COLLABORATION IN RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT STUDENT COMMUNICATIONS

By

MICHAEL BORONOWSKI

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We accept this Final Report as conforming to the required standard

Justin Kohlman, MA, Project Sponsor

Eileen Piggot-Irvine, PhD, Academic Supervisor

Lesley Ferkins, PhD, External Reviewer

Brigitte Harris, PhD, Committee Chair

ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This is an action research inquiry focused on how the Student Services division at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) can strengthen collaborative capabilities to enhance recruitment and enrollment student communications. The research was also intended to function as an organizational intervention supporting the development of readiness for positive future change at the institute.

This project followed the Organizational Action Research model (Rowe, Agger-Gupta, Harris, & Graf, 2011) from an appreciative stance and was comprised of multiple qualitative methods. The researcher first involved students in a focus group to examine their experiences with and perceptions of recruitment and enrollment communications. He then engaged employees from across BCIT in an interview matrix to examine their experiences, perceptions, and processes relating to recruitment and enrollment student communications. The researcher performed three cycles of data analysis; in vivo coding, process coding, and theoretical coding. Findings, conclusions, and draft recommendations were reviewed with a critical reference group of leaders in strategic enrollment management at BCIT and the VP of Student Services. The research adhered to Royal Roads University’s Research Ethics Policy.

The researcher found personal relationships, empathy, and unobtrusive collaborative systems as key themes, and concluded effective collaborative practice at BCIT was directly related to empathy, personal connections, and was responsive to participants’ unique situations. The six recommendations put forward include developing collaborative systems that include formalized feedback processes, highlighting successful practices across the institute, developing cross-functional teams to implement a CRM platform, and establishing a role and portfolio accountable for student communications and the overall student experience.
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CHAPTER ONE: FOCUS AND FRAMING

The British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) is one of Canada’s largest post-secondary institutions. It is based in Burnaby and operates four other campuses across the lower mainland. More than 48,000 students enroll annually in full-time, part-time, apprentice, technician, cooperative, and technical training programs. There are over 1,700 full-time faculty and staff and over 500 additional part-time faculty and staff employed across six schools and five divisions.

The Leadership Team (LT), comprised of the deans and vice presidents at BCIT and led by BCIT’s acting president, has introduced the institute’s 2014 – 2019 strategic plan. They put forward fundamental aims of growth and renewal (BCIT, 2013) within the plan, as well as multiple goals that focus on student recruitment, retention, engagement, and success.

Many of these goals fall within the purview of BCIT’s Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Council. I sit on the SEM Council with institute leaders, faculty, and operational staff from stakeholder groups across the institute. It is one of many cross-divisional coalition-based decision making groups common to the institute, and provides access to leaders who are strongly invested in the needs of our students and the goals within the 2014-2019 strategic plan that were a driving force for my inquiry.

As Manager, Student Recruitment and Client Services and SEM Council member I am responsible for developing and implementing marketing and recruitment strategies, goals, and tactics, as well as contributing to SEM projects driven by the council. Within this context I have and continue to work with Larry Vezina, BCIT’s Director of Student Services, and stakeholder groups to map and enhance student communications. This has highlighted the highly distributed and collaborative nature of developing and delivering these communications. It has also
generated awareness that strengthening our collaborative capabilities in this area provides a significant opportunity to impact both SEM and institute-level strategic goals. Figure 1 illustrates SEM Council structure and my placement within the group.

Figure 1. SEM Council structure.
I undertook this inquiry within BCIT’s SEM framework and in support of the institute’s 2014-2019 strategic plan. I focused specifically on collaboration in recruitment and enrollment (RE) student communications. RE student communications are the subset of interactions and materials within student communications that fall within non-educational communications with prospective and new current students from first-contact through enrollment and orientation.

I adopted SEM as a framework to link individuals and departments involved in student communications and engagement. The SEM framework aligned my research with institutional goals and provided an effective paradigm for engaging both the academic and non-academic stakeholders at BCIT. It also provided a means of access to leadership, and improved engagement with the process and recommendations to enhance investment in the report so that it could support developing collaborative capabilities in other areas of the institute.

I was interested in this inquiry largely because of my experiences as Manager of Student Recruitment and Client Services, where I am currently responsible for developing and delivering student communications in collaboration with individuals from across the institute. From the outset I believed that an action research inquiry would provide opportunities to collectively strengthen our orientation towards our students’ needs, align our work in support of institutional objectives, and generate valuable insight into localized collaborative capabilities and their impact in recruitment and enrollment within a SEM framework.

I engaged prospective and current students in exploring excellence in RE student communications. I then brought together stakeholders from departments within Student Services and the schools at BCIT with the goals of collectively enhancing our shared understanding of collaboration and identifying opportunities to strengthen collaborative capabilities in RE student communications.
Finally, I presented my research, draft findings, and recommendations to senior leaders involved in SEM at BCIT as well as my sponsor with the aim of enhancing the relevancy and sense of shared ownership of my findings and recommendations.

**Key Question**

How can the Student Services division at the British Columbia Institute of Technology strengthen collaborative capabilities to enhance recruitment and enrollment student communications?

**Sub-questions**

1. What examples of effective collaborative practices currently exist in developing and delivering recruitment and enrollment student communications?
2. What are the characteristics of the effective collaborative interactions involved in recruitment and enrollment student communications?
3. What do prospective and current students perceive as excellence in recruitment and enrollment student communications?
4. What strategies will be required to implement recommendations for strengthening collaborative capabilities to enhance recruitment and enrollment student communications?

**Significance of the Inquiry**

Effective communications with students is at the core of many institute goals put forward in the 2014 - 2019 strategic plan, Student Services divisional goals, and SEM priorities. Strengthening collaborative capabilities to enhance RE student communications offered several significant benefits to BCIT in support of Student Services divisional goals, SEM Council priorities, and key goals within the institute’s 2014 - 2019 strategic plan.
RE student communications is directly linked to our institutional goal of “increasing the number of graduates by extending our reach to those who may not traditionally engage in a BCIT education” (BCIT, 2013, p. 10). As a series of interventions, this inquiry aimed to strengthen stakeholders' collective orientation towards BCIT’s customers’ needs as a means to potentially enhance our shared understanding of the opportunities that exist to deliver improved materials and services.

Developing this kind of enhanced market and customer orientation is a key component in maximizing the opportunities presented by a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system (Day, 2000; Raman, Wittmann, & Rauseo, 2006) which is to be implemented along with a new admissions system in the near future. A CRM platform is one component of a large-scale multi-year admissions business review project being led by BCIT’s VP Student Services, Justin Kohlman.

A CRM and the relevant collaborative capabilities and orientation provide an opportunity to increase a sense of personal touch (J. Kohlman, personal communication, July 22, 2013) and meaningful engagement with our diverse student body. This has the potential to positively impact both RE student communications and, although beyond the scope of this inquiry, student retention. The organizational interventions that were part of this inquiry were designed to develop our ability to engage in CRM efforts and our readiness for implementing a CRM platform.

I positioned this inquiry in support of BCIT’s strategic plan and the key goal of “listening to the student voice” (BCIT, 2013, p. 29) by pursuing an enhanced understanding of prospective

\[ \text{1 All personal communications in this report are used with permission.} \]
Collaboration in RE Student Communications and current students’ perceptions of excellence in RE student communications. This understanding and the recommendations presented in chapter five of this report represent significant opportunities for “building a pervasive and consistent BCIT experience” (p. 15). Enhanced RE student communications may also provide a means to strengthen engagement at the outset of a student’s relationship with the institute to “define, create and sustain a student community that supports inclusiveness and fosters success” (p. 16).

Finally, enhancing our understanding of student needs through enhanced collaborative relationships early on in the student life cycle could provide opportunities for improved interventions during the early stages of our students’ experience with BCIT to support “increasing student retention” (BCIT, 2013, p. 11).

BCIT’s VP and director of Student Service both believe a clear picture of student communications is a key component of SEM work (J. Kohlman & L. Vezina, personal communication, March 7, 2013) and in supporting the development of a “customer strategy” (Rigby, Reichheld, & Schefter, 2002, pp. 102 – 103). Improving communications with students is a vital step in progressing student engagement beyond a “transactional relationship” (Day, 2000, pp. 24 – 25). This is of particular significance as recent research has shown students relate to BCIT at a functional or transactional level rather than with an emotional or resonant connection (Stormy Lake Consulting, 2012, pp. 25 – 27). Moving the student-institute relationship beyond the transactional end of the relationship spectrum (Day, 2000) enables stakeholders across the institute to engage in enhanced collaborative exchanges as we pursue our goal of “listening to the student voice” (BCIT, 2013, p. 29).

Enhanced collaboration across BCIT in RE student communications also presents a potential for cost-savings and a reduction of risk through streamlining multiple overlapping
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technology platforms. Historically, the bulk of student communications have been
developed and distributed in relative isolation. This isolation resulted in inconsistent records-
management and a proliferation of contact databases. As not all databases or systems were
developed in alignment with the provincial Privacy Act (1996) and BCIT’s own policy we have
not been able to effectively ensure data has been managed in secure and compliant systems
(BCIT, 2008). A potential benefit of this inquiry was that through an enhanced understanding of
systems and processes we might identify opportunities to streamline systems resulting in an
enhanced ability to provide stakeholders with the right of access, correction, and removal of
personal records (BCIT, 2008).

Reducing errors and inaccuracy in RE student communications is an additional potential
benefit that is closely related to reducing duplication of effort and systems. The unnecessary
complexity and workload created by a multitude of isolated stakeholders engaged in RE student
communications has negatively impacted our collective view of changes taking place in areas
outside our immediate departments (J. Kohlman, personal communication, July 22, 2013).

The final core benefit intended for this project was one of maximizing potential for future
change by developing an inclusive framework for further work on student communications.
Developing an understanding of how transferable the process and materials are across the
institute is key to maximizing the benefit as work transitions into the “change intervention cycle”
(Rowe, Agger-Gupta, Harris, & Graff, 2011).

Organizational Context

Distinct from a college or university, BCIT is a polytechnic institute that exists “within
the British Columbian educational system to deliver something unique” (BCIT, 2013, p. 8).
BCIT aims to be an inclusive institution and to “make the opportunities provided by the BCIT
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model of education available to all who could benefit from it” (p. 10). This places SEM efforts at the core of our business as “our primary focus is building expertise, not merely filtering it” (p. 10) and a motivation behind my use of SEM as a framework for this inquiry. It also creates an increasingly complex and diverse student body as we expand our offerings “so people with diverse interests and aptitudes can build rewarding careers in an equally diverse and changing economy” (p. 10).

The foundation of BCIT programming is “certificates, diplomas and both undergraduate and graduate degrees—the entry-to-practice credentials that lead to rewarding careers” (BCIT, 2013, p. 14). This programming is generally delivered in compressed timeframes and in close relationship with employers and industry leaders. This focus on employment and productivity is echoed across guiding and strategic documents. Our vision statement, “BCIT: Integral to the economic, social and environmental prosperity of British Columbia” (p. 12) is supported by a mission of supporting the success of learners and employers by producing “the right kinds, quality, and quantity” (p. 11) of career-ready graduates through inclusive, relevant, and highly time-efficient programming (p. 11). This guiding philosophy has further reinforced the need for effective SEM and CRM strategies and practices, along with a strengthened market orientation that maximizes competitive advantage.

The position and territory of key stakeholders is also a significant factor in my focus on collaboration and my use of SEM as a framework. While a highly diverse and distributed group, many stakeholders, including the sponsor for this inquiry, are deeply concerned with student communications and engagement. Many are also key members of BCIT’s SEM Council and other decision-making groups concerned with supporting student success and retention as key objectives. Their roles as leaders in education and Student Services across the institute SEM
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Council provides access to a decision-making group directly involved in enrollment at BCIT with the power to implement or authorize the implementation of recommendations for this inquiry.

These stakeholders are captured and categorized in Table H1 (see Appendix H). While each group is “affected by or [has] an effect on” (Stringer, 2007, p. 43) student communications, this table also identifies stakeholders according to Conner’s (2013) roles related to transformational change. These include the VP of Student Services as sponsor with the authority to initiate change, multiple targets who are the focus of change stemming from this inquiry, agents who will be engaged in facilitating change, and finally advocates who support the goals of this inquiry but may not have the power to sanction the recommendations (Conner, 2013). The table also notes opposition, or those who may resist this change effort, and the critical reference groups “primarily concerned with the issues at hand” (Stringer, 2007, p. 45). A comparison of Table H1 (see Appendix H) with Figure 1 shows the extent of crossover and thus the influence of the SEM council across stakeholder groups.

Changes to leadership at BCIT add a further dynamic complexity to this inquiry. BCIT’s president announced his resignation on February 13, 2013. The VP of Institute Planning, Learning and Technology Services, a key lead in developing the 2014–2019 strategic plan, stepped in as acting president, and a new president was appointed all during the course of this inquiry. Further changes include the discontinuation of service of the VP of External Relations and the relocation of departments within this division. This included returning Marketing and Communications (MARCOM) to the Student Services division, where it had been located prior to establishing External Relations. This reduced the number of divisions involved in this inquiry by one; however it added complexity as power-structures consolidate and shift following the
relocation. In contrast to the added complexity the changes also increased the VP of Student Services’ power to authorize change related to this inquiry as student recruitment once again falls within his division.

These changes, along with the appointment of two new deans increased the potential for conflict as divergent interests and multiple and new power-centers compete for scarce resources within a context of potentially weak authority (Bolman & Gallos, 2011).

The “flat or declining public funding envelope for post-secondary institutions” (BCIT, 2013, p. 16) projected within the strategic plan reinforces the potential for both internal and external competition and the importance of considering how that pressure and ongoing change at BCIT impact the engagement of key stakeholders throughout the inquiry.

**Systems Analysis of the Inquiry**

While the focus of this inquiry was closely related to the interface of BCIT with students and the organization’s orientation towards these students’ needs, I endeavored to maintain a holistic orientation towards systems analysis and engagement. I was conscious from the outset of my own personal predisposition towards a market or marketing orientation. My intention was to recognize my predisposition for adopting a market lens while “simultaneously being open to other perspectives” (Short, 1998, p. 30) that informed my research.

Transitioning RE student communications online over the past few years made it abundantly clear that the student communication system within BCIT is highly and dynamically complex. This transition had many different and nonobvious consequences across the organization (Senge, 2006, p. 71), including the creation of a “success to the successful” (pp. 396 – 398) system. Programs and departments actively maintaining and improving their recruitment communications were more highly engaged with, and received more direct support from
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recruitment staff. These programs typically maintained the highest application-to-seat ratios across the institute.

There was also a similar systems archetype potentially impacting students. As the institute has moved core communications online to reduce costs, the risk that marginalized groups of students with less access to online tools will be excluded from core communications tools has increased (J. Kohlman, personal communication, July 22, 2013).

There were also “tragedy of the commons” (Senge, 2006, pp. 397 – 398) systems at play. As faculty, program coordinators, and embedded marketing representatives became increasingly aware of the effectiveness of email communications with prospective students they developed multiple independent systems and databases. This resulted in an increased risk of overloading the students captured in our recruitment database with marketing materials, thus exhausting the shared resource of their attention.

The dynamic of multiple complex, and often conflicting demands and influence, is common at BCIT. The institute is part of a broad and complex coalition (Bolman & Deal, 2003) including municipal, provincial, and federal government, and a multitude of training authorities and associations. This complex and dynamic system of coalitions is omnipresent within BCIT as well, where schools within BCIT compete with each other for funding, students, and access to resources while at the same time forming coalitions to drive forward institutional, divisional, departmental, and personal agendas. Moving MARCOM into Student Services added to the dynamic complexity of the system. As the department had a previous history within the division there was the potential to “make decisions based on past patterns of success and failure, rather than on logical, definable rules” (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 71). This increased pressure and political complexity for student recruitment and marketing staff as they attempted to manage
complex and occasionally conflicting priorities originating from programs, departments, and committees across the institute.

