Rebuilding Trust in a Community College

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Agenda

- Types of Trust within the College
- Broken Trust
- Effects on an Individual & Institution
- The College’s Recovery Process
- College Leaders & Their Role as “Sense Makers”
- Honesty is the Best Policy
- Healing through Participatory Governance
- Moving Forward to Rebuild Trust
- Questions
Trust within the College

- Trust is the underlying foundation in any relationship.
- Trust is a psychological state that exists when you agree to make yourself vulnerable to another because you have positive expectations about your current and future experiences. ¹

- Who has worked at their institution for:
  - Less than 1 year?
  - Less than 2 years?
  - Less than 5 years?

Types of Trust

- Three types of trust:\n  - Strategic Trust:
    - Trust in upper management
    - Make the right strategic decisions
    - Unified vision
  - Personal Trust:
    - Trust in direct managers
    - Expectation of being treated fairly
    - Consider employee needs when making decisions
  - Organizational Trust:
    - Trust in the organization as a whole
    - Internal processes being fair
    - College follows through with promises to stakeholders
- All three are distinct and interconnected

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Broken Trust in Community Colleges

- Causes for Broken Trust in Community Colleges:
  - Administrator Turnover
  - Rotating or lack of leadership
  - Interims
  - Fiscal mismanagement
  - Abuse of power
  - Lack of moral or ethical framework
  - Inability to listen
- All three types of trust are impacted
Effects on an Individual & Institution

- True Victims of Broken Trust:
  - Faculty & Staff
  - Remaining Administrators
- Results of Mistrust:
  - Turbulent emotional climate
    - Fear
    - Hurt
    - Anger
    - Disbelief
    - Powerlessness
    - Abandonment
  - Crumbling infrastructures
  - Breakdown in Communication
  - Refusal to engage in Participatory Governance
  - Lack of Faith in the Participatory process
The College’s Recovery Process

- Mistakes new/entering Administrators make:
  - Try to make changes & rebuild trust immediately
  - Don’t examine conditions
  - Don’t examine the types of trust that have been broken
  - Results in backlash, anger, & isolation

- Three phases to recovery process
  1. Impact Phase
  2. Applying Meaning Phase
  3. Moving Forward Phase

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Recovery Process – Impact Phase

Impact - Phase One:
- A time when the faculty, staff, and remaining administrators, must be allowed time to absorb and process their experiences from the interpersonal distress experienced
- Observe individuals retreating & establishing barriers to protect themselves
- Observe withdrawal from engaging in participatory governance due to mistrust and disappointment
- Observe creation of unrealistic goals projected on remaining administrators as coping mechanism for broken trust
Recovery Process – Impact Phase

Impact - Phase One Continued:

- Administrators tasked with rebuilding trust should take the following steps:
  - Determine what happened
  - Analyze how trust was broken (& what type of trust)
  - Consider how to prevent deterioration of trust in the future
  - Identify if there was a single or multiple causes for the broken trust
Recovery Process - Applying Meaning

**Applying Meaning - Phase Two:**

- In-depth explanations are pursued to create context & explain why events occurred.
- Not intended to create blame, but to allow parties to take responsibility for roles they played, faculty & staff members can process their roles.
- **Enable individuals to mourn for what the institution was but no longer is**
Recovery Process - Applying Meaning

**Applying Meaning - Phase Two Continued:**

- Administrators who don’t engage in phase two can experience faculty and staff members clinging to the past and an institution that no longer exists.
- Developing a shared view of what has occurred can create a sense of safety needed to “move on”.
- Contribute to the development of new expectancies or predictions for the future.
- **Without understanding why an event occurred, it is difficult to predict whether it will recur in the future!**
Recovery Process – Moving Forward

Moving Forward - Phase Three:

- Empowers the staff to move forward with their lives within the new institutional context
- Attempting to engage in discussions of forgiveness before phases one and two are complete can be met with resistance
- Forgiveness does not begin on day one of a new administrator’s tenure; it begins once the administrator has created rapport with all individuals and constituency groups, engaging in the process with all staff members through phases one & two
Recovery Process – Moving Forward

Moving Forward - Phase Three Continued:

- Focus is to begin moving to forgiveness
- Allow staff the opportunity to:
  - Mourn what the institution was
  - Move through the phases and provide the new executive team a chance to walk through the process with faculty and staff
- Allow the executive team the opportunity to prove themselves without demonizing them based on past hurts
- Most importantly, the focus should remain on building a future rather than holding on to the past and refusing to move forward
- Must acknowledge past experiences to begin the healing process!
College Leaders & Their Role as “Sense Makers”

