

Preparing for Promise: A Case Study on Proactive Change

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Four-year postsecondary education institutions in Tennessee have sought systemic balance during a period of unprecedented change as a result of Tennessee Promise, a last-dollar scholarship program. The present study explored how administrators at four-year private, not-for-profit, and public-assisted postsecondary educational institutions responded to the need for structural change, as defined by Buller (2014) and Kezar (2013), through the delivery of orientation services. Investigators found that administrators reacted to anticipated change differently. Administrators who embraced the change sought to control the situation, create a culture of innovation, and seek coherence when the status quo was disrupted.

Keywords: *Tennessee Promise, structural change, student support service, orientation*

In 2014, Governor Bill Haslam invoked unprecedented change to postsecondary education in the state of Tennessee through the last-dollar scholarship-mentor program legislation, commonly known as Tennessee Promise. Similar programs, smaller in scope, existed throughout the nation prior to Tennessee Promise, but none as encompassing as to impose, directly and indirectly, varying types of change to all postsecondary education institutions throughout the state. The actualized impact of the legislation was immediate for associate-degree granting institutions like community colleges, while other institutions were afforded time to prepare for the imminent disruption to the status quo (Tamburin, 2016b).

The process by which four-year institutions respond to structural change, specifically student support service administrators, deserves further investigation because these administrators act to implement on-the-ground changes created in legislative chambers. Using multi-site case studies over a period of two years, this study explored the preparations for and implementation of organizational change that occurred as a result of the Tennessee Promise legislation. The delivery of orientation services, and those administrators responsible for offering this student support service, framed the observance of organizational change at four-year institutions in Tennessee. Orientation services was selected to observe organizational change because staff in this functional area provide information to incoming students and facilitate connections for this student population; the

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legislative impact on four-year institutions would be actualized by the preparations made to serve incoming students.

Tennessee Promise

Last-dollar scholarship and mentor programs significantly smaller in scope existed in Tennessee prior to Tennessee Promise. Formerly the mayor of Knoxville, Governor Bill Haslam founded the nonprofit organization “knoxAchieves” in 2008. Haslam’s knoxAchieves program acted as a pilot of Tennessee Promise, affording high school graduates in Knoxville the opportunity to attend college at the local Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville. The program knoxAchieves was later expanded to 26 counties and renamed “tnAchieves” (United Way of Metropolitan Nashville, 2013). The last-dollar scholarship provided financial support to students for the remaining tuition balance that federal and state aid would not cover (Brown, 2015).

Haslam’s initiatives married well with two major national education campaigns, Lumina Foundation for Education’s Goal 2025 (Lumina Foundation, 2013) and former President Obama’s Goal 2020 (De Nies, 2010), and would soon change the educational conversation in America. Governor Haslam utilized the national and statewide educational capital to launch Drive to 55 in 2013. Drive to 55 is a statewide effort to increase the percentage of the Tennesseans with a postsecondary educational credential to 55% by 2025. Tennessee Promise is the legislative initiative supporting the Drive to 55 campaign. When Drive to 55 was launched, only 34% of Tennesseans had an associate’s degree or higher (State of Tennessee, 2015). Five other states have since enacted similar statewide legislation offering tuition subsidies to all high school graduates: Missouri, Nevada, New York, Oregon, and Rhode Island (Mulhere, 2017).

Students can apply the Tennessee Promise scholarship to one of 13 community colleges, 27 colleges of applied technology, or, in some cases, a four-year college or university that offers associate degree programs (Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation [TSAC], 2016). As a last-dollar scholarship, qualifying students first apply their financial aid, such as Pell Grant and HOPE Scholarship, a lottery-funded, merit-based scholarship program in Tennessee, before Tennessee Promise covers the remaining balance of their tuition (Semuels, 2015). To receive the scholarship, high school seniors must apply to the Tennessee Promise program, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), attend two mandatory meetings at a participating institution, apply and register for a minimum of 12 credit hours at a participating institution, and complete eight hours of community service prior to the fall term immediately following their graduation from high school. Deadlines are associated with all eligibility criteria. To remain eligible for the Promise scholarship beyond the first semester, students must meet with an assigned mentor, attend mandatory Promise meetings, complete eight hours of community service, maintain continuous, full-time enrollment status, and maintain a 2.0 GPA each semester enrolled at a participating institution.