Leadership decisions at BCIT are often coalition-driven through councils, committees, and leadership groups such as the Deans Council, SEM Council, Part-time Studies (PTS) Council, and other decision-making groups. Former Director, Marketing and Communications stated that complex power-struggles are at play both within and between these committees (R. Friesen, personal communication, December 7, 2012), which at times has led to “a confusing multiplicity of goals, many in conflict” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 199).

MARCOM and the student recruitment team have been but one stakeholder in this highly coercive and dynamic system, with competing priorities and significant constraints on both time and capacity. Figure 2 illustrates the LT structure, and my hierarchical position in relationship to this group.
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There is significant crossover between the academic and service components of the system, especially on council or coalition-based decision-making teams such as PTS Council and SEM Council. Figure 3 shows the significant influence of faculty, Program Advisors, and external competition on prospective students and the influence that flows from senior leadership and the Director of Student Services to groups influencing current students. This suggests a considerable shift in influence during the RE process from when the student relationship is initiated through, ideally, enrolling and attending BCIT.

Figure 2. My placement in relation to BCIT’s senior leadership.
Several external factors also exert influence on the system. The projected decrease in school-aged British Columbians (BC Stats, Ministry of Labour, Citizens' Services and Open Government, 2012) is influencing increased competition for students across the post-secondary sector. As this decrease is common across Western nations, universities worldwide are becoming more aggressive in their marketing, especially in cities like Vancouver and Toronto where immigration is positively impacting the total number of potential students (J. Kohlman, personal...
communication, July 22, 2013). Changing training needs, and increased influence of training authorities as the provincial and federal governments promote skills training, has also increased BCIT’s need to connect external influences to strategic planning, and strategic planning with SEM and RE student communications, as outlined in Figure 4. These developments have increased senior leadership’s focus on data-driven decision-making, and significant internal budgetary scrutiny as BCIT pursues cost-savings through efficiency measures.
Financial pressures influencing the system have created further challenges in developing and delivering effective student communications. The growing funding-gap has led leadership at the institute to distribute printing and mailing costs to originating departments. While this made departments accountable for the true cost of their printed communications, initially no budget was transferred to cover those costs. Undertaken with the intention of moving costs to more appropriate cost centers, an unintended consequence arose where schools and departments were
competing for support and deploying independent low-cost systems for delivering RE student communications. These initiatives increased the institute’s exposure to FOIPOP concerns, negatively impacted each department’s level of collaboration with centralized marketing and student recruitment resources, and eroded institute standards of quality for RE student communications.

External funding pressures and internal competition for budget created an increase in territorialism and conservatism. In contrast the pressure and competition has also generated pockets of creative innovation as individuals engaged in change efforts to escape back to organizational certainty (Oshry, 2007). I observed some Program Heads and faculty members take increased ownership of RE student communications. As they created new systems and processes for communicating with prospective and enrolling students they increased the complexity of the system. In contrast, the task of generating significant revenue streams to maintain and expand BCIT’s operations (BCIT, 2013) seems to have added pressures on MARCOM prior to the dissolution of the External Relations division. Staff appeared to be focusing on the historical priority of student recruitment as they also looked to find certainty in the face of the challenge. This emphasized the importance of connecting my research to institute and SEM objectives rather than a departmental or individual bias towards recruitment as a priority unto itself.

Chapter Summary

Within this chapter I have provided the focus for this inquiry and an overview of the dynamically complex organizational context within which it was situated. I also described the significance of the inquiry, and provided a detailed systems analysis that informed my approach for exploring how the Student Services division at BCIT might strengthen collaborative
Collaboration in RE Student Communications capabilities to enhance recruitment and enrollment student communications. These considerations informed, and were informed by, the literature review contained in the next chapter. The next section expands the contextual relevance of the inquiry and provides a foundation of scholarly research aimed at enhancing this action research project.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

An examination of SEM, CRM and orientations in higher education, the nature of effective collaboration, and leadership and change in higher education provided a highly relevant grounding for my inquiry question of how the Student Services division at BCIT could strengthen collaborative capabilities to enhance recruitment and enrollment communications. I chose these topics and the sub-topics as they expanded the contextual relevancy of my inquiry and provided trusted knowledge that informed opportunities to generate readiness for positive change.

SEM was directly related to the origin of my inquiry. CRM and orientations in higher education related to the opportunities and required capabilities to enhance RE student communications. My review of the nature of effective collaborative interactions provided an enhanced understanding of the influences at play and informed my data analysis and recommendations. Finally, a review of leadership and change in higher education provided an enhanced context of dynamics and organizational norms at play within this sector, further enhancing data analysis, recommendations, and implementation strategies.

**Strategic Enrollment Management**

SEM provides a critical link between the core components of student communications and ongoing relationship management. As a framework for the inquiry it maximized the potential for organizational change and improvements across the institute by aligning the inquiry with core organizational priorities as outlined in the organizational context section. It was also very helpful in developing a common language and definitions for extending the findings of my inquiry across BCIT, where they might benefit the organization more broadly.
Core SEM concepts

SEM is an integration of recruitment, retention, education, student-service, data-analysis, and organizational collaboration and learning, driven by an institutional mission and embedded within strategic planning. It is a comprehensive integration of planning, programming, and structure that connects academic vision with institutional mission (Botrager, 2004a; Henderson, 2005; Kalsbeek, 2006a).

The SEM construct has developed from Dolence’s work in the 1990’s defining SEM as the pursuit of optimal recruitment, retention, and graduation rates for students into a broad set of activities and structures focused on achieving an institution’s “optimal enrollment, academic and financial profile” (Kalsbeek, 2006a, p. 4). The definition has broadened from a focus on optimal enrollment defined within an institution’s academic context (Dolence, 1993) to the more comprehensive definitions presented in Bontrager (2004a, 2004b), Kalsbeek’s (2006a, 2006b, 2007), and Henderson’s (2005) work, as described below.

More recent literature (Bontrager, 2004a, 2004b; Henderson, 2005; Kalsbeek, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Schee, 2009) has moved past rigid structures and has aimed to tie SEM directly to an institute’s mission. Bontrager (2004a, 2004b) and Henderson (2005) both suggested enrollment management becomes a strategic practice once goals and outcomes are defined and integrated within institutional planning. SEM has grown beyond the individual domains of marketing, admissions, or academic divisions, and is a shared responsibility that “reflects the ethos of the institution. . . . [so] each member of the community takes on the responsibility for nurturing the ethos and the enrollment planning that comes out of it” (Henderson, 2005, p. 6).

Bontrager’s (2004) identified core concepts such as establishing enrollment and graduation goals, promoting student success, enabling delivery of effective academic programs
and effective financial planning, improving efficiency and service levels, and creating a data-rich environment and relevant linkages across campus. These core concepts are common across much of the SEM literature, and provide a useful framework for understanding SEM.

Establishing clear goals for enrollment and retention that are tied to the institutional mission and promotion of student success is at the core of best practices (Bontrager, 2004b; Schee, 2009; Wilkinson, Taylor, Peterson, & Machado-Taylor, 2007). Effective SEM “must follow the deliberative path of the long-term academic, not the quick fix of the repairman” (Henderson, 2005, p. 7) and be held accountable to quantifiable goals connected to the institution’s academic mission (Bontrager, 2004a, p. 16). There has also been a general consensus in the literature that SEM has not succeeded when approached as an administrative function separate from academics, without a core-focus on retention and student-success (Bontrager, 2004a; Henderson, 2005; Hossler, 2005; Schee, 2009).

This is not to say that short-term efforts are ignored. Rather, they are integrated with long-term planning and coordinated with senior-level support (Wilkinson et al., 2007).

**SEM structures and orientations**

While there may be as many variations in the application of SEM as there are institutions where it is in place, work on best practices has led to a natural circular growth. Where Dolence (1993) originally placed SEM within academic context, Bontrager (2004a, 2004b) put forward the importance of carefully considering the effects of structure on SEM outcomes. Bontrager (2004a) placed variations in structure along a continuum from committee through coordinator, matrix, to division, and suggested the strongest enrollment results would come with a divisional structure with strong institutional support, led by an individual with significant expertise. The collaboration and coordination required for effective SEM requires top-level support, and much
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of the writing addresses an enrollment manager as a key individual at the centre of SEM efforts (Bontrager, 2004a, 2004b; Henderson, 2005; Schee, 2009; Wilkinson et al., 2007).

Where there has been divergence is in whether enrollment management becomes truly strategic when it is integrated with institutional planning and linked to organizational structure (Kalsbeek, 2006a, pp. 4–5), or whether the focus on, or orientation towards, structure is less important than how SEM integrates with academics (Henderson, 2005, p. 4). Kalsbeek (2006a; 2006b; 2007) explored these variations in structure and orientation and developed a valuable framework for considering the localized approach to SEM. His research suggested that the view of SEM as the coordination or integration of enrollment-related practices might be seen as SEM being approached with an *administrative orientation* (Kalsbeek, 2006a). A *student-focused orientation* would be primarily concerned on the care for individual students participating in those practices, and an *academic orientation* is centered on the “primacy of teaching and learning, recognizing that the development and delivery of academic curricula is higher education’s core enterprise” (p. 7). A *market-centered orientation* places added prominence on the market position of an institution and the concept of brand, where the goal is “assessing any gaps that exist between the perceived brand promise and the reality of the experience of key stakeholders (especially students), and leading the institution’s efforts to realize its brand promise” (pp. 7–8).

The lens provided by the market-centered orientation is particularly valuable to this inquiry, as its focus on understanding the external market and customer-needs (Kalsbeek, 2006b) effectively integrates marketing-communications and recruitment strategies into core SEM. While Henderson (2005) advocated for refocusing SEM on the academic context (pp. 4–6) it lacks the breadth of integration to represent the full interface of students with the institution.
Marketing and communications activities, and the collaborative and connecting opportunities embedded within, are lost when focused solely on this frame.

The integration of Kalsbeek’s (2006a; 2006b; 2007) lenses on orientations within an approach to SEM that is independent of formal structure was echoed by Brian Schee (2009) when he found that enrollment managers in small, private colleges maximized the benefits of enrollment management by staying “flexible in their marketing practices and organizational structures” (p. 16). Schee (2009) also found that institutes saw positive influences of retention and success programs on recruitment the longer they were in place.

These results and the consistent focus on integrated planning across all recent literature on SEM reinforce the importance of a holistic approach to SEM that is aware of multiple lenses stakeholders and participants bring to the process. This review has provided insight into stakeholders’ varied interpretations of optimal SEM orientations and configurations and grounding in theory that supports engagement with professionals across BCIT.

**CRM and Orientations in Higher Education**

Market relating capabilities and orientations within a CRM framework are fundamental to enhancing RE student communications supporting BCIT’s goal of listening to the student voice (BCIT, 2013). Achieving this goal necessitates student-school relationships that enable collaborative exchanges (Day, 2000) and an organizational orientation that is open-to and capable-of facilitating those exchanges. To achieve this we must understand the opportunities and related orientations and capabilities for CRM in higher education. As CRM is both an organizational practice and a technology platform (Seeman & O’Hara, 2006) this next section of my review focuses on CRM and market orientation in higher education, and what factors support a readiness for implementation.
CRM and a market orientation in higher education

Recent literature on CRM in higher education frames the student as a key stakeholder or *customer* (Grant & Anderson, 2002; Rowley, 2003; Seeman & O’Hara, 2006). This student-as-customer framing indicates a strengthened orientation towards the marketplace and external influencing factors in relation to marketing and recruitment in higher education. While customer information and market intelligence is at the heart of an effective CRM strategy (Rigby et al., 2002), implementing these tactics requires an organization to adopt a supportive orientation.

Where Raman et al. (2006) put forward a “customer centric orientation” (p. 41) as the key orientation for CRM, the multitude of external influencing factors in higher education necessitate a broader orientation. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2010) suggested that within higher education this is a *market orientation* (MO) that includes customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination. While this model promotes “awareness of the need to obtain information about competitors and establish cross-departmental activities to satisfy customers’ needs” (p. 206) it does not include customers outside the student realm such as alumni, industry partners, government, or organizations that hire graduates. Each of these potential customer or stakeholder groups represents possible segments within a CRM and market orientation. Where segmentation is the foundation of effective CRM and customer relating capabilities (Day, 2003; Rigby et al., 2002) and important to creating competitive market positions in higher education (Stimac & Simic, 2012), the absence of customer segmentation beyond student types represents a gap in the literature on CRM and market orientation in higher education.

Despite this gap there is consensus that CRM and market orientations provide benefits in higher education. Seeman and O’Hara (2006) stated “viewing students as customers provides a
competitive advantage for higher education and enhances a college’s ability to attract, retain and serve its customers” (p. 32). This aligns with Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka’s (2010) view that a market orientation “puts customers’, i.e. students’, interests first, in order to gain a competitive edge” (p. 205). This framing and orientation helps educational institutes “face the challenges of the changes in the environment by creating [a] so called ‘learning environment’ which is customized to satisfy the recognized needs of the customers” (Stimac & Simic, 2012, p. 26).

**Developing readiness for CRM**

Recent literature has begun to identify that beyond technical resources and expertise a significant component of successful CRM initiatives are an organization’s people-driven dynamic capabilities (Foley & Fahy, 2009; Maklan & Knox, 2009; Shang & Lin, 2010). Organizations that possess these capabilities are able to “manipulate, and analyze customer knowledge and satisfy customer needs in a customer-oriented culture” (Shang & Lin, 2010, p. 2442) and within CRM develop networked relationships that co-create value as “self-managed consumers leverage colleagues’ know-how online” (Maklan & Knox, 2009, p. 1396). The most effective people-driven processes enable the interaction of customers and an organization to serve immediate needs, develop new and useful knowledge, and further develop the capabilities to perform these tasks. Maklan and Knox (2009) stated that developing these dynamic capabilities ought to coincide or precede CRM implementation; as others have found organizations can enhance existing CRM initiatives by investing in developing dynamic capabilities (Jarratt, 2009; Shang & Lin, 2010).

It is a consistent point across the literature (Cravens & Piercy, 1994; Day, 2000, 2003; Jarratt, 2004, 2009; Maklan & Knox, 2009; Shang & Lin, 2010) that developing the capabilities
related to collaboration and dynamic learning are strongly tied to effective CRM.

While the actual processes for developing these capabilities are less consistent, they relate closely to action research (AR) and the collaborative development of actionable knowledge (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Stringer, 2007). In fact, Maklan and Knox (2009) engaged in AR on developing dynamic capabilities related to CRM and found it to be “a legitimate means of achieving this managerial goal” (p. 1403).

Day (2003) recommended investing in understanding the customer and changing the configuration of an organization so that internal processes, incentives, and metrics emphasize customer retention as critical components to improving an organization’s customer-relating capabilities. He stated that an organization’s historical biases were a significant hurdle. This view towards historical biases is relevant to the practice at BCIT of measuring and reporting broad application statistics (APPSTATS) as a primary measure of recruitment at BCIT. The historical focus on APPSTATS and the absence of clear and customer-oriented retention statistics has provided little incentive to those involved in RE student communications to engage in developing enhanced customer-relating capabilities.

Jarratt (2009) found that a learning orientation and the “ability of employees to cross functional and hierarchical boundaries to access knowledge” (p. 378) positively impacted an organizations’ ability to learn about relationship management. This extends Day’s (2003) concept of configuration and positions collaboration and organizational learning as effective preconditions of developing readiness for CRM.

