution had changed as a result of the SEM planning process, the CEMs interviewed spoke most frequently to five impacts which were, in large measure, consistent with Henderson’s characterization of organizations with an EM ethos centred within the academic context (2004):

1. A shared responsibility;

2. A focus on service;
3. Integrated institutional planning;
4. Key performance Indicators (KPIs);
5. Research and evaluation; and
6. For the long haul.

Specifically, the CEM's referenced:

- a heightened level of understanding and involvement of the institutions, particularly among academic deans and faculty, in achieving enrollment goals (feature #1);
- an enhanced focus on longer-term strategic planning (features #3 and 6);
- a greater reliance on research and data (feature #5); and
- and a stronger orientation and attention to key performance metrics (feature #4).

However, surprisingly none of the CEMs identified a *focus on service* (i.e., feature #2) as being an outcome of the change process. The lack of a student-focused orientation at the onset of the SEM planning process as discussed above, may have contributed, at least in part, to this finding.

- ***What strategies were employed, and with what success?*** Two strategies were recurrently mentioned:
 1. The ability to speak the language of the academic —with research and data; and
 2. The use of financial incentives tied to accountability with consequences through a process of negotiation.

Whether considered an intentional strategy or a component of the implementation process, the success of each CEMs initiative was clearly and consistently rooted in what Henderson (2004) suggested was the future of enrollment management, the ability for enrollment professionals to speak the language of the academic —with research and data. However, Kalsbeek's assertion, that among the four planning orientations (i.e., academic, administrative, market-centred, and student-focused), it was the *market-centred* orientation that best aligned EM with strategic planning and institutional research, was not substantiated by this study. Admittedly, this study was not designed to test the application of Kalsbeek's construct model. However, several factors suggested a contradictory outcome. These were:

- The variability in situational contexts at the five affiliated universities gave some credence to the notion that a singular planning orientation does not befit all five contexts;
- The CEM from one of the private institution's who spoke most explicitly about the university's market-centred orientation also indicated that the planning process that was employed was the least structured — a contrary position to Kalsbeek's allegation; and

- Each CEM claimed that the success of their SEM initiative in engaging the academic community was largely attributed to their ability to ground the arguments in research and data.

A second strategy that was recurrently referenced was the use of financial incentives tied to accountability with consequences. In particular, the process was informed, but not driven, by formula models. The engagement of the academic deans was primarily through a process of negotiation, the use of financial rewards/ consequences, and evidence-based accountability.

- ***What were the conditions underlying the success?*** Although there were no indications of formal process maps for how each CEM went about engaging the academic community in enrollment planning, several recurrent themes emerged in the discussion of factors contributing to the success of engaging the academic community. These were:
 - The engagement of the academic community in the SEM process occurred primarily through the collaborative leadership of the Chief Academic Officer (normally the Provost) and the Chief Enrollment Manager (CEM), with direct involvement of the academic deans;
 - The use of financial incentives tied to accountability with consequences— which involved a process of negotiation between the Chief Academic Officer and individual deans, in consultation with the CEM;
 - The Deans' Council and/or an Enrollment Planning Committee that were comprised of senior academic leaders and influencers tended to be the focal point(s) for strategic discussions on the enrollment challenges facing the institution and the strategic opportunities at hand;
 - In terms of the change management process for implementing strategies, it was the CEM who communicated through evidence-based research and data the urgency behind the call to action, and did so through communicating both laterally and horizontally. The CEM served as a collaborator in working with the chief academic officer, and as a resource to the deans in extending the dialogue into the academic units for purposes of formulating enrollment strategies.
 - Although the mechanisms used for discussion took many forms (e.g., retreats, individual and group meetings, task teams) depending on the style of the academic leadership, all CEMs occupied positions of influence and were able to directly influence decisions regarding the structures necessary to engage the academic community (e.g., establishment of new committees, composition of committees).

- In relation to the involvement of the faculty-at-large, the primary mechanisms cited were through governance bodies as well as through cascading discussion processes flowing from those at the Deans' Council level through to the academic units.
- The hurdles or barriers to success that were most frequently identified by the CEMs were those of overcoming complacency, and challenging the status quo.

Finally, in relation to what lessons they would recommend to others, eight key suggestions were made:

1. Maintain a balanced leadership style-neither too autocratic, nor too dictatorial;
2. Be knowledgeable in the business aspects of EM;
3. Be a student of the institution and campus culture;
4. Invest in research and data;
5. Set your boundaries between gaining buy-in versus getting things done;
6. Maintain a focus on students;
7. Have a passion for the work; and
8. Maintain a sense of humor.