- Range of emotions experienced when trust is broken
- New President or Administrators cause:
  - Shifts in organizational leadership
  - Shifts in culture
  - Further intensifying emotions
- Faculty & Staff Concerns 4:
  - Job security
  - Degree of structural changes occurring
  - Capacity of College to absorb changes and move forward successfully

College Leaders & Their Role as “Sense Makers”

• Administrators should:
  • Ascertain depth and breadth of loss of trust, assessing impact on all shareholders
  • Be honest & address the situation quickly with candor & sincerity
  • Identify precise steps on how to rebuild trust including changes which are necessary and sharing of information
College Leaders & Their Role as “Sense Makers”

- Kearney (2013) study on shifts in College Leadership
- Identified “hot zone” – intense & high volume negative emotions experienced by faculty & staff during presidential hiring
- “Much of their anxiety, apprehension, or other negative emotional reactions to the commitment they felt to the College and their feelings that the institution was vulnerable to the uncertainties or to the whims of a new administration” (p. 908).
College Leaders & Their Role as “Sense Makers”

- Hot zone ends once new president is announced
- Actions of the new leader that have the greatest impact:
  - Visibility & accessibility actions
  - Immediate problem resolution actions
- During this time, sense making occurs by constituencies within the organization
- Sense making occurs after an event rather than during the time of change
- Acting as “sensegivers”, leaders shape the ultimate interpretation of change by campus members

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College Leaders & Their Role as “Sense Makers”

- Approach the process from a sense giving perspective:
  - Host open forums
  - “What is working well at the College?”
  - “What is not working well at the College?”
  - “What are your thoughts & dreams for the future?”
- Approach with an “open mind” & “flexible stance”
- Provide broad framework to explore meaning
- Recognize & understand different perspectives
- Lead with empathy
College Leaders & Their Role as “Sense Makers”

- Demonstrate:
  - Ability to navigate ambiguity
  - Collaborative decision-making
  - Strong ethical code
  - Respect for others
  - Patience
- Work with the President to understand the vision and united goals for the College
- Use the vision and goals as tools to redirect individuals and correct behaviors
Honesty is the Best Policy

- “A leader’s access to knowledge and cooperation is based on trust, with followers having faith that their leader will not abuse their rights or interests”
- Honesty and open communication can build rapport
- Be cautious of inconsistent messaging
- Know your priorities and the President’s priorities before broadcasting
- Ensure new commitments are realistic and message consistently throughout administrative team
Honesty is the Best Policy

• “Honesty is absolutely essential to leadership and voluntary employee contribution is based on trust they have within their leader”

• Get in front of people, be visible, encourage candor, show concern, & mutual respect

• Tell all the news you have, even the bad news! This allows for factual and analytical processing and prevents jumping to conclusions

• Connect with all stakeholders and value face-to-face interactions
Everything is just fine.

Thank goodness. It's about time.

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Honesty is the Best Policy

- Listen to your people
- Help individuals see their roles
- Create a shared vision and procure individual buy in and constituency buy in
- “A leader’s goals are irrelevant if employees aren’t willing to embrace change; if they’re not confident, committed, and engaged; and if they don’t trust their leaders” 6

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Healing through Participatory Governance

- Steps taken so far:
  - Allowed faculty and staff to grieve
  - Created meaning for the incidents
  - Engaged in emotional process of creating new relationships
- Now conversations can begin to heal morale
- California Education Code 70902(b)(7) requires faculty, staff, and students participate effectively in district and college governance
- Participatory governance is vital to the trust and internal wellness of a community college
- Without participatory governance with constituency groups:
  - Conflict
  - Mistrust
  - Resentment

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Healing through Participatory Governance

- Participatory Governance affects:
  - Morale
  - Accreditation
  - Accountability

- The process:
  - Requires mutual trust and open communication
  - Can be lengthy, tedious, & difficult in terms of interpersonal skills
  - Requires a defining roles and expectations for all parties
Healing through Participatory Governance

- Envision a participative organization and what the college environment should be!
- Embrace the transformative nature of participatory governance & reaffirm the College’s mission & vision
- Focus on structure, efficiency, and inclusiveness
- If done right, you can observe:
  - Empowerment of participants
  - Development of new collegial relationships
  - Improved College environment
  - Improved communication between all levels
  - Greater understanding of issues facing the College

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Moving Forward to Rebuild Trust

- Navigate the emotional climate
- Take time to learn the environment and build relationships
- Adopt the “sense maker” role and lead through example
- Be accessible and willing to listen
- Use the College mission, vision, and student success goals to establish priorities and define roles
- The road to rebuilding trust is long, but not impossible!
OK, I'm going to fall, and if I can trust you, you'll catch me before I hit the ground.

Why would we do this, again?

To build trust between us, can I trust you to catch me?

I guess.

1-2-3 GO!

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Questions