The Nature of Effective Collaborative Interactions

Identifying opportunities to strengthen collaborative capabilities to enhance RE student communications has required a clear understanding of those capabilities, the nature of effective
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Collaborative interactions, the preconditions for effective collaboration, and the strategies to develop effective collaboration. My goal in selecting this topic and the subtopics within this section of the review was to enhance my understanding of collaboration, better inform my data analysis and findings, and develop stronger recommendations and implementation strategies.

While individuals and teams working on RE student communications BCIT might provide excellent value to prospective and current students when functioning independently, strengthening RE student communications overall “demands substantial coordination and integration of specialized expertise within and outside the team[s]” (Cross, Ehrlich, Dawson, & Helferich, 2008, p. 75). Enhancing collaboration offers the opportunity to “increase value creating by expanding the availability and use of relevant knowledge and other resources” (Fjeldstad, Snow, Miles, & Lettl, 2012, p. 734). More broadly, effective collaboration can “maximize the potential of those collaborating by fully utilizing their expertise” (Piggot-Irvine, 2012, p. 91).

The collaboration capability

There is a large body of current literature that speaks to the concept of collaboration as a capability that can be developed at the organizational level to enhance innovation and develop competitive advantage (Allred, Fawcett, Wallin & Magnan, 2011; Blomqvist & Levy, 2006; Hattori & Lapidus, 2003). Recent literature has begun to integrate the view towards collaboration as a capability across theoretical frameworks, converging on definitions similar to what Blomqvist and Levy (2006) termed a “meta-capability enabling leverage of both internal and external knowledge bases for changing needs in uncertain and complex environment[s]” (p. 2).
This aligns well with the resourced-based view (RBV) of an organization, which holds that organizations can attain a competitive advantage by developing unique capabilities, its *core competencies* (Connor, 2002). Adopting an RBV approach, Allred et al. (2011) found that “a strong collaboration capability increases awareness and appreciation of strong functional orientations and promotes their development as essential ingredients of a core competency” (p. 150). This suggests the collaboration capability within BCIT could be developed as unique competency and source of competitive advantage.

One must expand on the RBV stream and the internal view of the collaborative competency when pursuing the development of enhanced CRM, which requires the integration of marketing capabilities which “originate within organizations through collaboration” (Maklan, Knox, & Peppard, 2011, p. 79) and necessitate the development of networked relationships that cross organizational boundaries in order to become “the leader of an orchestrated network of participants, shaping the offer in conjunction with its consumers” (p. 81).

Integrating our view of collaboration across these frameworks suggests collaboration as a competency that enables individuals and organizations to leverage the multitude of diverse perspectives, experiences, and inputs, to collectively enhance our shared knowledge, what we produce, and the experience of the act of production within, between, and across teams.

**Preconditions of effective collaboration**

Within this section I have reviewed the literature on the preconditions of effective collaboration. I have focused preconditions for deep, effective collaboration here. Some authors have developed frameworks with precedent relationships and states (Hattori & Lapidus, 2004) that place collaborative relationships at the end of a continuum while others have developed a framework of deepening categories of collaboration (Cardno, 1998; Piggot-Irvine, 2012). I have
chosen the latter route to recognize the extant collaborative practices at BCIT and to focus my review on developing an understanding of the preconditions for and nature of enhanced practice.

While trust, shared goals, and structural or organizational flexibility have emerged as a general set of preconditions for effective collaboration (Cross et al., 2008; Fjeldstad et al., 2012; Hattori & Lapidus, 2004; MacCoby, 2006, 2011) there is recognition that “trust is a hard earned outcome from effective collaboration” (Piggot-Irvine, 2012, p. 91) and attaining trust requires a progression through deepening levels of collaboration which reduce “defensive, self-protective, values and strategies to enable movement to an inquiry perspective and trust” (p. 95). This offers a contrasting model that suggests that even without genuine trust, engaging in collaboration at continually deepening levels generates the preconditions for authentic collaboration.

**Strategies for developing effective collaboration**

While precise wording varies between authors, it is generally accepted that an “interactive” (MacCoby, 2006, p. 62) leadership style is best suited for creating an environment that fosters collaboration. This interactive leadership is the tool an organization can use to “define and build a shared purpose” (Adler, Heckscher, & Prusak, 2011, p. 97) which is a “basis for trust and organizational cohesion that is more robust than self-interest, more flexible than tradition, and less ephemeral than the emotional, charismatic appeal of a Steve Jobs, a Larry Page, or a Mark Zuckerberg” (p. 96). Expanding on the literature on leadership styles required for effective collaboration, Maccoby (2011) stated “in complex collaborative organizations, different types of leaders with complementary competencies-strategic, operational, network-must be able to partner in developing and implementing strategies and visions” (p. 59).
Further, Maccoby (2011) added, “a flexible structure of roles and processes is also required” (p. 59). This does not in any way diminish the importance of leadership for fostering collaboration, but does provide an additional dimension that must be considered.

Fjeldstad et al. (2012) noted highly collaborative enterprises have benefitted from a shift from expressing “specific organization structures to expressing it as principles by which actors engage in organizational relationships. Such a change provides a truly dynamic perspective of organizational adaptation to continuously changing environments” (p. 745). Further, Allred, et al. (2011) found “entrenched organizational structures and cultures perpetuate interfirm and interorganizational conflict and stifle collaboration” (p. 151).

This suggests that along with engaging leaders with varied styles and competencies, defining principles and values that support collaboration is a potential strategy for developing effective collaboration, which minimizes the need to change formal organizational structure.

Leadership and Change in Higher Education

I chose to review literature on leadership and change in higher education to provide an additional context to findings, recommendations, and implementation strategies. Within this section I have provided a review of literature on change leadership in higher education and the concept of distributed leadership, which is especially relevant given my focus on collaboration for this inquiry, and the context of distributed ownership of RE student communications at BCIT.

Change leadership in higher education

Meister-Scheytt, Scheytt, and Shattock (as cited in McRoy & Gibbs, 2009) stated “managing change in universities is a difficult task, generally undertaken at times of pressure on budgets and with unclear objectives” (p. 688). McRoy and Gibbs (2009) added “rivalries between disciplines and personal jockeying for position, especially for those within institutions
who aspire to positions of leadership” (p. 691) increases the pressure on any given change. They suggest beyond the skills and knowledge required in any leadership role, leading change in higher education requires,

An understanding of the culture and history of an institution, its organization, and the impact these factors can have on the change process, the barriers to change in HE settings, an understanding of assessment, the research on learning, student development, and teaching, and the process and the criteria that can be used for rewarding faculty, staff and operational units. (p. 700)

Spillane (2006) painted a similarly complex picture of the role of leadership in higher education, and suggested “this is all too much for one person. Even expecting two or three people to master of this expertise might still be setting expectations too high” (p. 88). This suggests leaders in higher education face a truly complex and challenging environment when leading change, and must engage leaders from across their institutes if they are to succeed.

Hotho (2013) suggested a reframing of the adversarial and uni-directional nature of leading change in higher education, cautioning that the common discourse creates a limiting perspective of “corporate change managers seem confronted with a solid phalanx of a change-averse academic community managed more or less by default by change-subverting academic middle managers” (p. 361). Hotho suggested that while dialogue is a means to implement change it must move beyond a one-sided exchange typified as “senior managers as the authors and senders, managers lower down the organizational hierarchy as recipients” (p. 367) towards more authentic collaborative exchanges.

Further reinforcing the need for authentic and contextually-relevant exchanges, Bolman and Gallos (2011) have cautioned “faculty are unforgiving when they perceive authoritarian
overreach, violation of legitimate procedures, or processes that lack internal credibility” (p. 66), and advised that patience, persistence, and process are three essential components of leading change. Their work again returns to the importance of engaging individuals in leadership positions across an institute to address “the architecture of disconnection in higher education [that] makes colleges and universities difficult to manage and change” (p. 67).

**Distributed leadership in higher education**

There is a high level of recognition across recent literature for the potential of distributed leadership (Bollman & Gallos, 2011; Hotho, 2013; McRoy & Gibbs, 2009; Spillane, 2006, 2009), a “system of practice comprised of a collection of interacting components: leaders, followers, and situation” (Spillane, 2005, p. 150), to be a useful tool for understanding leadership in higher education.

Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, and Ryland (2012) stated “the higher education sector requires a less hierarchical approach that takes account of its specialized and professional context” (p. 67). Through their research they found distributed leadership developed “recognition of the importance of both a multi-level and cross-functional approach to leadership” (p. 67), indicating it is a useful tool for fostering collaboration. Finally, they stated “this collaboration will be best achieved if it includes academics, executive and professional staff” (p. 74), highlighting the importance of engaging educators as a key component of successful distributed leadership.

Plank, Feldon, Sherman, and Elliot (2011) stated “most academic institutions are organized to support knowledge exchange or translation within disciplines or schools more than among them” (p. 42). Their statement suggests it is not enough to engage leaders from a single
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discipline, faculty, or school, in the pursuit of widespread change, further linking
positive change in higher education to the concepts of enhanced collaboration and distributed
leadership.

Where Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, and Ryland (2012) have suggested distributed leadership as
a solution, Spillane (2006) put forward that a distributed perspective offers “a way of thinking
systematically about the practice of leadership” (p. 87) itself. Spillane et al., (as cited in Spillane,
2006) put forward three types of distribution as a framework for understanding co-practiced
leadership. These are “collaborated distribution” (p. 60) where two or more leaders “work
together in place and time to execute the same leadership routine”, “collective distribution”
where two or more leaders “enact a leadership routine by working separately but
interdependently”, and “coordinated distribution which involves leadership routines that involve
activities that have to be performed in a particular sequence” (p. 60). Each of Spillane’s (2006)
types of distribution provide leaders in higher education with a framework for continually
examining and developing their practice of leadership within a local context.

Spillane (2005) cautioned that distributed leadership is “a conceptual or diagnostic tool
for thinking about school leadership. It is not a blueprint for effective leadership nor a
prescription for how school leadership should be practiced” (p. 149). This caution is echoed by
Harris (2009) who stated that contemporary literature has indicated “distributed leadership can
result in conflicting priorities, targets, and timescales” (p. 13).

In closing, I found the emphasis on dialogue, systems thinking, authentic collaboration,
and the participatory nature of literature on distributed leadership in higher education (Bollman
& Gallos, 2011; Harris, 2009; Hotho, 2013; Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2012; McRoy &
Gibs, 2009; Spillane, 2005, 2006) to be strongly aligned with the principles and practice of
action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Stringer, 2007) which I describe in more
detail in the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: INQUIRY APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Within this chapter I define the overarching AR approach of my inquiry, my chosen methodology, and rationale for how the approach and methods were appropriate to BCIT and my inquiry topic. The criteria and methods for selecting participants are outlined, followed by a detailed description of my data collection tools, study conduct, and data analysis. Finally, I conclude this chapter with an overview of how I addressed ethical issues pertaining to my research on the question: How can the Student Services division at the British Columbia Institute of Technology strengthen collaborative capabilities to enhance recruitment and enrollment student communications?

Sub questions for my inquiry included:

1. What examples of effective collaborative practices currently exist in developing and delivering recruitment and enrollment student communications?

2. What are the characteristics of the effective collaborative interactions involved in recruitment and enrollment student communications?

3. What do prospective and current students perceive as excellence in recruitment and enrollment student communications?

4. What strategies will be required to implement recommendations for strengthening collaborative capabilities to enhance recruitment and enrollment student communications?

Inquiry Approach

I followed an AR approach for this inquiry to actively engage participants in exploring how the BCIT can strengthen collaborative relationships to enhance RE student communications.
Creating “collaborative democratic partnerships” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 4) and the concurrence with action provided by the AR approach aligned well with the dynamic environment and decentralized nature of student communications at BCIT. The cogenerative nature of AR (Greenwood & Levin, 2005) provided an effective means to synthesize professional knowledge along with localized, contextual expertise of stakeholders and participants across the whole system. The approach also allowed me to engage participants in the collaborative generation of data and recommendations, building readiness for change while practicing and modeling the collaborative practices that are at the very core of my inquiry. I was able to create a “bridge between practitioner understanding and the generation of theoretical knowledge to inform action” (Given, 2008, p. 6) to support readiness for organizational change.

I followed the Organizational Action Research (OAR) model “Organizational Readiness Cycle” (Rowe et al., 2011) while engaging in early and ongoing data and process analysis. My inquiry was situated within the first five steps of the OAR model (Rowe et al., 2011) as illustrated in figure 5. This framed my work as developing readiness for positive change. To initiate the first step of the cycle I engaged with my faculty and classmates at Royal Roads University to develop a proposed topic for my inquiry. I then worked with my sponsor at BCIT to finalize my topic and the change goals. I then engaged in formal data gathering, which is the second step in the cycle. After the data analysis as described in chapter three I engaged leadership as a reference group in understanding findings and finalizing recommendations. Finally, this report was disseminated to all participants and across BCIT through presentations and by leading a discussion on our intranet.
This approach was further informed by Coglan and Brannick’s (2010) “meta cycle of action research” (pp. 11-12) of continually evaluating the inquiry itself to “shape how the subsequent steps are conducted” (p. 12). Because of this approach I was able to adapt to emergent challenges and opportunities while maximizing the action oriented aspect of my inquiry. When recruiting prospective and current students for an interview matrix proved challenging I referred to my ongoing literature review on collaborative practices and determined the interview matrix method might prove more useful if applied to the second focus group with faculty and staff. Thus, after adjusting my approach I involved employees in an interview matrix as a means for collaborative inquiry and as an organizational intervention where participants
engaged in a highly collaborative experience examining collaboration in RE student communications.

I adopted an appreciative stance (Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008) for this inquiry in order to maintain positive engagement across divisions at BCIT. This approach was inspired by Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a “co-operative and co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 3). This aligned well with AR and the goal of fostering positive change through research in action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010), but rather than seeking to solve problems (2010) I focused on strengths and opportunities through working to engage the whole system in “creating a future that works for everyone” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 14). Where participants in AR follow a “cyclical process to increase their understanding of the real problem before moving towards a solution” (Sanharan, Tay, & Martin, 2009, p. 181), I followed a cyclical process to better understand real opportunities before moving towards implementing them.

The core processes of AI (Watkins, Mohr, & Kelly, 2011) informed my approach to the AR methodology to the extent that positivity was a core value of this inquiry, emergent themes were used to identify future opportunities, and diverse stakeholders were engaged in creating a vision for a preferred future and identifying how BCIT might attain that future. This reflects the approach of recognizing positive work while planning for future change recently modeled by senior leadership in developing BCIT’s strategic plan (BCIT, 2013).

This inquiry was comprised of multiple qualitative methods including a focus group with prospective and current students, an interview matrix with staff, and a final review of findings to develop final recommendations with a reference group of leaders in SEM at BCIT. This mix of qualitative methods yielded a large body of highly contextual data from multiple, diverse
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It also provided multiple in-person engagements with staff and leaders engaged in student communications which helped enhance engagement and buy-in for the inquiry, and support for recommendations. I also chose to employ these multiple group methods to align with the collaborative work environment and decision-making models favoured at BCIT.

**Project Participants**

I engaged stakeholders from across the whole system including students, staff, faculty, and leadership in order to strengthen the breadth and depth of data, and engagement with findings and recommendations. All population selections and participants were above the age of 19, and as the methods took place in October and November all participants had recent experience with RE student communications because of term-start, orientation, and the start of the annual recruitment cycle at BCIT.

**Student focus group**

I engaged four current students from a diverse set of programs in a focus group to establish their perceptions of excellence in RE student communications, determine their level of engagement with BCIT outside the classroom, how they might want to be engaged in developing enhanced RE student communications, and also to develop themes and codes for data analysis. While I had initially set out to recruit a larger number of students to participate in an interview matrix, this proved highly problematic. Upon reviewing the very low response rate I decided to reframe my initial method as a focus group.