How relevant was the application of SEM theory to professional practice? This study substantiated the relevance of many of the theories behind the practice of SEM. In particular, the study demonstrated that:

- An enrollment crisis precipitated the introduction of a SEM process – a finding consistent with change theory as articulated by Hossler (1986), and subsequently by Kotter (1995) and Owen (2001).
- Differences in the nature of the institution's planning orientation appeared to be related to differences in how the primary purposes, outcomes, and success of SEM were framed – a finding consistent with Kalsbeek's theory (2006) of the four orientations to EM (i.e., academic, administrative, market-centred, and student-focused), with one exception. No relationship could be drawn from the comments to a 'student-focused' orientation.
- Changes in the academic character and values of the institution as a result of the SEM planning process reflected in large measure how Henderson (2004) characterized organizations with an EM ethos centred within the academic context, with one exception. None of the CEMs identified a 'focus on service' (i.e., one of Henderson's six key features).
- A recurrent strategy employed in the process was clearly and consistently rooted in what Henderson (2004) suggested was the future of enrollment management – the ability for enrollment professionals to speak the language of the academic, with research and data.

- The types of roles served by the CEMs in the process were similar to those articulated by Jim Black (2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d) in applying Bolman and Deals' (1991) four dimensions of change for reframing organizations to the future EM agenda.

Conclusions

This study was undertaken to develop a deeper understanding of the conditions for success in building shared responsibility for enrollment outcomes with the academic community at medium-sized research-focused universities. In considering the findings from this study, the following ten questions may prove useful to SEM practitioners in their quest to reframe the SEM process from the academic lens:

- 1. Have the academic leaders (i.e., President, Provost) of the institution characterized the importance of enrollment as vital to the academic well-being of the institution?**
- 2. Is there a sense of urgency underlying the enrollment planning process that resonates with the academic values of the institution?**
- 3. Are research and data effectively used to substantiate the case for change?**
- 4. Is there a willingness among the academic community to consider change?**
- 5. Are the enrollment planning, implementation, and decision processes designed to be highly interactive and participatory?**
- 6. Are academic leaders at the level of the dean engaged at critical decision-points in the enrollment planning process?**
- 7. What fora are in place to engage academic leaders at the level of the dean in discussion and decision processes?**
- 8. What lateral and horizontal communication structures are in place to extend the discussions into the academic units?**
- 9. What incentives and with what consequences are in place to encourage change?**
- 10. Is there collaborative leadership between the Chief Academic Officer and the CEM in the process?**

A note about the research methodology

Pre-interview survey- The purpose of the pre-interview survey was to identify which of ten planning stages, using the constructs of Bryson (2004), and which of eight steps to introducing transformative change, using the constructs of Kotter (1995) and Owen (2001) were considered to be the most important in engaging the academic community in a SEM process. The identified important stages were then used as the focus for the subsequent interview phase of the research. The pre-interview survey also was intended to mitigate potential bias in the interview process, given that the researcher occupied a SEM-practitioner role.

The one-hour in-depth semi-structured telephone interview- The purpose of the interview was to probe into each of the stages rated as important in the pre-interview survey, to gain more depth of understanding. The secondary research questions established for this study were used to frame the interview process to obtain information on the specific objectives, processes, procedures, outcomes, measures of success, and the lessons learned in the process. The following chart presents an overview of the general construct of the study.

Construct of the Study

| Research Questions | Related Questions | |
|---|--|-----------|
| | Pre-Interview Survey | Interview |
| <p>Primary Research Question</p> <p>What processes and procedures were associated with successful SEM planning processes at research-focused institutions, in which the term 'successful' was defined by the ability to effect positive change through active participation by academic administrators and faculty in the process?</p> | <p>In considering your experiences in leading a Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) initiative at a research-focused institution, please indicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how important it is to engage academic administrators and faculty at each stage of the SEM planning process.[see Table 4.1 list of Bryson's ten-step <i>Strategic Change Cycle</i>] • how important it is to engage academic | |

| Research Questions | Related Questions | |
|---|---|--|
| | Pre-Interview Survey | Interview |
| | administrators and faculty at each stage of the SEM implementation process[see Table 4.2 list of Kotter's and Owen's eight steps to introducing transformative change] | |
| <p>Secondary Research Questions For each stage of the strategic planning and implementation process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the intended <i>objectives</i> for promoting academic engagement? • What were the intended <i>outcomes and measures of success</i>? • What <i>strategies</i> were employed, and with what success? • What were the <i>processes and procedures</i> underlying the success? | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based upon your experience in leading a SEM initiative within a research-focused institution, for <i>each</i> of the stages in the planning and implementation processes identified as most important on the pre-interview survey, please identify the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What were the intended <i>objectives</i> for promoting academic engagement? b. What were the intended <i>outcomes and measures of success</i>? c. What <i>strategies</i> were employed, and with what success? d. What were the <i>processes and procedures</i> underlying the success? • Please identify the 3 factors that contributed most to making the SEM process successful. • Please identify the 3 barriers that needed to be overcome to achieve engagement of the academic community. • What lessons have you learned that you would recommend to others? |
| <p>Contextual Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About the Study Participant and Affiliated Institution | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please provide a brief overview of your professional background and experience as a SEM professional. • Please provide the name and |