In fall 2015, over 16,291 high school graduates took advantage of the new Tennessee Promise program, enrolling in community colleges and technology centers across the state (Tamburin, 2016a). Enrollment of first-time, full-time freshmen increased 24.7% at community colleges and 20% at technology centers (Tennessee Higher Education Commission [THEC], 2016). First-year Promise students were retained at a rate of 63% from fall 2015 to fall 2016 (THEC, 2017a). The number of high school graduates utilizing Promise increased in fall 2016 to 16,790, which represented 22.6% of all high school seniors (THEC, 2017b). Financial data shows the state has spent \$25.3 million funding Promise since its implementation, with students receiving an average award of \$1,090.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored how four-year private and public postsecondary educational institutions, specifically those administrators responsible for coordinating the delivery of new student orientation, responded to structural change, as defined by Buller (2014) and Kezar (2013), resulting from Tennessee Promise legislation. Minimal, immediate impact on four-year institutional types, such as a decline in first-time freshmen, is expected from the imposed legislation. Buller (2014) and Kezar (2013) focused exclusively on the process of change management for academic leaders. The present study seeks to expand their research through the incorporation of a student support service, in this case, orientation at four-year institutions. Examining a functional area provides a microcosm for how campuses proactively respond to the legislation. Orientation is the conduit to student success. The itinerary of activities is designed to introduce, acclimate, and integrate a diverse cohort of students to the academic expectations, resources, and student life of an institution, while creating an environment where relationships can exist early and last through the transition. The empirical observation of student support service administrators preparing and implementing structural change will add further understanding to the existing body of knowledge related to higher education change theory.

Theoretical Framework

The topic of organizational change is well-researched (Buller, 2014; Bolman & Deal, 2013; Fullan, 2001; Kezar, 2013; Kotter, 2012; Krüger, 1996; Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 2000; Rodd, 2015; Schein, 2010). However, change within a decentralized organization, like higher education, is interpreted differently from change in a centralized, hierarchical organization, for which Kotter (2012) and Krüger (1996) developed popular change management models. Contemporary higher education change theorists like Buller (2014) and Kezar (2013) acknowledged that change leaders focus on the content of the change, rather than understanding the change process. A basis for future decisions with an organization is established by a leader's ability to interpret the type of change and create a culture receptive to change.

Kezar (2013) suggested two types of change exist in higher education: first-order and second-order change. First-order change has a minimal impact on the institution and the process for change is linear. An acute situation, like a weather-related incident, or legislation targeting a single functional unit, are examples of first-order change. First-order change can evolve into second-order change. Second-order change, which associates best with the Tennessee Promise legislation, impacts the underlying values, structures, processes, and culture of an institution. Second-order change is complex and implicates multiple levels (e.g. department, division, campuses) and dimensions (e.g. interests, schema, values) of the institution, often encountering resistance through the non-linear process of change. Legislation like the G.I. Bill or an institutional response to an accreditation sanction are examples of second-order change. Kezar observed that a common administrative mistake is not realizing when second-order changes are needed.

Like Kezar, Buller (2013) suggested different types of change exist in higher education: reactive, interactive, and proactive change. He defined reactive change as change forced on an institution beyond its control. Examples include change resulting from economic necessities, a disaster, or an approved legislative or governing board initiative. Interactive change is described as the type initiated due to internal factors impeding an institution from fulfilling its mission efficiently. Examples include change resulting from financial exigency or mission misalignment. He defined proactive change, which most closely associates with the present study, as the type not immediately forced on an institution by circumstances beyond its control, but which will be imposed if preventive action is not taken now. Examples include a progressive market shift in student population or an approved legislation with a delayed actualized impact.

Kezar (2013) and Buller (2014) encouraged administrators to develop different responses to change based on the type. When responding to second-order change, Kezar recommended administrators utilize social cognition theories, specifically sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and organizational learning (Argote, 2012; Argyris & Schon, 1978). Both focus on changing underlying assumptions individuals have regarding a particular environment. Sensemaking utilizes a social component to understand how individuals make sense of their environment through conversations and collaboration. Organizational learning provides impersonal information to individuals with the purpose of detecting abnormalities within an organization. Administrators who adopt a social cognition approach build data infrastructure systems, form data teams, enhance systems thinking through trainings, and facilitate dialogue to encourage sensemaking.