Participants were selected through multi-stage purposeful sampling (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a, 2007b), a practice of “concurrent [purposeful] sampling in which one sample is not a subset of other samples” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b, p. 115). I concurrently developed six purposefully selected pools of potential participants, students from each school at BCIT and
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across delivery-methods. I checked for duplication to ensure each sample was not a subset of any other sample. I divided the sample frame into strata by school and delivery method, and then selected a purposeful sampling from each strata to ensure potential participants were engaged with BCIT across a variety of programs and delivery methods, and were over the age of 19. Contact information for the 38,000 current students at BCIT is stored in the institute’s enterprise system. A reporting tool was used to generate contact-lists that MARCOM’s administrative assistant used to send invitations and research information letters (see Appendices A, B). 50 part-time and 150 full-time students from each of BCIT’s six schools were invited to participate, for a total of 1,200 invitations. This process was conducted twice due to a lack of responses to the first invitations, for a final total of 2,400 invitations.

Six students returned responses, and MARCOM’s administrative assistant verified they were enrolled across a variety of programs before confirming their participation. A total of four students attended the session. They were enrolled in Marketing Management, Nursing, Electrical Engineering, and Broadcast Journalism programs at BCIT and were a mix of first and second-year students.

Staff interview matrix

After analyzing findings from the student focus group I refined questions for, and facilitated, an interview matrix with fourteen BCIT employees who had been directly involved in RE student communications at BCIT within the six previous months. This identified localized examples of effective collaboration and potential opportunities to strengthen collaborative capabilities to enhance RE student communications. The interview matrix format also provided a means for participants to practice and model collaboration while exploring the topic, supporting the meta cycle of AR (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010) while integrating “collaborative
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teaching/learning among multiple disciplines” (Greenwood & Levin, 2005, p. 56) to
create a “bridge between practitioner understanding and the generation of theoretical knowledge
to inform action” (Given, 2008, p. 6).

I identified potential participants for this method through modified snowball sampling
(Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a, 2007b). Where traditional snowball sampling “involves asking
participants who have already been selected for the study to recruit other participants”
(Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b, pp. 112 - 113) I modified this method by identifying potential
participants through engaging in conversations within my inquiry team and through a review of
stakeholders involved in past collaborative student communications projects. MARCOM’s
administrative staff distributed invitations through email accompanied by research information
letters (see Appendix D, E) and posted the same invitation and letter to our institute intranet.
They also acted as a neutral third party by gathering responses.

To ensure diversity among participants they selected four respondents from the Student
Services division based on time of response, and a remaining four participants from respondents
located in Web Services and the six schools at BCIT. To minimize the potential for any real or
perceived conflict of interest or power over influence I was not involved in the selection process
beyond the initial snowball conversations.

SEM leadership reference group

After further analysis I engaged a reference group with participants from BCIT’s SEM
Council. All were engaged in leading SEM initiatives at BCIT, and were first identified through
politically important sampling (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a, 2007b). I identified SEM Council
as the most appropriate venue for this phase through conversations with my project sponsor and
because SEM Council members are accustomed to the politically sensitive nature of developing recommendations for change spanning multiple divisions and departments at BCIT.

There are approximately 25 individuals in positions at the director level or above engaged in SEM leadership at BCIT with the power to implement and authorize the implementation of recommendations. I requested a portion of a regular SEM Council agenda be set aside for a review of findings and comments to help refine my final recommendations.

**Inquiry team**

My inquiry team consisted of MARCOM’s administrative assistant, and two student recruitment staff. Each member signed a letter of agreement and addendum that addressed privacy, confidentiality, and their participation (see Appendix G). MARCOM’s administrative assistant handled all communications with research participants and maintained hardcopy records. The student recruitment staff within MARCOM assisted with recording and room setup.

**Inquiry Methods**

**Data collection tools**

Within this section I describe my methods for collecting and analyzing data, and ethical considerations relating to the inquiry.

As stated earlier, I employed an approach comprising focus group and interview matrix methods. These methods and their sequence were chosen to bring diverse perspectives together to address this complex issue and support a progression of synthesis (Suri, 2011) and triangulation across multiple frames of reference (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005). I worked to meet the general rule of thumb of limiting group size for focus groups (Kruger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1997) and to keep the interview matrix to a manageable size. Questions for each
method are included in the invitations and research information letters (see Appendices A, B, D, E, G, H).

The methods and sequence helped avoid the premature consolidation of findings while supporting reflexivity and “intellectual/empirical modesty as forms of ethics and praxis” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 903). Multiple group methods also provided a means to identify how participants “position themselves in relation to each other as they process questions, issues, and topics in focused ways” (p. 904). The methods and the natural progression of participant groups from students to faculty and staff were chosen to maximize variation among participants as well as engagement within BCIT with the inquiry. Finally, the reference group with leadership provided an opportunity to refine and develop greater top-level support for my recommendations.

**Student focus group**

The student focus group was the first point of data collection in the “look” (Rowe et al., 2011) phase of this inquiry. The purpose of this initial focus group was “both to generate and to answer research questions” (Morgan, 1997, p. 18). As focus groups “are especially effective in studying professional practices” (Rosaline, 2008, p. 133), this session allowed me to explore in considerable depth both the students’ experiences relating to our practices, and their practice of engaging with the institute outside the classroom environment.

I selected the focus group method in part because all participants shared the common characteristic of being BCIT students. Despite diverse backgrounds and programs of study the focus group centered on their experience with RE student communications as a homogeneous characteristic to “create the opportunity for participants to engage in meaningful conversations about the topics that [I] wished to understand” (Morgan, 2008, p. 353). The method was
particularly fitting as students are rarely directly consulted during the development of RE student communications, and focus groups are “especially useful for hearing from groups whose voices are often marginalized” (p. 353). Finally, I chose the method as “focus groups work particularly well to determine the perceptions, feelings, and thinking of people about issues, products, services, [and] opportunities” (Kruger & Casey, 2000, p. 12).

Through this focus group I developed an initial concept of how students engage with RE student communications at BCIT and how they perceive excellence in this realm. I also identified opportunities to enhance the experience of communicating with BCIT and used the data to refine questions for further exploration with the staff interview matrix as described below. From an appreciative stance I integrated the themes of inclusivity and a focus on the positive (Reed, 2007) by employing a low level of moderation to allow for spontaneous exchanges, and by framing the focus group with an initial question which asked participants to share a time they had an excellent experience engaging with BCIT outside the classroom environment.

**Staff interview matrix**

I chose an interview matrix format for my group method with staff to enhance the collaborative practice within the group, and to remove my personal bias from the information gathered and reported. While there is not a great deal of literature on the interview matrix as a qualitative research method, it shares some common characteristics with the focus group method.

As a powerful tool for getting “the whole group engaged in dialogue, with equal airtime, focus and consensus building” (National Managers’ Community, 2002, p. 70) it aligned well with my AR approach and my goal of developing readiness for positive change. The interview matrix format also helped me engage participants as partners “who are “insiders” to the
situation” (Given, 2008, p. 6). The interview matrix format requires that participants interview each other (National Managers’ Community, 2002) to collaboratively develop themes and findings, and report out to the group. As participants were required to explore their experiences in detail without significant input from me as moderator, the method “symbolically recognized the legitimacy of their experience” (Stringer, 2007, p. 69). It also allowed participants to collaboratively engage in member checking during the final reporting phase as each sub-group summarized their findings.

The high level of active, collaborative participation distinguishes the interview matrix from other group methods. Participants are required to quickly form groups and collaborate between and across those groups during a sequence of six mini interviews. Further, participants work together to gather, theme, and report out on findings. The highly participatory and cogenerative nature of this method supported my aim of enhanced shared ownership of findings among participants, and engaged the entire group by getting them “working at speed with focus and full participation” (National Managers’ Community, 2002, p. 71).

Findings from my initial focus group with students informed my questions for this session, which yielded draft recommendations I brought forward along with findings to my final focus group with individuals engaged in leading SEM initiatives at BCIT.

**SEM leadership reference group**

I facilitated a focus group with members of BCIT’s SEM Council as the final step in my data collection process, and as an organizational intervention. As a data collection tool this focus group provided perspectives on draft recommendations informed by significant and highly contextually relevant leadership experience in both SEM and overall institutional management at BCIT. My intent was to further pursue saturation (Saumure & Given, 2008) by expanding the
diversity of stakeholders engaged as participants, and to increase support and investment in this inquiry and recommendations by engaging those with the power to implement or support the implementation of recommendations in identifying and prioritizing opportunities.

Study conduct

After receiving Research Ethics Board (REB) approval from both the Royal Roads and BCIT I began this inquiry with an initial meeting with my inquiry team members to review roles and collect signed letters of agreement (See Appendix G). I selected MARCOM’s administrative assistant as an inquiry team member to address my need for a neutral third party to manage invitations, communicate with participants, and store signed forms in a secure location. Their participation minimized any perceived conflict of interest or potential coercion related to my position within the institute. I also recruited two staff from Student Recruitment to provide logistic and technical support, and to assist in piloting questions for each data collection method.

Electronic communication was used for all correspondence with participants. This reflected the most common form of correspondence in use at BCIT. Participants in all methods were invited by an email explaining the purpose of the inquiry, and providing an overview of the method, confidentiality, anonymity, and how results would be disseminated. MARCOM’s administrative assistant also used BCIT’s intranet to recruit participants for the interview matrix with staff by posting the email invitation as a digital document within the system.

For each group session I prepared a comfortable space at BCIT’s Burnaby campus to ensure accessibility and respect for the privacy of all participants. My inquiry team helped pilot questions in advance of each session, and aided in refining timing, my script for facilitating each session, and in identifying potential hurdles.
At the outset of each method I reviewed participants’ roles and rights, my role as researcher and how data was to be collected and used while protecting their confidentiality. I then obtained signed consent forms, which I gave to MARCOM’s administrative assistant for secure storage.

**Student focus group**

During September 2013 I engaged with my inquiry team to discuss questions for the initial focus group with students. I facilitated mock sessions with my inquiry team and reviewed the process, questions, and script. The fall timeline for this session ensured students had recent experience with RE student communications either through orientation activities or general Fall Student Services awareness campaigns at BCIT.

I found I faced significant challenges recruiting students for the focus group. I canceled the first session because of lack of participants; however after creating a second sample set I was able to move forward with the focus group with four students participating. After welcoming the participants and reviewing the research information letter (see Appendix B) I collected signed consent forms (see Appendix C). These were given to MARCOM’s administrative assistant for archiving. I used a digital recorder to capture an audio recording of the focus group, and took analytical notes throughout. I transcribed the recording and performed manual analysis in addition to generating data visualizations and maps using MindNode, Omnigraffle, and NodeBox.

**Staff interview matrix**

Approximately one month after the student focus group I conducted an interview matrix with BCIT employees who had engaged in RE student communications within the past six months. Invites were sent out by email and a general invite was posted to BCIT’s intranet
following the sampling and recruitment process described in the project participants section of this report. There were 20 total respondents, allowing MARCOM’s administrative assistant to ensure the participants matched the intended makeup of the group.

MARCOM’s administrative assistant used the calendar function in Microsoft Outlook to identify the most-available time for participants and to book a suitable room for this session. The Recruitment staff that were part of the inquiry team assisted with piloting the questions in a brief mock-sessions, and with room and materials setup. After a review of preliminary findings from my focus group with students, and the research information letter, I gathered signed consent forms (see Appendix F) and gave them to MARCOM’s administrative assistant for archiving. I facilitated the session following Harrison’s (1999) guide. This involved dividing participants into four groups of approximately equal size and providing a unique question to each group. I then directed a series of timed interviews in sequence to ensure each participant was able to ask their question to a member of every other group, and was themselves given the opportunity to answer each question. I then gave participants time within their groups to discuss and record their findings on flipcharts. Finally, each group reported-out to the participants as a whole on their findings and the themes that emerged from the session. I used a digital recorder to produce an audio recording of the final reporting component and collected flipcharts and produced digital copies for analysis.

I transcribed the audio recording and performed manual analysis on the transcript and the flipcharts to further develop coding and themes. I then reviewed my findings and the recommendations put forward by the group to develop my draft recommendations for the final SEM leadership reference group.
**SEM leadership reference group**

Finally, I engaged SEM Council as a reference group once I had developed codes, categories, themes, and draft recommendations. This session involved leaders from across the institute who were SEM Council members.

My sponsor assisted with securing time on the agenda for the first SEM Council meeting of 2014. I presented an overview of my research topic, methods, and findings, then facilitated a conversation on my draft recommendations. I took notes during the session and used the input from this group to refine my recommendations, which I then reviewed with my sponsor to develop the final recommendations as outlined in chapter five of this report.

**Data analysis**

I began early data analysis (Glesne, 2011) along with the initial group methods and created coding lists in Microsoft Word. I personally transcribed the audio recordings of each session, and through reading and re-reading developed coding and themes. During the interviews and the transcription process I made analytic memos (Saldaña, 2013, pp. 41 - 43). I also used two computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) platforms at the beginning of my analysis, however I found manual analysis of reading and re-reading the transcripts and developing codes, groupings, and themes to be most useful within the context of this inquiry. To further paw through data during my data analysis I developed concept-maps and data-visualizations with MindNode, OmniGraffle, and NodeBox.

These steps and my analytical notes from the session aided in improving the relevance and depth in subsequent stages by identifying potential themes and patterns early on in the research process. This included a rudimentary coding scheme of priori codes which I then reviewed against emergent codes as I read and re-read transcripts during my analysis.
Transcripts were provided to participants from the student focus group and the final reporting phase of the staff interview matrix functioned as member checks (Sandelowski, 2008, pp. 501 - 502) to enhance trustworthiness, reliability, and validity through descriptive triangulation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a).

**Student focus group**

I began my analysis of the data from the student focus group by employing in vivo coding in order to “prioritize and honor the participants’ voice” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91) while deepening my understanding of the participants’ experiences and perceptions. I did this by generating my initial set of codes using the participants’ own words rather than by applying my own interpretation (King, 2008). This allowed me to frame my interpretations within the language of the participants while developing an initial structure and understanding of the participants’ perceptions of excellence in RE student communications, their experiences, processes, and preferences for engaging with BCIT outside the classroom. As I progressed through this analysis I returned to my literature review to situate my initial theories “within the context of knowledge development” (Stern, 2008, p. 115). Figure 6 provides one example of a categorized map of codes generated through my use of in vivo coding for this data.
The codes and themes that emerged formed the foundation for my second cycle of analysis and for developing themes and final questions for the staff interview matrix described next.
**Staff interview matrix**

After collecting data through the staff interview matrix I again engaged in in vivo coding to develop an initial set of codes for this data set by identifying prominent keywords and concepts within each groups’ findings. Simultaneously I employed process coding (Saldaña, 2013) to more deeply explore “ongoing action/interaction/emotion taken in response to situations” (p. 96) as described by participants.

**Second cycle analysis**

Throughout this inquiry I encountered multiple significant shifts in social and organizational situations and structures. In recognition of this dynamic complexity I undertook a situational analysis (Clarke, 2005). I reviewed my systems analysis as presented in chapter 1, my analytic memos, and developed further situational, social, and positional maps to supplement my data analysis. I then began the process of “grounded theorizing through the development of sensitizing concepts and integrated analytics” (Clarke, 2005, p. 28) by employing theoretical coding (Saldaña, 2013). To do this I explored the codes and categories I had developed for each session and identified correlations and developed categories of codes. I then developed a top-level list of categories, and through a review defined the central/core category for this study.