| Research Questions | Related Questions | |
|---|----------------------|--|
| | Pre-Interview Survey | Interview |
| | | features of the institutional affiliation that will serve as the basis of reference throughout the study |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About the SEM Planning Context | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what ways was the academic well-being of the institution tied to its enrollment health? How would you describe the academic character and values of the institution before versus after the SEM planning process |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About the Study Participant's Position and Roles of Others Involved | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What was your role and positioning within a SEM organizational structure at the beginning and by the end of this process? Please identify other positions within the institutions that were involved in the SEM process. Which positions were the most helpful and least helpful in achieving success, and why |

About the Study Participants

Although the criteria for the study indicated that the CEMs must have at least five years experience, all five of the CEMs had more than 20 years experience within higher education, and specifically as leaders within the field of EM. Collectively, the five participants had 100 years experience as SEM professionals.

Two of the five participants were no longer associated with the affiliated institution they used as a point of reference in the study. However, all of the CEM's had occupied senior leadership SEM roles for at least 7 years at the affiliated institution, and during their tenure had reported directly to the Provost or the Chancellor as an Associate Provost, Assistant Provost, Vice-

Chancellor, or Senior Vice-President. In addition, all CEMs reported that they were actively employed in the field of SEM at the time of the study.

In relation to their affiliation with professional associations, all cited the American Association of Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) as the primary organization of affiliation among a variety of others. In addition, all CEMs reported that they were either actively sought after as conference key note speakers, SEM consultants, and/or in authoring publications on the subject of SEM.

One attribute of the study participants that was not pre-defined in the research design was whether the affiliated institution that served as the point of reference should have been a private versus a public research-focused university. All research participants had served in enrollment management leadership roles at more than one type of institution (i.e., private, public, and/or not-for-profit). However, three of the five participants reported a public university as the affiliated institution of reference, while one participant reported a private university, and one reported a private not-for-profit university. Although some variation in responses may be attributed to the type of institution of reference, all study participants qualified their responses as appropriate to reflect whether their experiences differed by type of institution. Therefore, throughout the discussion of the research results in this paper, distinctions in responses were made where relevant to type of institution.

All affiliated universities used as points of reference in this study were located in the U.S., and were classified as leading research- intensive or extensive universities, as defined under the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/> Retrieved July 26, 2007). The focus on American universities was purposeful. The literature suggested that the concept of enrollment management was rooted within the American context dating back to 1976, and to the work of such authorities on the subject as Jack Maguire, who was commonly referred to as the father of enrollment management (Kalsbeek, 2006). Therefore, the researcher believed that the greatest insights into how to engage the academic community in the SEM process would emanate from the American context which had the longest history

associated with what the literature suggested was an emerging and evolving profession from the mid-1970's through to the beginning of the twenty-first century (Black, 2001; Bontrager, 2004b).

Pseudonyms and Profiles of the Chief Enrollment Manager (CEM)

Research Participants

| Pre-Defined Selection Criteria | CEM Southeastern University | CEM Northeastern University | CEM Northwestern University | CEM Midwestern University | CEM Central University |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| Minimum of 5 years in a SEM leadership role | √ (>20 years) | √ (>20 years) | √ (>20 years) | √ (>20 years) | √ (>20 years) |
| Affiliate school is a medium-sized (15,000-20,000 students), research-focused university | √ <i>Public University</i> | √ <i>Public University</i> | √ <i>Not-for-profit Private University</i> | √ <i>Public University</i> | √ <i>Private University</i> |
| Demonstrated EM leadership role (e.g., Assistant/ Associate Provost level) | √ EM leadership role at both private and public colleges and universities | √ EM leadership role at both private and public colleges and universities | √ EM leadership role at primarily <i>private not-for-profit</i> universities | √ EM leadership role at both private and public colleges and universities | √ EM leadership role at both private and public universities |
| Proven track record in engaging the academic community in the process | Recipient of SEM awards of distinction; Sought after SEM consultant | Sought after SEM consultant | Nationally recognized as a best practice leader; In demand as a keynote SEM speaker | Recognized for SEM research | Sought after SEM presenter |
| Active membership in SEM-related professional associations | Active role in organizing and presenting at SEM related conferences | Active role in organizing and presenting at SEM related conferences | Active role in presenting at SEM related conferences | Active role in research and professional organizations | Active role in presenting at SEM related conferences |
| Fluency in SEM theory and concepts (e.g., conference presentations, publications) | Author of SEM articles and book chapters | Author of SEM articles and chapter books | Author of SEM articles and chapter books | Author, or co-author, of books, monographs, articles and book chapters | Published works on enrollment management |

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