Buller (2014) suggested creating a culture of innovation throughout the decentralized structure of an institution. Institutions function uniquely as decentralized organizations because each operates inclusive of shared governance. Responsibilities and opinions on how to govern an organization, such as creating policies and procedures, are shared by autonomous member groups. Effective change leaders maximize the change process by encouraging autonomous member groups to participate in the brainstorming and planning process. Rodd (2015) warned administrators to initially acknowledge stakeholders' concerns, interests,

and needs in order to create a workplace climate where change is attractive and where staff approach the experience with confidence and optimism. In a culture of innovation, leaders develop a wider range of possible solutions beyond the initial received wisdom. Good ideas are implemented early, which further validates and perpetuates the culture (Schein, 2010). Creative and entrepreneurial ideas stream steadily, and the good ones grow because institutions rely on the full range of stakeholders to engage in the process.

Methodology

The following questions served to guide the study:

1. How has Tennessee Promise legislation impacted orientation services at four-year postsecondary institutions? and
2. What structural changes did four-year postsecondary education institutions implement to prepare for Tennessee Promise?

The investigators sought to understand how four-year private and public postsecondary educational institutions, specifically the administrators responsible for coordinating the delivery of new student orientation, responded to structural change as a result of the Tennessee Promise legislation. Orientation was selected to frame structural change, because orientation staff facilitate connections and provide information reflective of the institution as a whole to incoming students. Orientation activities prepare students, through sensemaking and organizational learning, to enter the system of postsecondary education. The legislative impact on four-year institutions would be actualized by the preparations for and implementation of organizational change that occurred as a result of the Tennessee Promise legislation. Investigators observed the response to change by using a multi-site case study over a two-year period.

Investigators used the multi-site case study design to understand the organizational change phenomenon. Audet and d'Amboise (2001) recommend this technique for strategic scanning if cross-case comparisons are the desired result. Case study research allowed the investigators to explore bounded systems (e.g. public, private) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). Interviews and website and document reviews were utilized for data collection at three distinct points through the life of the study. The in-depth process of data collection as the phenomenon was experienced was designed to provide rich accounts of the impact Promise had on orientation services.

The investigators selected six colleges and universities within the Tennessee Board of Regents and Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association systems. Investigators chose colleges and universities located geographically across the state, to strengthen generalizability of findings. For the purposes of this study, institutions located east of Nashville were considered eastern. The Nashville area constituted middle Tennessee. Finally, the western section of the state included

institutions to the west of Nashville. The investigators contacted administrators responsible for the coordination of orientation services at the six four-year institutions, and asked each to participate in the study. Administrators possess a familiarity for the organizational structure at the university and can convey how a phenomenon, such as Tennessee Promise, impacts both the institution and functional area. All six administrators elected to participate, by phone or email, providing investigators with a purposeful sample (Bernard, 2002). The identities of the six institutions were protected and the following pseudonyms were employed: Public A, Public B, Public C, Private A, Private B, and Private C.

Online documents and websites for the six participating institutions were reviewed in advance of the interviews. As a part of the exploratory process, the purpose of the document review was to learn about the institution, specifically its organizational structure and orientation services. The review of documents and websites offers investigators conducting a multi-site case study an enriched understanding for each case (McMillian, 2016). Investigators accessed online documents like organizational charts, directory information, university and orientation mission statements, and student handbooks. Webpages pertinent to orientation services and Tennessee Promise were also reviewed for each participating case. Investigators printed accessible materials and made observational notes. Notes were semi-structured, but all investigators commented on the ease or difficulty of locating and interpreting the information retrieved.

Administrators responsible for the delivery of orientation services participated in three rounds of interviews: pre-implementation (before the first Promise students enrolled), mid-implementation (after the first Promise students enrolled), and post-implementation (after the first Promise students completed two years of college). Pre-implementation interviews were conducted by the investigators in February and March 2015, before the first cohort of Promise recipients utilized the scholarship at participating institutions. During the pre-implementation interviews, investigators asked administrators the following questions:

1. Describe your current new student orientation.
 - a. [Probe] Do you have a separate freshmen and transfer student orientation? If so, can you describe how they differ?
2. How do you see Tennessee (TN) Promise impacting new student orientation (NSO) at your institution?
3. What changes are you putting in place with NSO to prepare for TN Promise?
4. Why has TN Promise motivated you to make these changes?