**SEM leadership reference group**

As a final component of my analysis I engaged SEM Council as a reference group to review my findings and draft recommendations. This provided a means to further refine my central/core category, sensitizing concepts, and develop enhanced recommendations and implementation strategies. The engagement also provided a means to directly involve leaders at BCIT in my research to further enhance their investment in the findings, recommendations, and their responsibility for implementing change (Stringer, 2007).
Ethical issues

I undertook this inquiry with the upmost respect for participants, concern for their welfare, and the concept of justice as outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [CIHR], 2010). Before commencing with research I sought and received approval from both Royal Roads’ and BCIT’s REBs.

Respect for persons

I engaged with a respect for persons (CIHR, 2010,) by ensuring all participants were empowered to make informed decisions regarding their involvement through comprehensive written information delivered along with invitations to participate (see Appendices A, B, C, and D). I also reviewed this information and consent materials, as well as participants’ power of autonomy at the outset of each method, and again during the member checking process.

At each step I confirmed participants were aware of their freedom to remove themselves from the research process, which would include my best efforts to destroy any data that could possibly identify the participant(s).

As my methods were all group methods where participants could have been known to each other, and in the case of the staff interview matrix and SEM leadership reference group were known to each other, I asked all participants to respect the confidential nature of the research by not sharing identifying information with others. Finally, I avoided “controlling influences or coercion” (CIHR, 2010, p. 9) by having all invitations and responses handled by MARCOM’s administrative assistant, acting as a neutral third party.
**Concern for welfare**

To protect the welfare of potential participants and actual participants I ensured that as researcher I was not privy to any correspondence with faculty and staff, and that senior leaders and members of my inquiry team other than MARCOM’s administrative staff were not involved in the selection process or any of the research methods where their position might have created the perception of coercion or the potential for power differentials. My project sponsor was not involved in any of the methods and did not review any information that could potentially identify participants.

I held the staff interview matrix and the focus group with SEM leaders separately to reduce power differentials within each group. I also protected participants’ anonymity in all reports on findings by substituting participant codes and pseudonyms for all real names, and ensuring citations from transcripts and quotations did not identify participants. Finally, in order to further safeguard the welfare of all involved I framed this inquiry with an appreciative stance through a lens of success, positivity, and opportunity. Together, these measures minimized the potential that any participant or group faced any “stigmatization, discrimination, or damage to reputation” (CIHR, 2010, p. 10).

**Concern for justice**

All participants were treated fairly and equitably in accordance with the concept of justice (CIHR, 2010, pp. 10-11). My sampling methods ensured equity in representation across stakeholder groups and levels of the organization by minimizing the potential for discrimination and maximizing the diversity of perspectives and experiences shared along with the distribution of findings across stakeholder groups.
All participants in this inquiry were over the age of 19 and were provided with clear communications at multiple points on their rights regarding participation, the processes of ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, and their opportunities to review and confirm the data collected. As I am directly involved in and accountable for components of student communications at BCIT I worked with my inquiry team to address the influence of my bias on the research by pilot testing questions for each method. I also compared and contrasted priori codes with emergent data.

I explained my dual role as researcher and professional and my interest in enhancing student communications in both electronic and in-person communications, explaining that to minimize this potential conflict and the possible perception of an imbalance of power I was acting as an impartial facilitator and researcher and had engaged a neutral third party to manage invitations and gather and store consent. No members of the inquiry team were directly involved in facilitating methods, and only MARCOM’s administrative assistant managed invitations and responses for each method in order to minimize the potential for conflicts of interest and power over relationships.

Chapter Summary

Within this chapter I described my AR approach and appreciative stance, as well as my overall methodology and processes. I also outlined the steps I took to address my ethical obligations as researcher.

The approach and methodology aligned well with the organizational context of BCIT as outlined in chapter one, and provided an excellent framework for the in-depth exploration of collaboration as it relates to RE student communications at BCIT. Finally, the progression from student to senior leaders, and from external-influence to internal tactics and strategy were aligned.
with and informed by a detailed literature review, provided in chapter two. In the next chapter I present my findings and conclusions, as well as the scope and limitations of my inquiry.
CHAPTER FOUR: ACTION INQUIRY PROJECT RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Within this chapter I present my findings, which are centered on the core theme of how participants make sense of their experiences and local environments within the context of BCIT and RE student communications.

My primary inquiry question was: How can the Student Services division at the British Columbia Institute of Technology strengthen collaborative capabilities to enhance recruitment and enrollment student communications? The subquestions that expanded on this core question were:

1. What examples of effective collaborative practices currently exist in developing and delivering recruitment and enrollment student communications?
2. What are the characteristics of the effective collaborative interactions involved in recruitment and enrollment student communications?
3. What do prospective and current students perceive as excellence in recruitment and enrollment student communications?
4. What strategies will be required to implement recommendations for strengthening collaborative capabilities to enhance recruitment and enrollment student communications?

Each of my questions were framed within the unique organizational context of BCIT, and informed by the literature review presented in chapter 2. Following my findings I have concluded this chapter with a presentation of conclusions and the scope and limitations for this inquiry.
Study Findings

The findings within this section are based on my analysis of qualitative data gathered through a student focus group (SFG) and a staff interview matrix (SIM). Four students from various educational programs at BCIT participated in the SFG, and 14 BCIT employees who worked in a broad range of levels and across multiple departments and schools took part in the SIM. I first analyzed, coded, and themed the data from each session independently. This allowed me to develop sensitizing concepts, the “rather new and intriguing, though underdeveloped, constructs that prompts the researcher to learn more about the subject” (Doorewaard, 2010, p. 856). From these constructs I developed situational maps and undertook an integrated analysis. This helped further refine my codes and categories, and led me to identify the following six themes as key findings:

1. Inconsistent experiences with collaboration;
2. A relationship between positive personal relationships and depth of knowledge to effective collaborative exchanges;
3. A relationship between empathy, clarity, and personal attention to students’ perceptions of excellence in RE student communications;
4. Collaborative information sharing in RE student communications;
5. Unobtrusive collaboration; and
6. Formalized systems for collaboration;

Analysis for each finding is provided. I have noted the source of all comments relating to each finding, using SFG1 through SFG4 to represent each participant in the SFG and SIM1 through SIM4 to represent each group of two to three participants in the SIM.
Finding 1: Inconsistent experiences with collaboration

Through my analysis I found that while all participants recognized that BCIT employees collaborate across the institute when engaging in RE student communications, the quality of their experiences with collaboration were inconsistent.

While students related positively to the basic concept of collaboration, analysis indicated their experiences were inconsistent in terms of depth and quality. One stated “when you actually get to talk to people from different departments you come up with great ideas” (SFG1) in recognition of the benefits of collaboration. While this is positive, I found the depth of collaboration experienced or practiced in support of students’ needs to be superficial. Students typified their best experiences with employees as one where, when the employee was unable to help the student directly, they were directed to appropriate contacts. This was related as “I can’t answer your question, I’ll connect you with someone who will be able to answer your question” (SFG3). While this indicates a basic collaborative engagement between student and employee I found no indication of deeper collaboration between staff to meet students’ immediate needs.

This theme also surfaced multiple times during the SIM. Two groups of four participants each reported on their recent experiences consulting others or being consulted in the development of RE student communications. Both groups related that while there was frequent personal contact with other BCIT employees, there was “no feedback” (SIM3) and the experiences could be characterized “one way communications” (SIM2). To further reinforce the inconsistent quality and depth of collaboration one group reported that at times they “didn’t have a say in the final outcome” (SIM2).

In contrast to this experience the group reporting on their recent experiences engaging in RE student communications provided examples of collaboration where each party brought
significant additional value. This was most evident in the development of new website content where one group of employees said they collaborated effectively to “clarify, update, and keep accurate” (SIM1) information such as career paths. This group added they were proud their activity “helped students outside the task at hand” (SM1) as well.

**Finding 2: A relationship between positive personal relationships and depth of knowledge to effective collaborative exchanges**

I found positive personal relationships and depth of knowledge to be the two most prominent characteristics participants deemed key to effective collaborative interactions.

*Personal relationships*

Student participants were unanimous in recognizing the importance of positive personal relationships. All four students related their most positive experiences occurred with individuals they had gotten to know personally early on in their engagement with BCIT. One said it was most important students not feel like “some number that they don’t really care about” (SFG3). Another student stressed this point by noting his negative experiences as “It’s like they’re just trying to sell you something, they’ll sell you their idea because they don’t really care about you.” (SFG2).

This focus on positive relationships was echoed within the SIM. In relating a recent positive experience one group reported they were able to find and collaborate with “personal (BCIT) contacts. . . [who] knew programs intimately” (SIM1). The group looking at how we might collaborate in a perfect world also noted the importance of personal relationships. They put forward that “getting people (staff) together” (SIM4) to build connections was an effective strategy to enhance the current state of practice.
As a contrast to the importance of personal relationships all four students suggested technological solutions as opportunities for BCIT to enhance RE student communications. One participant stated “web chats” (SFG2) would be preferable to waiting in line for someone to answer questions, while another added “one platform where I could easily get information” (SFG1) would be his ideal.

**Depth of knowledge**

Depth of knowledge, often in very specific areas, also surfaced as a key characteristic in the effective collaborative interactions. One group of employees in the SIM reported they found subject matter experts were key when verifying information and answering questions within a very short timeframe (SIM2). Another group stressed that excellent collaboration in this context must “involve faculty in [the] recruitment process” (SIM3) because of their depth of knowledge.

**Finding 3: A relationship between empathy, clarity, and personal attention to students’ perceptions of excellence in RE student communications**

During the initial focus group the participants frequently cited the importance of empathy for their unique situations, clarity, and personal attention as the key factors in how they identify excellence in RE student communications.

**Empathy**

When asked “what makes the experience of communicating with someone in this context excellent?” one participant characterized the experience as establishing an “empathy conduit” (SFG1). This participant expanded on the concept by stating “The more you can understand where they’re coming from and if they can understand where I’m coming from. . . those are the really meaningful, like, high-bandwidth communications. The two nodes are synched” (SFG1).
All three other participants agreed with this statement. Two indicated their general support, stating “that’s a great definition” (SFG4), and “Nice. Yeah right on.” (SFG2).

Another participant expanded on this line of conversation by adding “the other person needs to have some sort of concept of, having your best interest at heart. Understanding why you’re here, like (they) are not just here to listen to you talk but they are here to gain some knowledge or wisdom from what you’re going to say” (SFG3).

One participant returned to the subject to reinforce importance of a connection deeper than a simple factual exchange through the comment “actually understanding that you’re a person, you’re a human with feelings and they want to connect with you on more than just a communication” (SFG4).

In contrast, two participants described short transactional exchanges as not requiring deep emotional or empathetic connections. One stated “it depends on the communication. . . . on an interpersonal level or face to face it’s more meaningful, but if you did that with everyone how much time would that take?” (SFG4). Another added “if it’s professional and I just want to know how much this coffee costs then I just want that quickly” (SFG1).

**Clarity**

I found clarity of information and roles was a prominent recurring theme for all participants. All four participants in the SFG emphasized clarity of information through comments such as “I’m big on clarity” (SFG4), “I should get my message as quickly as possible and I should have a clear understanding of what I should do next” (SFG1), and “for me it’s shooting for the stars if you get clarity” (SFG2). One participant also noted their preference for clarity was directly related to the demands of being a student at BCIT by stating “since we’re so
time-poor here, and having to work on projects, and mid-terms, and finals, we want to make sure that the information we’re getting is clear, understandable” (SFG3).

Clarity of information was also a key theme in the SIM. One group emphasized their depth of knowledge allowed them to “provide clearer career paths. . . [and] clarify and update the website to keep it accurate” (SIM1). The group reporting on their experiences being consulted by others who were engaged in RE student communications was that they were most frequently asked to answer questions and verify information to ensure clarity. They reported this was challenging as “very short timeframes are given” (SIM2).

Two groups noted the importance clarity of roles across schools, program areas, and service departments. One reported “results are inconsistent between schools and student services departments and support areas like marketing and web services. . . we don’t understand each other, program areas and recruitment don’t always understand each others’ roles which makes missed opportunities for recruitment” (SIM3).

**Personal attention**

The final common theme was that personal attention is required for excellent RE student communications. This theme emerged from the SFG through comments such as “what I say excellent communication would be is to know that the other person is listening to you and actually paying undivided attention so you know they’re actually hearing what you say” (SFG3) and “I’m going to listen to you as a person” (SFG2). Finally, one student commented that they enjoyed making personal connections with employees and found the practice commonplace. They stated that aside from one department “everyone else I’ve contacted they always sent me a response - a formal response, but also like “you can contact me directly” so it’s nice to have that kind of route to a contact person you know” (SFG4).
Employees participating in the SIM also related to personal attention as an important factor. One group found it important as an internal practice for clarifying complex information before responding to students, and reported “personal (BCIT) contact” (SIM1) was the most important factor in their ability to deliver excellent RE student communications. Two groups of participants also related poor personal attention to their negative experiences in collaborating on RE student communications. One group noted in their experience there was little personal follow-up after the initial consultation and that personal recognition or “closing the loop” (SIM3) would make for a more positive experience.

**Finding 4: Collaborative information sharing in RE student communications**

All four groups in the SIM reported some frustration with the depth and breadth of information sharing. One group noted “faculty aren’t aware of what’s on the website” (SIM4) when commenting on the potential benefits they saw in enhanced collaboration. They indicated the lack of information sharing was a significant factor in inconsistent and confusing messaging to students through the RE process. The group reporting on their experience being consulted on RE student communications also indicated a lack of collaborative information sharing, saying those providing information often “didn’t know the final outcome” (SIM2) of an RE exchange.

Students participating in the SFG offered a contrast to the importance of behind-the-scenes information sharing. Two students suggested the communications platforms required enhancements that would allow them to better navigate information themselves regardless of source. One referred to BCIT’s online communication channels as “archaic” (SFG1) and said “If there were one platform where I could easily get information, where I chose the filter for it, it would make that process easier for the extracurricular stuff and the other stuff happening on campus”.

Collaboration in RE Student Communications

Finding 5: Unobtrusive collaboration

I found interest and support in unobtrusive collaboration to be a common theme for the vast majority of participants. All of the SFG participants indicated they were willing to engage in some measure of collaboration to enhance RE student communications. One suggested the use of comfortable online channels such as social networks would be useful for “actively asking the student body as a whole” (SFG3) for input, and that this would be of benefit to BCIT as “the idea of being part of something where everyone is actively trying to become better, that’s something everyone wants to be part of”. They also restated the importance of personal attention and connected this concept to shared learning by saying their best exchanges with BCIT occurred when employees were “listening to what you have to say and integrating it or using that information rather than writing you off as someone who is here to complain” (SFG3).

Three students qualified their willingness to collaborate by restating the importance of their individual situations. One participant said of students “if you can give them the opportunity to take part without having to spend so much time to go to meetings and stuff because people are busy” (SFG4), and another re-stated students were “time-poor” (SFG3). This reinforced that their level of collaboration must be measured against the realities of being a student at BCIT.

Two students emphasized that through feedback and shared-learning RE student communications could become unobtrusive collaborative exchanges. One noted BCIT should develop “more case scenarios” (SFG4) and that “if you’re recording what people are going there for you can filter that and understand what cases need help”. Another noted that through gathering and analyzing data on demand BCIT could “figure out trends and more kiosks could be open based on when you have more people who need to do those face-to-face things” (SFG1).
I found that while all four groups of SIM participants were supportive of enhanced collaboration all participants qualified their support by referencing workload through statements such as “they’re so busy” (SIM4).

**Finding 6: Formalized systems for collaboration**

Formalized systems that support collaboration and effective feedback routines emerged as the final key finding. One group of participants in the SIM reported that developing formalized “forums to bring staff together” (SIM4) and “defining roles and processes” would enhance our collaborative capabilities in RE student communications. Further statements from two other groups such as “there needs to be a follow-up process” (SIM2) and stressing the “need to involve faculty” (SIM1) reinforced the notion that there is the potential to improve by moving beyond ad-hoc collaboration.