Mid-implementation interviews took place in October 2015, after the first class of Tennessee Promise students had enrolled at associate-degree granting institutions across the state. The investigators updated the interview protocol to reflect the administrators' answers in the pre-implementation interviews. All other interview protocol from the pre-implementation interviews was replicated. The study suffered from mortality in the mid-implementation interviews. One

administrator from the pre-implementation interviews never responded to phone calls, voice mail messages, or emails made by an investigator. Investigators asked administrators, during the mid-implementation interviews, the following questions:

1. What reflections do you have now that the first Tennessee Promise students have enrolled across the state?
2. The last time we spoke, you saw Tennessee Promise (refer to pre-implementation interview).
 - a. [Probe] Was your anticipated impact accurate? How so?
 - b. [Probe] Were there any surprises? Explain.
3. Based on what you observed from fall 2015, what changes will you make, if any, to new student orientation for fall 2017?

The post-implementation round of interviews took place in October 2017, two years after Tennessee Promise was implemented and as the first class of Promise recipients transferred to four-year institutions across the state. All other interview protocol from the two previous rounds of interviews was replicated. The study suffered from mortality in the post-implementation interviews as well. One administrator, from a private institution, from the pre-implementation interviews never responded to phone calls, voice mail messages, or emails made by an investigator; it was the same administrator who failed to participate in the mid-implementation interviews. Investigators asked administrators, during the post-implementation interviews, the following questions:

1. Has TN Promise impacted new student orientation (NSO)?
 - a. [Probe] If so, what changes have you put into place with NSO because of TN Promise?
 - b. [Probe] If changes were made, why has TN Promise motivated you to make these changes?

Investigators manually transcribed interview recordings on password-protected computers. The typed transcriptions were stored on a shared cloud drive. Each investigator checked for response consistencies once interviews were transcribed. Administrators were contacted by individual investigators if an inconsistency was found, and further clarification was sought. Following clarification protocol, each investigator offered one another a peer research review to scrutinize perceived interpretations. The investigators shared with one another interview transcriptions, inclusive of digitally marked codes and larger themes, and observation notes derived from website and document reviews. Thematic analysis was applied by differentiating low- and high-level codes, largely derived from frequencies and co-occurrence, on the transcriptions until larger themes were developed (Carspecken, 1996; Guest & MacQueen, 2012).

Findings

As discussed, investigators selected six institutions across two institutional types: three four-year public institutions and three four-year private institutions. From the pre-implementation interviews, the multi-site case study revealed shared themes specific to the institutional type, underscoring the importance of this sampling method from both public and private institutions geographically located in different sections of the state. Resulting themes for the pre-implementation phase include concerns about change and anticipated Promise impact. The latter serves as the focal theme for mid-implementation. For the post-implementation interviews, investigators focused on the theme of realized Promise impact, based on the participants' reported anticipated changes from the two earlier rounds of interviews.

Pre-Implementation

Concerns about change. The investigators observed that each administrator interviewed perceived proactive, structural change differently. Administrators at the private institutions perceived the Promise legislation as a threat to the primary revenue source with unforeseen, delayed consequences. All three administrators acknowledged the ramifications of Promise would be realized in two years. Private B and Private C administrators were passive about implementing preemptive change to stabilize the potential reduction on fall 2015 student enrollments; however, both acknowledged the impact Promise would have on enrollment. Private A reacted quickly to the legislation by offering an associate degree option as part of new academic offerings. The three administrators openly opposed the legislation and perceived limited opportunities to stay competitive.