**Study Conclusions**

Based on the study findings and relevant literature I have drawn the following conclusions on collaborative capabilities within the context of RE student communications at BCIT:

1. Participants feel collaborative practices in RE student communications at BCIT are inconsistent;
2. Effective collaborative interactions in RE student communications involve empathy and create ongoing personal connections;
3. Excellent RE student communications are responsive to the students’ unique situations;

and

4. Participants support developing formalized systems including feedback routines.
I have expanded on each conclusion and how they relate to my inquiry subquestions below.

**Conclusion 1: Participants feel collaborative practices in RE student communications at BCIT are inconsistent**

I conclude that participants feel collaborative practices in RE student communications at BCIT are inconsistent in depth, quality, and effectiveness. I found few positive experiences to relate to in response to my first subquestion, “What examples of effective collaborative practices currently exist in developing and delivering recruitment and enrollment student communications?” Further, the positive experiences that were reported indicate that collaboration occurs mostly at a basic level. Participants, particularly employees in the SIM, were quick to identify collaboration as an avenue to enhance RE student communication, but shared few examples of excellence within this context.

As I have discussed in chapter two, a capability for effective collaborative exchanges is critical to developing enhanced market orientation and CRM practices (Day, 2000). Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2010) have suggested that within the context of higher education this includes the capacity for inter-functional coordination. I found that it was within this capacity for inter-functional coordination that collaboration in RE student communications at BCIT encounters difficulties. While students related stories of their immediate needs being met, I found little evidence that the interactions they described were used by employees to develop new and useful knowledge or enhanced capabilities that might be used to better meet students’ needs in the future.
Conclusion 2: Effective collaborative interactions in RE student communications involve empathy and create ongoing personal connections

I found empathy and personal connections to be the key characteristics of effective collaborative interactions in RE student communications.

While few and far between, for the effective collaborative interactions described by participants I noted they were most often engaged with individuals with whom they had ongoing personal connections. For students these were faculty and staff they felt they could turn to when facing challenges. For employees the most effective collaborative experiences occurred in proximity to their own position and location within BCIT. This suggests collaborative practices benefitted from enhanced empathy and personal relationships built as collaborators work in proximity with each other.

As discussed in chapter two, trust and enhanced relationships both support and emerge from effective collaboration (Clarke & Darabi, 2012; Piggot-Irvine, 2012). Further, empathy is strongly aligned as a practice to enhance both collaboration and personal relationships as it “contributes to community spirit and social solidarity” (Musolf, 2003, p. 447) and “can lead to altruism or prosocial behavior” (p. 447).

The “capacity to share in the affective life of another” (Kohn, 1990, cited in Musolf, 2003, p. 447) due to a more intimate understanding of their situational reality appears to be a key support in the effective collaborative interactions such as those reported by employees in the SIM.

The concept of ongoing personal relationships also aligns well with effective CRM and market orientation as discussed in chapter two. On the surface, maintaining ongoing relationships is directly connected to the concept of customer retention put forward by Day (2003), as a
fundamental aspect of improving customer-relating activities. At a deeper level within BCIT, positive collegial relationships are important as employees “cross functional and hierarchical boundaries” (Jarratt, 2009, p. 378) in search of knowledge to support students’ needs.

One important distinction is the difference between positive collegial or collaborative relationships and friendship. Students identified this dimension by retelling stories of their engagements with faculty and their family doctors, noting that friendship is not the defining factor of the ongoing personal relationships they relate to effective collaborative interactions.

**Conclusion 3: Excellent RE student communications are responsive to the students’ unique situations**

All four students in the SFG reported responding more positively to RE student communications when they were delivered in a manner that recognized their unique situation at the time of engagement. For two students that meant deep empathetic connections were most important. The other two participants related that speed and concise information were ideal, and sometimes the emotional aspects of an exchange were less important. This echoes the recommendations put forward in current literature that an organization’s people-driven dynamic capabilities are key components of successful CRM initiatives (Foley & Fahy, 2009; Maklan & Knox, 2009; Shang & Lin, 2010) as they enable organizations to dynamically adjust engagement based on customers’ current needs and preferences.

**Conclusion 4: Participants support developing formalized systems including feedback routines**

There was unanimous support among all participants for the development of formalized systems that include feedback routines to support enhanced communication and collaboration.
Employees suggested formalized forums while students expressed interest in providing input and suggested that BCIT develop systems to extract actionable data from exchanges with students. These suggestions combined with the repeated notion that effective follow-up is important to building trust have led me to conclude that developing formalized systems and feedback routines is an effective strategy for strengthening collaborative capabilities within the context of RE student communications.

That is not to say participants are supportive of seeing formalized systems imposed without being developed collaboratively and in recognition of their unique situations. Writing about their experience developing an agent based simulation, Plank, Feldon, Sherman, and Elliot (2011) stated “the integration of expertise is a social process that requires a collaborative design of standards and the warranting of information and its representation and application” (p. 42). This warranting of information, how it is represented, and the application of information is a key consideration as individual participants may be protective of their personal information, expertise, or territory, there is a recognition that to be successful the system and feedback routines must support unobtrusive collaboration.

**Scope and Limitations**

The scope of this inquiry was specific to collaboration in RE student communications. It was undertaken with the intent of building readiness for positive organizational change, starting within the Student Services division at BCIT. With this in mind there are several factors that could limit the application of findings and the generalization of my conclusions across BCIT and outside the contextual boundary of this inquiry.

The first factor that might impact transferability is that part-time, distance, co-operative, apprenticeship, and industry-training students did not participate in the research. Despite
employing purposeful sampling that included identifying prospective participants across all delivery methods in order to enhance transferability (Jensen, 2008) I only received responses from students engaged in the full-time delivery method. Thus, while the student perspective was explored through a diverse group it is not necessarily representative of the student body as a whole. As a result one cannot assume the experiences and views of the participants are representative or consistent with those of the other groups listed above.

Further, while participation in the SIM was much higher there were no participants from three of the six schools at BCIT. While SIM participants were a highly diverse group who were all closely linked to context and boundaries of the study (Jensen, 2008) the reader must assess the context of this study to determine if it is transferrable to their own.

To address this I have endeavored to provide thick description (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2008) throughout my inquiry to provide the reader with “a full and purposeful account of the context, participants, and research design” (Jensen, 2008, p. 887). My aim has been to enable the reader to better determine the transferability of this study as it relates to their own unique situation.

The second factor impacting transferability is related to the AR approach for this inquiry. Stringer (2007) stated that “action research outcomes apply only to the particular people and places that were part of the study” (p. 59), explaining that judgments on transferability “indicate the degree of trust people have that the research outcomes may be transferred to their own situation” (p. 59). I engaged SEM Council as a reference group to review findings, conclusions, and recommendations in an effort to enhance the level of trust and investment in this inquiry, however given constraints on time I was not able to review my methods in great detail. I was able to review my inquiry in detail with my organizational sponsor, which provided valuable
additional insight and context while refining recommendations as well as developing enhanced ownership of findings, conclusions, and recommendations at the leadership level.

The final significant factor is one of dynamic complexity and ongoing change. During the course of this inquiry BCIT has undertaken significant organizational change. This has included new leadership at the most senior levels and the transfer of individuals and departments across divisions. This has led to what I perceive as more deeply entrenched territorialism as individuals seek certainty in times of change (Oshry, 2007). Conversely, it has also led to enhanced collaboration as new stakeholders become involved in projects and identify opportunities to work together. Along with the continually shifting organizational landscape at BCIT matters of transferability and generalization must be assessed by the reader against factors such as students’ preferences shifting towards technology-mediated communication (Robinson & Stubberud, 2012), that is communications which involve various technologies and platforms. Finally, external cultural events and influences may change their interest and willingness to engage in collaborative exchanges and must be continually assessed when considering or implementing change involving students.

**Chapter Summary**

Within this chapter I have presented my findings, conclusions, and the scope and limitations for my inquiry. While the quality and consistency of collaboration reported by both students and employees was lower than I expected at the outset of this inquiry, I found strong support for enhancing the state of practice, and a belief that by strengthening collaborative capabilities the Student Services division at BCIT might enhance RE student communications. In the next chapter I present my recommendations, organizational implications, and conclude with a
report summary that outlines the next steps and what role I might play in leading positive change at BCIT.
CHAPTER 5: INQUIRY IMPLICATIONS

It has long been a commonly held belief at BCIT that the most effective form of communication with a prospective or newly accepted student is undertaken in-person, and wherever possible staff should take the time to connect face-to-face. It is also commonly understood that the reality of our finite capacity, budget, and physical space, make this a practical impossibility. How then do we honour the significance of each individual’s decision to pursue an education with BCIT at the outset of the relationship?

Within this final chapter I put forward potential strategies that address the key question of my inquiry, “How can the Student Services division at the British Columbia Institute of Technology strengthen collaborative capabilities to enhance recruitment and enrollment student communications?”, and my subquestions:

1. What examples of effective collaborative practices currently exist in developing and delivering recruitment and enrollment student communications?
2. What are the characteristics of the effective collaborative interactions involved in recruitment and enrollment student communications?
3. What do prospective and current students perceive as excellence in recruitment and enrollment student communications?
4. What strategies will be required to implement recommendations for strengthening collaborative capabilities to enhance recruitment and enrollment student communications?

I have provided recommendations in three sub-sections; Near-term, medium-term, and long-term. The near-term recommendations are focused on maximizing the collaborative nature and benefits of current activities in RE student communications. The medium-term
recommendations are aligned with initiatives planned for the next six to twelve months. The long-term recommendation is a new initiative of significant scope that necessitates more significant readiness for change.

I have also provided organizational implications for leaders at BCIT to be considered when implementing any of the recommendations put forward, and the implications should leadership choose not to implement the recommendations. This chapter concludes with an overview of how I engaged my sponsor and the SEM leadership reference group with my findings and draft recommendations, and the actions being considered at BCIT as a result.

**Study Recommendations**

**Near-term**

As BCIT is a highly dynamic and complex environment I have put forward the following initial near-term recommendations:

1. Develop a system for ongoing collaborative mapping of RE student communications; and
2. Highlight successful practices and supplement these with a formalized feedback process.

These recommendations are opportunities that minimize the potential barriers presented by territorialism and the lack of a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities in RE student communications across the institute as identified through my research. Both near-term recommendations are aligned with areas where participants, my sponsor, and the SEM leadership reference group identified the potential for high-impact initial steps. Finally, both are highly collaborative in nature and of low-risk in recognition of the importance of “maintain[ing] approaches to development that engage the participatory processes that foster a sense of
Collaboration in RE Student Communications

community among all participants” (Stringer, 2007, p. 147).

**Recommendation 1: Develop a system for ongoing collaborative mapping of RE student communications**

This recommendation is based on my findings of support for formalized collaborative systems and information sharing in RE student communications as described in chapter four. It is also put forward in support of BCIT’s strategic plan (2013).

I have been engaged in a project to map RE student communications, which was initiated by the Director of Student Services. While we have had some initial meetings with key stakeholders we have yet to make significant progress. Further, we have not consciously positioned this project as one that aims to strengthen collaborative capabilities, and we have yet to directly engage stakeholders across the institute in planning the work.

This recommendation is also provided in recognition and response to the constant tension between centralized and decentralized ownership of student communications at BCIT. A broad collaborative approach could provide a means to manage the tension as a polarity (Johnson, 1996) rather than responding to it as a problem to be resolved.

Pursuing this project as a collaborative effort promotes the goal of “organization learning and transformation” (Burke & Biggart, 1997, p. 706) in support of developing strengthened collaborative capabilities. This is aligned with the concept of collaboration as a dynamic capability which “mediates the conflict resulting from functional orientations, and improves performance” (Allred et al., 2011, p. 129).

*Structural enablers* (Allred et al., 2011) which support the development of collaborative capabilities will be required to successfully implement this recommendation. SEM Council could potentially function as an “executive steering committee” (p. 152), a structural enabler such as
Allred et al. (2011) have suggested be “tasked with (i) removing obstacles to success, (ii) allocating the required resources, and (iii) providing visibility for the initiatives” (p. 152). Additional structural enablers I suggest be implemented to support this recommendation would be the formation of a cross-functional team to engage in collaboration strategy meetings to collectively “define objectives and obtain buy-in” (p. 152) for the project, and to undertake the project itself. This team would ideally include both staff and faculty from each school as well as the Student Services division, and should include both staff at the student-facing level as well as senior employees to enhance collaborative capabilities both horizontally across the organization as well as vertically across levels.

Once the cross-functional team defines objectives and obtains buy-in from the executive steering committee they would share a documentation of the objectives with stakeholders across institute by posting it to BCIT’s intranet.

The key considerations for leadership and a cross-functional team pursuing this recommendation are the political ramifications of initiating a project that penetrates historical organizational boundaries, the impact on employee time, and the potential resources required for the ongoing maintenance of a dynamic record of RE student communications.

Recommendaion 2: Highlight successful practices and supplement these with a formalized feedback process

Allred et al. (2011) suggested “the key to freeing up resources and building momentum is to document and disseminate early successes - often via collaborative pilot projects” (p. 151). I recommend the Student Services division at BCIT implement a process for publicly recognizing successful collaborative practices in RE student communications, which includes the disclosure of the impact or outcomes of those collaborative efforts in order to emphasize feedback as
integral to the work. This process would create conversations regarding the collaborative practices, which Piderit (2000) suggested was the best first stage in creating change when taking the view that change is a continuous rather than planned and finite process.

I found that excellence in RE student communications and positive collaborative practices were reported most often in close proximity with each participant’s own department, division, or school during both the SFG and the SIM. All four students related positive experiences outside the classroom involving their instructors, and two of the four SIM groups reported effective localized practices “in my area” (SIM3).

Some current projects that could be highlighted in support of this recommendation include the production of Viewbook, BCIT’s key recruitment publication, the development of web content communicating new admissions requirements and processes to prospective students, and the new email marketing platform and materials developed collaboratively by Web Services and MARCOM. Each of these projects are of an ongoing nature and highly collaborative.

Where appropriate and effective feedback processes for each project are not in place, they will need to be developed and catalogued. As both BCIT’s Institutional Research Office (IR) and Web Services (WS) possess effective tools for gathering feedback and performing analysis I recommend they be engaged to develop feedback mechanisms where required.

Medium-term

The following medium-term recommendations are provided to extend the strengthened collaborative capabilities and successes achieved during the near-term through leveraging relevant initiatives already approved for implementation, or for which implementation has just begun.
3. Extend access to student question and answer databases to all student-facing employees;

4. Integrate feedback mechanisms into all digital RE student communications; and

5. Engage faculty and staff as a cross-functional team for developing a strategy and implementation plan for a CRM platform.

These recommendations offer an opportunity to strengthen positive feedback loops (Senge, 2007) and support the continued growth of collaborative capabilities while also maximizing the benefits of the new initiatives in regards to RE student communications.

**Recommendation 3: Extend access to student question and answer databases to all student-facing employees**

This recommendation is provided as a means to address the multiple overlapping sources of information that student-facing employees refer to when engaged in developing or delivering RE student communications. Each isolated information-source presents an increased risk of inaccuracy as platforms, structure, processes, and key-messages change over time. This increases the potential for inaccurate information being provided to prospective and current students, and unnecessarily complex processes for student-facing staff as they search for answers to their questions.

I recommend access to the key-information database currently in use by BCIT’s Student Information and Enrollment Services department be extended to all student-facing employees at BCIT. This would streamline employees’ information-gathering process and encourage updates, refinements, and additions to the database from across the institute.