Public universities' administrators embraced the structural change to orientation services, despite a lack of research on the topic and the continuous need to change over the next two to five years. Administrators from this institutional type were also nervous about the legislation. The immediate implications would be a loss in traditional student enrollment and fewer attendees at new student orientation events. Other concerns expressed transcended orientation services, such as fewer endowed scholarship recipients, residential occupants, and ultimately students engaged in campus activities. Like their counterparts at the private colleges and universities, the phrase, "we'll know more in two years" was said throughout the interviews. Unlike the private institution administrators, the three associated with the public universities responded to impending change with assurance as demonstrated by ideas. Public B planned to expand its recruitment region further out-of-state. Public A planned to offer an associate's degree, making the institution eligible to receive Promise dollars through eligible recipients. Public C described a plan to recruit prospective students at a younger age, expand the recruitment radius and add more transfer counselors to recruit at community college partners.

Anticipated Promise impact. Administrators acknowledged Tennessee Promise would impact their institutions' orientation service; anticipated impact largely reflected differences in four-year institutional types. The private college and universities and the public universities anticipated a drop in new student orientation attendees for fall 2015, expecting an overall enrollment decline in first-time freshmen due to Promise recipients first attending community colleges before transferring to four-year institutional types. However, the response to this change varied. Administrators at private institutions and Public A did not plan to adjust the number of new student or transfer orientation events scheduled for fall 2015. However, two public universities planned to decrease the number of new student orientation events and possibly add transfer orientation events over the next two years. Administrators at the private college and universities acknowledged an older population would attend orientation events in two years. The anticipated age change prompted the Private C administrator to consider incorporating financial aid, career services, bursar and alumni relations into the content sessions for the event. The same administrator also considered shortening the event from one day to a half-day and reducing the number of "rah-rah" activities.

Administrators at all three public universities acknowledged transfer orientation attendees would increase, but were reluctant to voice concern for the decline in new student orientation attendees. Those at public four-year universities recognized that the activities and duration of transfer orientation events would change. An emphasis on career counseling and academic planning, prior learning assessment, financial aid and scholarships would be added to the existing transfer orientation agenda. Administrators at Public B and Public C acknowledged a need for staff and peer mentors as well as adding a parent track to the existing orientation. Administrators at all public and private four-year institutions realized the importance of educating transfer students on the support services and social engagement opportunities available at their institution, that were not necessarily available at community colleges. Despite the ideas shared by both private and public administrators, the unequivocal decision to alter the event was never made. Rather, a common phrase was messaged throughout the pre-implementation interviews, "we'll know more in two years." The investigators infer this repeated phrase suggested four-year colleges and universities would not see the majority of Tennessee Promise recipients for two more years, and time for change existed.

All four-year colleges and universities acknowledged the need to re-establish, and possibly re-invent, partnerships with community college leadership. Public C administrator voiced an interest in sending transfer counselors to community college summer orientation events for greater visibility. Public B administrator planned to re-publicize a dual admissions partnership. Both of these administrators thought "more handholding and simplified information" needed to be shared with Promise recipients earlier in the community college-to-university enrollment matriculation process.

In terms of administrators' motivation to change in response to the Promise legislation, administrators at private, four-year institutions felt pressure to change in order to stay competitive as well as maintain tuition and fees, the primary

revenue source. Motivations to change varied most among public universities' administrators. The call to support student success, explore new ways to deliver orientation services, and respond to state legislation were among the answers given. A summary of findings from the pre-implementation phase can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Summary of Findings

Interview Phase	Commonalities	Differences
Pre-implementation February, March 2015	<p>Shared by Private and Public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts primary revenue source; anticipated loss of enrollment and orientation attendees • Unforeseen, delayed impact • Time for change exists • Ideas shared to secure lost revenue and adapt orientation based on anticipated changes • Older student population to attend orientation events • Increase in transfer orientation attendees • Responsible for educating students at transfer orientation about opportunities available at four-year institutions • Neither type of institution planned to change orientation services 	<p>Private</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceive limited options to remain competitive • Threat to primary revenue source <p>Public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embrace imminent structural change with reservations • Re-establish community college partnerships

Mid-Implementation

Anticipated Promise impact. The anticipated decline in new student orientation attendance at private and public institutions was verified by administrators in the post-implementation interviews. The enrollment decline was attributed to first-time freshmen attending community colleges in advance of four-year institutions, which in turn reduced the number of students participating in new student orientation. No significant change to transfer orientation participation was observed at public universities.