Additionally, as a primary reference-tool, its use might contribute to what Senge (2006) called adaptive and generative learning, and further support pan-institutional collaboration. The
greater breadth of employees across the institute engaged with key-information might enhance adaptive learning as through their diverse perspectives improved processes and services addressing student needs might be identified. Reducing the complexity and length of time required to find and rearticulate key information when developing or delivering RE student communications frees up additional time for the analysis and exploration of students unexpressed needs in support of generative learning.

Both types of learning are important to enhancing the RE student experience at BCIT as Day (2000) found organizational learning to be an important component of enhanced CRM. Further, Herhausen and Schögel (2013) found “firms need a well-developed generative learning orientation to fully benefit from translating new insights resulting from CRM capabilities into establishing, maintaining, and enhancing long-term associations with customers, and vice versa” (p. 1678).

**Recommendation 4: Integrate feedback mechanisms into all digital RE student communications**

BCIT does not consistently offer feedback mechanisms for prospective or current students to provide input on RE student communications. This recommendation is most closely tied to fostering unobtrusive collaboration with prospective and current students, and integrating feedback routines in all RE student communications. This recommendation is positioned in supporting the strategic goal of changing the student experience (BCIT, 2013) as it could provide the means to gather qualitative and quantitative data on our students’ changing communications preferences and support more fully informed decision making. This recommendation is also targeted at reducing the costs currently involved across the institute when surveying students while enhancing the quality and consistency of practice. There are a number of competing
platforms and tools currently in use, and no widely shared question-banks to enable benchmarking or comparisons across surveys and feedback. Finally, this recommendation supports the development of enhanced market sensing abilities as a foundation for the enhanced CRM. The approach of maintaining a focus on enhanced sensing and analysis is supported by Coltman (2007) who stated “CRM is best aligned with a strategy that puts a premium on superior market sensing and customer analysis” (p. 314).

Collaboration across Student Services, Information Technology Services, Institute Reporting, and the schools will be required to successfully implement this recommendation. Prioritizing collaboration and assigning the necessary resources for developing a consistent feedback mechanism will require leadership to allocate time and resources across a number of departments. I recommend a cross-functional team that includes representation from faculty be assembled to provide SEM Council with a list of current platforms and processes. This team would also provide input on which to prioritize as institute standard and champion that process for the institute.

This task could be undertaken relatively quickly and would provide leadership with information that is also of value outside the scope of this inquiry. Engaging faculty effectively will require the leadership and the team to identify tangible benefits for these individuals. If successful this approach holds much promise for supporting enhanced pan-institutional collaboration. In writing on their highly collaborative research within a post-secondary Plank, Feldon, Sherman, and Elliot (2011) suggested such activity “reinforces cross-disciplinary, cross-sector behavior, and the interest of the faculty team is sustained because the collective and cooperative learning opportunities are irreplaceable” (p. 42).
Recommendation 5: Engage faculty and staff as a cross-functional team for developing a strategy and implementation plan for a CRM platform

For this recommendation I suggest leaders engage faculty, instructors, and staff from each school at BCIT as part of the cross-functional team to engage in exploring the implementation of a CRM platform. This recommendation provides a means to bring to bear the enhanced collaborative capabilities and market orientation developed by successfully implementing previous recommendations for developing a strategy and implementation plan for a CRM platform.

Engaging employees from across the schools at BCIT is important for developing buy-in for a centralized CRM system, as there are multiple overlapping platforms with varying degrees of CRM capabilities already in place and ownership and use of these generally resides within the schools at BCIT. Engaging stakeholders with a more direct connection to these systems and their use could provide the opportunity for enhanced learning as their experiences can be leveraged to inform this project. Engaging faculty and instructors from across BCIT in early and ongoing collaboration is also a useful strategy for promoting positive attitudes towards this change initiative.

It is important for stakeholders engaged in this initiative to have been involved in some way with the previous recommendations. Reengaging participants from past collaborative efforts in student communications will support enhanced collaboration within the group, ensure they are sensitized to the importance of student-feedback, and have access to existing RE student communication materials.

A key consideration for leadership in forming the cross-functional team is to ensure team members share a customer-focused orientation. As discussed in chapter two, a customer or
market orientation and collaborative capabilities are effective antecedents to the successful implementation of a CRM platform. Further, Day (2003) cautioned, “installing CRM technology before creating a customer-focused organization is perhaps the most dangerous pitfall” (p. 103). I recommend that leadership carefully identify participants who share customer orientation to address this potential hurdle.

Finally, timing is another key factor requiring careful consideration. Day (2003) emphasizes the importance of developing a customer strategy before implementing a CRM. As SEM Council transitions its key-focus to retention, BCIT is well positioned to align the timing of a robust customer strategy with the implementation of CRM as a technological platform.

**Long-term**

As my final recommendation I propose a change in structure and portfolios in recognition of the opportunities and importance of RE student communications. As with previous recommendations it was informed by a consultation with BCIT’s SEM Council as a reference group. Additionally, my sponsor identified this recommendation as a priority and high-impact opportunity during a final review of draft recommendations.

*Recommendation 6: Explore the creation of a role and portfolio accountable for student communications and the overall student experience*

This recommendation is provided as a key opportunity for reinforcing the need for enhanced RE student communications, the importance of the student experience, and develop processes under consistent leadership which support the ongoing enhancement of that experience. I propose RE student communications be a key area of responsibility for this role, while noting the portfolio and accountability would extend beyond this initial phase of students’ engagement in alignment with SEM Council’s priorities of student success and retention.
As a long-term and ongoing extension of previous recommendations, this role would include the responsibility to lead ongoing research and development of RE student communications as an innovation activity. Salge and Vera (2012) have suggested such research and development activities provide two key benefits, “(1) the generation of novel products, services, and processes, and (2) the strengthening of the organizational ability to learn from new external knowledge” (p. 551). While these benefits align with the links I identified in chapter two between organizational learning, customer and market orientations, and enhanced CRM, attaining such benefits will require effective collaboration with multiple departments and divisions across BCIT as well as with external stakeholders.

One potential location for this role is the Director of Student Services position. This position has recently been restructured with a focus on SEM. This provides for an excellent alignment with RE student communications as well as significant authority to implement change because of the position and location of the position.

Pursuing this recommendation will require careful consideration by leadership of several factors including the nature and scope of any changes to authority, reporting structures, and budget. While not a simple task, the opportunity to leverage the recent restructuring of the Director of Student Services portfolio to focus on SEM could serve as an initial “focused symbolic and energizing event. . . [as] a highly useful way of launching large-scale and planned organizational change” (Burke, 2008, p. 749).

The primary implication for leadership will be to carefully consider the potentially limiting factor of the position within Student Services. Reporting to the VP of Student Services might have a negative impact on the willingness of employees outside the division to engage in
collaborative projects as there is no direct accountability to the Deans of each school or the VP, Education.

**Organizational Implications**

I have identified opportunities to pursue the dual goals of strengthened collaborative capabilities and enhanced RE student communications through building momentum by sharing the good work currently being done, enhancing current practices, and leveraging new and imminent initiatives. Maximizing the benefits of each recommendation put forward will require collaboration across multiple departments, divisions, and schools, as well as vertically within and across each. Further, stakeholders will be engaged in multiple change initiatives in order to achieve lasting and ongoing positive impact as “true organizational change is too complicated for one intervention” (Burke, 2008, p. 752).

AR and the appreciative stance I adopted for this inquiry provides effective means for implementing each change. The participatory and cogenerative nature of AR (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Stringer, 2007) and the OAR model (Rowe et al., 2011) I adopted are effective means of engaging in meaningful ongoing change with a respect for all participants. An appreciative stance and “search for the best” (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 3) provides a means to continually build momentum through communicating successes (Allred et al., 2011). An appreciative stance also provides a means to reduce the risk of defensiveness (Argyris, 2003) by minimizing the risk of embarrassment for participants through its focus on the positive.

While providing a point of leverage for building support and momentum the AR approach to implementation and appreciative stance will require an attentive eye for the defensive strategies of avoidance and control (Piggot-Irvine, 2012). Stakeholders engaged in
each recommendation will need to carefully balance advocacy and inquiry (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010) to minimize such defensive strategies.

Finally, implementing the recommendations I have put forward will require that stakeholders face the complex challenge of learning to work in new configurations and across traditional hierarchical and structural boundaries, including collaborating under the direction of a new figure of authority. Ongoing leadership development strategies such as the one currently in place within the Student Services division are a key means to address these challenges and provide positive impact both within the boundaries of this study and across the institute as a whole.

**Implications for leadership**

Throughout this inquiry I have engaged in both formal and informal conversations and meetings to develop interest, understanding, and commitment to the importance of collaboration in RE student communications. In my presentation and conversation with the SEM leadership reference group, and through conversations with my sponsor and the Director of Student Services, I identified widespread support for strengthening collaborative capabilities and a recognition of the importance of effective RE student communications.

Key implications for leadership at BCIT are the importance of identifying positive relationships between staff when creating cross-functional teams, the importance of monitoring the political frame and the completion for scarce resources (Bolman & Gallos, 2011), and the importance of their role as sponsors with the power to implement or authorize the implementation of change (Conner, 2013).
Implications for Future Inquiry

Though this AR project focused on building readiness for positive change I found the cogenerative nature of AR, the group methods I employed, and in vivo coding to be highly valuable. I also identified several opportunities for future inquiry that expand on the subjects of collaborative capabilities and RE student communications.

I found the focus group method for the SFG and my choice of in vivo coding especially useful in maintaining a respect for participants and preserving their voice through the study. Both my sponsor and I found that by focusing on honouring participants’ own language we gained new insight into the phenomena they described. The interview matrix method I used for the SIM was also particularly effective. It generated highly collaborative dialogue and discussion, and expanded participants’ shared understanding of effective collaboration and RE student communications. These methods could be used in further studies to generate highly localized data in a collaborative manner while maintaining a respect for the diverse perspectives and experiences among participants.

An exploration of the paradoxical relationship between the student participants’ preference for personal, empathetic communications and their tendency to engage most often with technology-assisted communications is required for BCIT to develop a comprehensive student communications strategy in support of institutional and SEM goals. Such an inquiry would require a comprehensive engagement with students across multiple dimensions such as age, gender, area-of-study, and delivery method. Such a study would be instrumental in developing an effective strategy for delivering student communications that effectively meet students’ preference for personal attention and bias for technology-mediated communications (Robinson & Stubberud, 2012).
Finally, while collaboration across schools within the context of the educational experience was not within the scope of this study it emerged as a primary interest among students participating in the SFG. All four students related highly positive experiences collaborating with other students outside their program during the SFG. This suggests a potential to enhance the student experience through developing curriculums that include cross-departmental collaborative projects. A study in this area might provide opportunities for BCIT to further develop innovative learning opportunities for students.

I presented draft findings, conclusions, and recommendations to BCIT’s SEM Council as a reference group, and gathered input from the stakeholders present. This was effective for both refining my recommendations and building buy-in with individuals at a leadership level at BCIT.

I then presented my analysis, findings, conclusions, and refined recommendations to my organizational sponsor. He provided additional feedback, which I used to hone my final recommendations and the implementation plan presented below.

**Chapter Summary**

Within this chapter I provided six recommendations based on my findings, conclusions, and consultation with SEM leaders at BCIT and my sponsor. They provide a series of organizational interventions across the near, medium, and long-term that is focused on strengthening collaborative capabilities to enhance RE student communications. These include:

1. Develop a system for ongoing collaborative mapping of RE student communications;
2. Highlight successful practices and supplement these with a formalized feedback process;
3. Extend access to student question and answer databases to all student-facing employees;
4. Integrate feedback mechanisms into all digital RE student communications;
5. Engage faculty and staff as a cross-functional team for developing a strategy and
implementation plan for a CRM platform; and

6. Explore the creation of a role and portfolio accountable for student communications and the overall student experience.

While each recommendation represents a distinct opportunity for BCIT, together they present a roadmap for generating significant and ongoing positive change.

The first three recommendations are to proceed immediately with my input and under the direction of the Director of Student Services and my sponsor. The additional complexity and implications of the medium-term and long-term recommendations I have put forward are to be examined further, as future opportunities to address RE student communications and student communications more broadly.

Throughout this inquiry I have been struck by the ongoing level of organizational change and the impact that has on employees. As BCIT enters its 50th anniversary year there are multiple new priorities, activities, and demands on employees’ time and institutional resources. This has heightening the need to develop enhanced collaborative capabilities both within Student Services and the context of this inquiry, and beyond. The ability to reconfigure and collaborate across levels and traditional organizational boundaries will be a valuable advantage and essential to the continued success of BCIT.
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Collaboration in RE Student Communications


Dear [Prospective Participant],

On behalf of Michael Boronowski, BCIT’s Manager, Student Recruitment and Client Services, I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that he is conducting. This project is part of the requirement for his Master’s Degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University.

He invites you to participate in an interview matrix, a group research session where participants ask each other a set of questions and participate in grouping answers and identifying themes. This session will take place Wednesday, October 9th at 4pm on BCIT’s Burnaby campus.

The objective of this research is to engage prospective and current students, and the departments within Student Services and the schools at BCIT, in examining recruitment and enrollment student communications and to identify opportunities to strengthen collaborative capabilities to enhance those communications.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant from a sampling of our prospective and current student databases because you have recently experienced communicating with BCIT outside of the classroom environment. Your input is important to developing a better understanding of your perceptions and expectations of excellence in recruitment and enrollment student communications.

This group session will consist of open-ended questions in an interview matrix where prospective and current students will ask each other questions and summarize the collective answers. The group session will last approximately one hour. It will take place Wednesday, October 9th, 2013 in building SE 42 on BCIT’s Burnaby campus.

The foreseen questions include:

- Share a time you’ve had an excellent experience at BCIT while outside the classroom environment.
- What makes the experience communicating with someone excellent?
- How would you define excellent written or electronic communications?
In a perfect world, how would BCIT communicate with you?

The attached research information letter contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Any choice you make regarding your participation will not affect your standing with BCIT in any way.

Please feel free to contact me should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. I am acting as a neutral third party in facilitating participation in this research.

If you would like to participate in this project please reply to this email or contact me at:
Name: Joy Little
Email: [email address]
Telephone: [telephone number]

Sincerely,
Joy Little, on behalf of Michael Boronowski
Collaboration in RE Communications

This project is part of the requirement for a Master’s Degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My name is Michael Boronowski and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Brigitte Harris, Director, School of Leadership, at [telephone number] or email [email address]

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of my research project is to engage departments within Student Services and the schools at BCIT in developing opportunities to strengthen collaborative capabilities in student communications, and to include prospective and current students in developing an understanding of what characterizes excellence in recruitment and enrollment student communications.

Key Question

How can the Student Services division at the British Columbia Institute of Technology strengthen collaborative capabilities to enhance RE student communications?

Sub-questions

1. What examples of effective collaborative practices currently exist in developing and delivering RE student communications?

2. What are the characteristics of the effective collaborative interactions involved in RE student communications?

3. What do prospective and current students perceive as excellence in RE student communications?

4. What strategies will be required to implement recommendations for strengthening collaborative capabilities to enhance RE student communications?
Your participation and how information will be collected

This group session will consist of open-ended questions in an focus group format where prospective and current students will discuss each question.

The questions include:

- Share a time you’ve had an excellent experience at BCIT while outside the classroom environment.
- What makes the experience communicating with someone excellent?
- How would you define excellent communications?
- In a perfect world, how would BCIT communicate with you?
- Should BCIT engage students collaboratively in developing communications?
  - How?

Benefits and risks to participation

As a prospective or current student you will have the opportunity to provide information that will help BCIT enhance its services and communications to yourself and others like you. My goal is to begin this inquiry by engaging prospective and current students so that your needs and perceptions guide our work.

The benefit to BCIT is that by engaging prospective and current students like yourself we might better understand your needs and preference and enhance the quality of communications we develop, ultimately contributing to improved rates of student success.

There are minimal risks in participating as nobody outside of this research will have access to any information that could potentially identify you or associate you with any of your comments or input. Signed consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, and all transcripts will be anonymous to ensure confidentiality. To further safeguard your privacy I ask that in participating you also respect the confidentiality of all participants by not sharing any potentially identifiable information outside of the group. Your participation or choice to not participate or withdraw will have no impact on your academic standing or application/potential application to BCIT.

Inquiry team

My inquiry team includes BCIT’s director of Student Services, Marketing and Communications administrative staff, and three student recruitment strategists. They are assisting with piloting the research method, corresponding with participants, safeguarding information, and facilitating anonymous transcriptions of the recordings.

This project is sponsored by BCIT’s Vice President of Student Services. He will not have access
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to any information that might potentially identify any participants, and will not participate in any of the research methods.

All of the team members have signed confidentiality agreements, and none will have access to personally identifiable information in relation to any of your input so as to further safeguard your anonymity.

**Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest**

During this inquiry I will be acting as both researcher and an employee of the British Columbia Institute of Technology. My intention is to participate only as a neutral facilitator during the process, not as Manager of Student Recruitment and Client Services. No attempt will be made to persuade you to attend BCIT during the session, and no personally identifiable information will be shared with the institute at any time.

I disclose this information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study.

**Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period**

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office of Marketing and Communications administrative staff. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored in an encrypted folder on my computer. Information will be recorded in audio format and flip-charts will be retained. Where appropriate it will be summarized in anonymous format in the body of my thesis. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

Audio recordings, transcripts, and flip-charts will be destroyed six months after the publication of my final thesis. The date of destruction is expected to be September, 2014. In April, 2014 all signed consent forms will be transferred to a secure locked container which I will retain in my home office for a period of one year, after which they will be shredded.

I will destroy all potentially identifying information for any individual who withdraws at any time. As this is a group research method it is difficult to remove comments from within group conversations, however all consent forms and electronic or written correspondence will be destroyed or deleted.

Note: Given the nature of electronic communications and digital storage I can not assure the absolute confidence of all materials and communications beyond our commitments outlined in this document. No cloud-storage of data will be used, and all data and communications will be
stored locally on computers which are encrypted and password protected, and only Marketing and Communications administrative staff will have access to the computer and email account used for communicating with participants.

**Sharing results**

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership I will also share findings and a final report within BCIT and Royal Roads University through printed copies, electronic versions, and in publishing with the national archive as a thesis.

All participants will receive a copy of the final report.

A portion or all of the final report may be submitted for publication elsewhere or used as part of a presentation or other media. All uses will ensure the anonymity of participants.

**Procedure for withdrawing from the study**

Participants can withdraw from this study at any time by contacting Joy Little, Marketing and Communications’ administrative staff.

Name: Joy Little  
Email: [email address]  
Telephone: [telephone number]

All correspondence and written or signed material pertaining to participants who withdraw will be destroyed. Your choice to withdraw will not be shared with anyone other than Joy Little and myself, as researcher.

Should you withdraw after participating in this research it will be difficult to remove individual comments from group discussions as these are recorded anonymously and will not be connected to any personally identifiable information to support their removal from the data under analysis.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project. You will also be provided with a hardcopy of this letter and a consent form at the outset of the group session to ensure you fully understand and can provide free and informed consent.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.
Thank you,
Michael Boronowski
This project is part of the requirement for a Master’s Degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My name is Michael Boronowski and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Brigitte Harris, Director, School of Leadership, at [telephone number] or email [email address]

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project.

☐ I consent to the audio recording of the focus group
☐ I commit to respect the confidential nature of the interview matrix by not sharing identifying information about the other participants
☐ I understand that due to the group nature of this study, the audio recording will be ongoing throughout the interview matrix and my voice cannot easily be removed should I choose to withdraw.

Name: (Please Print): ____________________________________________________

Signed: ____________________________ Date: __________________________

Witness Name: (Please Print): ___________________________________________

Signed: ____________________________ Date: __________________________

Researcher Name: Michael Boronowski

Signed: ____________________________ Date: __________________________
Dear [Prospective Participant],

On behalf of Michael Boronowski, BCIT’s Manager of Student Recruitment and Client Services, I would like to invite you to be part of a focus group for a research project that he is conducting. This project is part of the requirement for his Master’s Degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University.

He invites you to participate in a focus group as a component of this research.

The objective of this focus group is to engage staff and faculty in examining collaboration in recruitment and enrollment student communications.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant from a sample of staff and faculty who have engaged in work on RE student communications at BCIT.

This focus group will consist of open-ended questions participants ask each other and a collaborative recording, theming, and reporting component. It will last approximately one hour.

**The attached research information letter contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.**

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Whether you choose to participate or not, or to withdraw at any time, there will be no impact on your employment or advancement with BCIT.

If you would like to participate in this project please reply to this email or contact me at:
Name: Joy Little
Email: [email address]
Telephone: [telephone number]

Sincerely,
Joy Little, on behalf of Michael Boronowski
Collaboration in RE Student Communications

This project is part of the requirement for a Master’s Degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My name is Michael Boronowski and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Brigitte Harris, Director, School of Leadership, at [telephone number] or email [email address]

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of my research project is to engage departments within Student Services and each school at BCIT in developing opportunities to strengthen collaborative capabilities in student communications, and to include prospective and current students in developing an understanding of what characterizes excellence in recruitment and enrollment student communications.

Key Question

How can the Student Services division at the British Columbia Institute of Technology strengthen collaborative capabilities to enhance RE student communications?

Sub-questions

1. What examples of effective collaborative practices currently exist in developing and delivering RE student communications?
2. What are the characteristics of the effective collaborative interactions involved in RE student communications?
3. What do prospective and current students perceive as excellence in RE student communications?
4. What strategies will be required to implement recommendations for strengthening collaborative capabilities to enhance RE student communications?
Your participation and how information will be collected

This group session will consist of open-ended questions in an interview matrix format where participants will ask each other questions and summarize the collective answers. The group session will take place on a weekday afternoon or evening in early December on BCIT’s Burnaby campus. It will last approximately one hour and the final reporting component will be audio-recorded. Flipcharts will also be used to report-out on each question and they will be kept as part of the research.

The foreseen questions were informed by a focus group with current students from across BCIT and include:

- Share a recent experience where you were very proud of your ability to help a student, and what made that experience possible.
- Share a time when someone working on recruitment or enrollment communications came to you for information and assistance, and describe the results.
- Share a time when you consulted someone else when communicating with a student, and describe the results.
- In a perfect world how should staff and faculty at BCIT work together to deliver excellent student communications?

Benefits and risks to participation

As a member of the BCIT community engaged in RE student communications you will have the opportunity to provide input on how BCIT might strengthen our collaborative practices in this space, and on how we might enhance the student experience.

Your input through this focus group will provide data that will shape the findings and recommendations to support positive change for the institute.

There are minimal risks in participating as nobody outside of this research will have access to any information that could potentially identify you or associate you with any of your comments or input. Signed consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, and all transcripts will be anonymous to ensure confidentiality. To further safeguard your privacy I ask that in participating you also respect the confidentiality of all participants by not sharing any potentially identifiable information outside of the group. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect upon your employment or advancement.

Inquiry team

My inquiry team includes BCIT’s director of Student Services, Marketing and Communications administrative staff, and three student recruitment strategists. They are assisting with piloting the
Collaboration in RE Student Communications

research method, corresponding with participants, safeguarding information, and facilitating anonymous transcriptions of the recordings.

This project is sponsored by BCIT’s Vice President of Student Services. He will not have access to any information that might potentially identify any participants, and will not participate in any of the research methods.

All of the team members have signed confidentiality agreements, and none will have access to personally identifiable information in relation to any of your input so as to further safeguard your anonymity.

**Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest**
During this inquiry I will be acting as both researcher and an employee of the British Columbia Institute of Technology. My intention is to participate only as a neutral facilitator during the process, not as Manager of Student Recruitment and Client Services. No attempt will be made to persuade you to attend BCIT during the session, and no personally identifiable information will be shared with the institute at any time.

I disclose this information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study.

**Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period**
I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office of Marketing and Communications administrative staff. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored in an encrypted folder on my computer. Information will be recorded in audio format and transcribed anonymously for retention. Where appropriate it will be summarized in anonymous format in the body of my thesis. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

Audio recordings and transcripts will be destroyed six months after the publication of my final thesis. The date of destruction is expected to be September, 2014. In April, 2014 all signed consent forms will be transferred to a secure locked container which I will retain in my home office for a period of one year, after which they will be shredded.

I will destroy all potentially identifying information for any individual who withdraws at any time. As this is a group research method it is difficult to remove comments from within group conversations, however all consent forms and electronic or written correspondence will be destroyed or deleted.
Sharing results
In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership I will also share findings and a final report within BCIT and Royal Roads University through printed copies, electronic versions, and in publishing with the national archive as a thesis.

All participants will receive a copy of the final report.

A portion or all of the final report may be submitted for publication elsewhere or used as part of a presentation or other media. All uses will ensure the anonymity of participants.

Procedure for withdrawing from the study
Participants can withdraw from this study at any time by contacting Joy Little, Marketing and Communications’ administrative staff.
Name: Joy Little
Email: [email address]
Telephone: [telephone number]

All correspondence and written or signed material pertaining to participants who withdraw will be destroyed. Your choice to withdraw will not be shared with anyone other than Joy Little and myself, as researcher.

Should you withdraw after participating in this research it will be difficult to remove individual comments from group discussions as these are recorded anonymously and will not be connected to any personally identifiable information to support their removal from the data under analysis.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project. You will also be provided with a hardcopy of this letter and a consent form at the outset of the group session to ensure you fully understand and can provide free and informed consent.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.
Thank you,
Michael Boronowski
APPENDIX F: STAFF INTERVIEW MATRIX CONSENT FORM

This project is part of the requirement for a Master’s Degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My name is Michael Boronowski and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Brigitte Harris, Director, School of Leadership, at [telephone number] or email [email address]

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project.

☐ I consent to the audio recording of portions of the interview matrix
☐ I commit to respect the confidential nature of the interview matrix by not sharing identifying information about the other participants
☐ I consent to the final flip-charts being retained for analysis.
☐ I understand that due to the group nature of this study, the audio recording will be ongoing throughout the reporting component of the interview matrix and my voice cannot easily be removed should I choose to withdraw.

Name: (Please Print): __________________________________________________
Signed: ________________________________ Date:________________________

Witness Name: (Please Print): ___________________________________________
Signed: ________________________ Date:________________________

Researcher Name: Michael Boronowski
Signed: ________________________________ Date:________________________
APPENDIX G: LETTER OF AGREEMENT AND ADDENDUM FOR INQUIRY TEAM MEMBERS

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Michael Boronowski (The Researcher) will be conducting an Action Research study at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) on strengthening collaborative capabilities to enhance student communications. This project is part of the requirement for a Master’s Degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University.

Michael Boronowski’s credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Brigitte Harris, Director, School of Leadership, at [telephone number] or email [email address]

Inquiry Team Member Role Description

As a volunteer Inquiry Team Member assisting the Student with this project, your role may include one or more of the following: providing advice on the relevance and wording of questions and letters of invitation, supporting the logistics of the data-gathering methods, including observing, assisting, or facilitating an interview or focus group, taking notes, transcribing, or analyzing data, to assist the Student and the BCIT organizational change process. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential inquiry data.

Confidentiality of Inquiry Data

In compliance with the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy, under which this inquiry project is being conducted, all personal identifiers and any other confidential information generated or accessed by the inquiry team advisor will only be used in the performance of the functions of this project, and must not be disclosed to anyone other than persons authorized to receive it, both during the inquiry period and beyond it. Recorded information in all formats is covered by this agreement. Personal identifiers include participant names, contact information, personally identifying turns of phrase or comments, and any other personally identifying information.

[FOR THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT]

In addition to the other potential responsibilities you will be specifically required to send
electronic invitations, collect responses and select participants for all group methods in this project. You will also distribute, gather, and archive all signed consent forms and ensure they are secure and separate from research data. You will also be responsible for review and confirmation correspondence with participants following each session. Finally, you will ensure all participant information is not available to the researcher or any other members of the inquiry team.

[FOR THE DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SERVICES]
In addition to other responsibilities you are specifically responsible for assisting with minimizing interference from leadership at BCIT, piloting and refining scripts, timing and approach for group sessions and phone interviews, and in developing potential participants for expert phone interviews.

[MARCOM STAFF]
In addition to other responsibilities you are specifically accountable for the secure, confidential, and respectful recording and transcription services, and the secure and anonymous storage of all data related to each research method.

Bridging Student’s Potential or Actual Ethical Conflict
In situations where potential participants in a work setting report directly to the Student, you, as a neutral third party with no supervisory relationship with either the Student or potential participants, may be asked to work closely with the Student to bridge this potential or actual conflict of interest in this study.

Such requests may include asking the Inquiry Team Advisor to: send out the letter of invitation to potential participants, receive letters/emails of interest in participation from potential participants, independently make a selection of received participant requests based on criteria you and the Student will have worked out previously, formalize the logistics for the data-gather method, including contacting the participants about the time and location of the interview or focus group, conduct the interviews (usually 3-5 maximum) or focus group (usually no more than one) with the selected participants (without the Student’s presence or knowledge of which participants were chosen) using the protocol and questions worked out previously with the Student, and producing written transcripts of the interviews or focus groups with all personal identifiers removed before the transcripts are brought back to the Student for the data analysis phase of the study.

This strategy means that potential participants with a direct reporting relationship will be assured they can confidentially turn down the participation request from their supervisor (the Student), as this process conceals from the Student which potential participants chose not to participate or simply were not selected by you, the third party, because they were out of the
selection criteria range (they might have been a participant request coming after the number of participants sought, for example, interview request number 6 when only 5 participants are sought, or focus group request number 10 when up to 9 participants would be selected for a focus group). Inquiry Team members asked to take on such 3rd party duties in this study will be under the direction of the Student and will be fully briefed by the Student as to how this process will work, including specific expectations, and the methods to be employed in conducting the elements of the inquiry with the Student’s direct reports, and will be given every support possible by the Student, except where such support would reveal the identities of the actual participants.

Personal information will be collected, recorded, corrected, accessed, altered, used, disclosed, retained, secured and destroyed as directed by the Student, under direction of the Royal Roads Academic Supervisor.

Inquiry Team Members who are uncertain whether any information they may wish to share about the project they are working on is personal or confidential will verify this with [Your name here], the Student.

Statement of Informed Consent:

I have read and understand this agreement.

________________________  __________________   ____________
Name (Please Print)   Signature    Date

ADDENDUM

Inquiry Team Members agree to the following:

• Work on this project will be undertaken largely outside of normal working duties with the aim of minimizing any disruption of responsibilities or duties at BCIT.
• Release-time if requested must be approved by the Inquiry Team Member’s immediate supervisor and the inquiry sponsor.
• Inquiry Team Members will not transfer data to storage devices owned or managed by BCIT or their personal storage devices.
• Inquiry Team Members will not store data or any information relating to this inquiry on cloud storage.
• Inquiry Team Members will clear any expenses with the researcher, Michael
Collaboration in RE Student Communications

Boronowski, who will reimburse members personally for any expenses incurred as a result of their participation in the inquiry.

- Inquiry Team Members commit to participating in the team for the duration of research.

I have read and understand this agreement.

________________________  ________________  ____________
Name (Please Print)        Signature          Date

BCIT RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD
### APPENDIX H: STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

#### Table H1

<table>
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<th>Stakeholder groups</th>
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N= no, Y= yes