The five administrators who participated in the mid-implementation interviews voiced a need to change future orientation services. Private and public

administrators acknowledged greater relationships with community colleges were a priority moving forward. However, specific plans on how orientation services would change were not shared by the two private administrators. Rather, administrators suggested changes would not be implemented until the Tennessee Promise students completed their associate’s degrees and transferred to their four-year institution. Private B administrator stated, “we do not plan to make changes to new student orientation at this time.”

Public university administrators expected to change both new student orientation and transfer orientation services. All three administrators planned to reduce the duration of new student orientation events and offer fewer sessions. An emphasis on social engagement opportunities will remain because “some students will always seek out institutions that can provide a residential college experience” as stated by Public B and Public C administrators. The number of transfer orientation sessions will increase at all three institutions. The same two administrators stated transfer orientations will contain information specific to transferring Promise recipients, such as information on financing the last two years, experiential learning opportunities, off-campus housing options, and employment preparation services. Public B administrator said transfer orientations will also have two tracks, one designed for younger transfer students, like transferring Promise recipients, and one for older adult learners, likely non-Promise recipients. It is important to note all three public university administrators also affirmed the real impact would not be known until the end of the two-year associate’s degree cycle. A summary of findings from the mid-implementation phase can be found in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Summary of Findings

Interview Phase	Commonalities	Differences
Mid-implementation October 2015	<p>Shared by Private and Public Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decline in enrollment and new student orientation attendance • No change with transfer orientation participation • Acknowledged need to change future orientation activities • Acknowledged need for outreach to regional community colleges • Delayed impact not actualized until Promise recipients transfer 	<p>Private Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No plan to implement changes until Promise recipients transfer <p>Public Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned to change new student and transfer orientation services • Fewer new student orientation event dates; continue to emphasize residential experience • More transfer orientation sessions; emphasize experiential learning opportunities

Post-implementation

Realized Promise impact. Private A reported that as a result of Promise, this institution created an advisor role in its retention division, and this advisor begins interacting with the students at orientation, instead of later. However, “the majority” of students who plan to pursue Promise at Private A ultimately pursued a bachelor’s degree instead, and therefore selected a different financial aid package. Other reasons students are not pursuing Promise at Private A, according to the interview, is the limited selection of associate’s degree majors offered, advisors suggesting bachelor’s tracks to students, and students losing Promise aid. Private B indicated Promise had not made much of an impact on orientation, with “no real changes” to the orientation program. Although orientation did not change, the implementation of Promise led to an “increased awareness” of transfer students and the option of course registration prior to orientation to better serve this group of students.

Public B and C reported substantial declines in the number of new student orientation attendees for 2015 and 2016. Public C stated, “we anticipated fewer orientation attendees as a result of a decline in enrollment. However, the decline exceeded our expectations.” All three public universities offered fewer new student orientation sessions during the summer months since Promise was implemented. Public B and C also noted students attending new student orientation were noticeably different since Promise was implemented in 2015. The Public C administrator stated, “students and their parents inquired more about the cost-of-attendance. They knew a free alternative existed.” Public B and C also shared that attendees had stronger academic records in high school, few were first-generation students, and sought a college experience independent of their parents. All three universities had to sell students on the “value of the experience.”

Public B created a new transfer center and hired an admissions counselor to work exclusively with transfer students who were Promise recipients. The counselor traveled regularly to the community colleges in the region to promote the dual admissions agreement, recruit for all academic programs, register transferring Promise recipients, and answer questions about scholarships, transferring credits, and activities on campus. The Public B administrator was encouraged by the results, and added, “When we spoke in 2015, our university knew this staff position was necessary to strengthen those relationships at regional community colleges.”

All three public universities added more transfer orientation sessions and reduced the duration of the event to three hours. The transfer orientation itinerary did not vary from what was stated in pre-implementation interviews. Two-hour night sessions were now offered at Public A and B. The Public A administrator stated, “our transfer orientation sessions were offered during the day and open to any transfer student. We needed sessions for older adults, those with off-campus obligations. Adult students have specific needs.” A summary of findings from the post-implementation phase can be found in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Summary of Findings

Interview Phase	Commonalities	Differences
Post-implementation October 2017	<p>Shared by Private and Public Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New positions were created or revised due to Promise • Increased awareness for unique needs of transfer students 	<p>Private Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reluctant to attribute Promise for decline in enrollment and new student orientation attendance • Chose not to change orientation services <p>Public Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attributed decline in enrollment and new student orientation attendance to Promise • Orientation attendees displayed prominent differences • Transfer orientation events and sessions reflected needs of student population

Discussion

Schein (2010) acknowledged that organizations, specifically personnel within the organizations, rarely self-impose change. Institutions unreceptive to proactive change refused to implement a culture of innovation and were satisfied in a state of equilibrium. Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja (2000) warned equilibrium is a precursor to death because organizations are less responsive to change. The administrators who demonstrated no desire to change before the actualized impact of Tennessee Promise placed their institution at risk.

Effective change leaders sought to control the change and respond in a timely manner, as suggested by Buller (2014). Two administrators, and their staff, refused to accept that options were limited, despite external forces imposing change. Change was seen in this case study as imminent because the student population was changing. Although time to change was available, these two administrators began planning and soliciting feedback from stakeholders early.

Administrators at the four-year institutions varied in their timely responses to the change, specifically in regards to controlling the situation. Administrators at Public B and Public C associated the need to proactively change as a matter of survival because the prospective student pool was changing and competition was increasing from rival institutions. Public B and Public C institutions plan

to adapt orientation services for a younger transfer group, expand recruitment of traditional-aged students outside state lines, start the matriculation of transfer students immediately after they enroll in a community college, and shift personnel resources to reflect the anticipated changes of this legislation. Other institutions conveyed a similar message, but failed to develop and implement a plan of action by the time post-implementation interviews were conducted. The investigators interpreted this observation to signify the administrators were aware change was imminent, but a willingness to control the situation, prioritize the institution's best interests, and, most importantly, create a culture of innovation to determine how change occurs were not guaranteed to follow.

The investigators observed reactive change, by way of the imposed Tennessee Promise legislation, was a catalyst for proactive change. Buller (2014) defined proactive change to be the type eventually forced on an institution, leaving change leaders time to enact change to avoid a crisis. Two of the four-year institutions, Public B and Public C, took measures to proactively change orientation services and recruitment practices before the institution imposed such changes. Orientation services is the functional intermediary institutions will utilize to demonstrated a renewed focus on transfer student development. The actualized impact has potential to present itself as a crisis for institutions unwilling to proactively change services and practices.

Limitations

In all but one instance, the investigators had not been employees at the institutions they interviewed. However, one investigator interviewed a respondent he or she knew at an institution where he or she had previously worked, as a matter of convenience sampling. Besides that one case, the investigators did not know the respondents prior to the interviews, thus avoiding personal bias. In addition, interviews were conducted by phone, wherein investigators did not see their respondents, thereby eliminating any bias that could have arisen from in-person interviews.

Implications for Practitioners

The investigators observed reactive change was a catalyst for proactive change, as defined by Buller (2014). Administrators at four-year institutions have time to plan and prepare for proactive change once Promise, or a similar last-dollar scholarship, is implemented in their state. All six four-year institutions experienced a decline in new student enrollment. The decline in enrollment transcended functional areas beyond orientation services, making the realized impact of Promise second-order change (Kezar, 2013). The unique needs of transfer students was the shared theme for innovation that united changes such as new positions, revised responsibilities of existing positions, and adaptations to existing events and services. Early in the implementation of Promise, private and public institutions

were reluctant to change. Change requires planning, fiscal and human resources, and a culture receptive to innovative solutions. It is easier to say “we’ll know more in two years” until proactive change arrives at reactive change.

Future Research

The continuation of this study is needed to understand how other student support services like housing, campus activities, career counseling, advising, and academic support services responded to proactive change at private and public four-year institutions. In addition, community colleges endured reactive change as the Promise program was implemented throughout the state. A replication of the present study at the community college setting would be beneficial to further understanding reactive change in a higher education setting, as well as what second-order changes were implemented with an increasingly traditional-aged student population.

Conclusion

The present study found that student support service administrators responsible for the delivery of orientation services responded to proactive, structural change differently. Effective change leaders sought to control the situation in a timely manner, create a culture of innovation, and discover coherence when the status quo was disrupted. The change described by these administrators was not singularly focused on personnel, tactics, and procedures, but rather on an encompassing, continuous process.

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