

Turning Belief into Action:

***The Role of Relationships, Trust and Leadership
in Building Shared Belief and Motivating Organizational Support***

A Case Study of an Anonymous Post-Secondary Institution in Ontario

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Abstract

This case study tests a new model for corporate communications called *Building Belief*, which urges a firm to constantly live up to its stated character and values so as to motivate its stakeholders to identify with it, support it, and promote it. The model was applied to a post-secondary institution in Ontario. Building on published theories and best practices related to culture, reputation, trust, relationship management, communications, employee engagement, strategy, leadership, storytelling, and social media, this study asked employees (faculty and staff), advisory committee members and leaders to define their organization's culture and rate the extent to which the organization shares their values. This study finds that the organization's stakeholders do have the potential to act as ambassadors, but just as in the private sector, a sense of shared belief is needed first. The study recommends the use of storytelling to build shared identity. It further suggests the involvement of the institution's stakeholders in the co-creation of a culture code and the use of ongoing, two-way communications to deepen levels of engagement and strengthen people's relationships with the institution. The *Building Belief* model was found to have relevance in the post-secondary sector. Finally, this study delivers a new tool to help any organization, public or private, quickly assess its level of shared values and connection with its stakeholders and gain insight into the dimensions that might need further attention to help build shared belief and turn it into action.

Keywords: corporate communications, culture, reputation, shared identity, storytelling.

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Introduction

Colleges and universities in Ontario are facing a disruptive shift. Rapid advances in technology have dramatically changed established methods for research, teaching and learning, and created an environment in which students are preparing for jobs that might not exist yet (Miner, 2010; Johnson et al., 2013). The added financial pressure of decreased operating grants at colleges and universities (Colleges Ontario, 2012b; HEQCO, 2013) and an anticipated slowdown in future enrolment growth (Drummond, 2012) has prompted legislators to introduce a new framework based on differentiation (MTCU, 2013b). The model forces institutions to focus on specified areas of strength to use their resources more purposefully, avoid duplication of programs, and help applicants determine which institution best serves their personal and professional goals.

To further set themselves apart from the competition, colleges and universities have much to gain by examining how companies capitalize on their enviable cultures and reputations. One such model, called *Building Belief: A New Model for Activating Corporate Character & Authentic Advocacy* answers this call by explaining why corporate character matters and how to engage people to identify with a firm and willingly advocate on its behalf.

This organizational case study applies the *Building Belief* model to a single, anonymous post-secondary institution in Ontario. In so doing, it strives to determine whether this model that was created for business can also have merit in this quasi-public sector.

Background

The model at the heart of this single, organizational case study is called *“Building Belief: A New Model for Activating Corporate Character & Authentic Advocacy”*. It was created by the Arthur W. Page Society, an invitation-based, professional association dedicated to the ethical practice of public relations and corporate communications. The model was created based on the challenges expressed during interviews with senior communications leaders from 13 corporations including FedEx, P&G, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, BMW, Pepsico, Thomson Reuters and eBay. The interviewees noted that the rise of a heavily networked and connected society has turned individuals into publishers and broadcasters. They warned against the foolish illusion that culture is separate from reputation, controlled by a company, and contained within its four walls. They sought to expand their communications efforts from a current focus on engaging limited groups of publics to instead meet the needs of a “mass influencer audience’s expectation for 1:1 relationships” (p. 38). The model suggests that building this type of “advocacy at scale” (p. 23) hinges on people’s personal sense of identification with the firm, which happens when a firm and a stakeholder share the same values.

The model defines corporate character as the integration of an organization’s culture and reputation and the embodiment of the beliefs, values and purpose that make it unique. The model suggests that when people understand, accept and identify with a corporation’s character, this is what makes an enterprise “worthy of trust” (AWPS, 2013, p. 16) and what “motivates employees, customers, communities and citizens to believe in and advocate for the organization” (p. 17).

Building Belief addresses a number of additional challenges that all organizations, public or private, face today. As the literature shows, people have growing expectations for transparency and authenticity in the institutions with which they choose to interact (AWPS, 2007). They have strong feelings of identification with brands (Lin & Sung, 2014) and the means to rapidly and widely share their thoughts about what they find interesting or displeasing (Hanna et al., 2011). Workplaces are also experiencing diminishing levels of employee trust and engagement, including rising levels of active disengagement (Aon Hewitt, 2013).

The model was corroborated by secondary research in behavioural sciences to better understand what inspires people to take action. A prototype model was created and peer reviewed before being further tested and validated by members of the Arthur W. Page Society.

If post-secondary institutions strive to differentiate themselves from their competitors, attract and retain top talent (whether that be students, faculty, staff, or advisory committee members), and seek to maintain a positive reputation as demonstrated by the perceived quality of their programs or the ongoing value of their credentials for their alumni, there is much to gain by looking at communications models such as *Building Belief*. Engaging a critical mass of influencers (such as students, alumni, staff, faculty, or advisory board members) through the creation and enactment of shared values and shared identity represents an organic and enduring way for colleges and universities to communicate what is special about them.

Literature Review

While the concept behind the *Building Belief* model is straightforward, it is far from simplistic. To better understand how the model can help an organization create believers and

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inspire commitment and cooperation from them, a number of disparate fields were explored. Each of these areas was selected because it was felt to be at the root of the model. The areas include organizational identity, culture, reputation, trust, relationship management, human motivation, public relations, communications, employee engagement, strategy, leadership, storytelling and social media.

Building Shared Identity

Enacting the *Building Belief* model requires mass audiences of influencers to personally identify with and believe in a firm. While a literature search for 'shared identity' resulted in few published works, the concepts of organizational identity and organizational identification have been studied extensively by management scholars and offer highly relevant insights.

Scott & Lane (2000) define organizational identity as the shared beliefs by top managers and stakeholders regarding the characteristics that are central, enduring and distinctive to an organization. Much like the *Building Belief* model, they suggest that identity is created through an iterative process of "contested and negotiated" (p. 44) interactions and that visibility, inclusion and communications help with the process. They continue that people identify with an organization when they perceive that its values align with their own and when they derive self-esteem, self-consistency, and self-distinctiveness as a result of the association. According to He & Brown (2013), organizational identification occurs when employees develop a sense of belonging and "oneness" with an organization (p. 12). They point to research that shows that shared identity leads to positive outcomes such as the intention to stay at a firm, feelings of satisfaction and higher performance. Brickson (2005) adds that stakeholders seek shared

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identity because it creates consistency, which answers employees' psychological need to make sense of their organizations and the need for external stakeholders to understand the organization before choosing whether or not to interact with it. This idea is shared by Ashforth, Harrison & Corley (2008) who explain that "human beings are meaning seekers and the process of identifying with collectives and roles helps reduce the uncertainty associated with interacting in new environments" (p. 336). Scott & Lane (2000) argue that top managers are more likely to develop a sense of shared identity with an organization than are other employees, due to their visibility, their roles in promoting an organization, and their increased levels of interaction. They note that shared identity enhances people's motivation to attain group goals as it reduces conflicting expectations. Conversely, they warn that "stakeholders who fail to identify may continue in an exchange relationship with an organization, but with reduced trust" (p. 59), to the extent that an organization's goals are only supported if they benefit the stakeholder.

Culture: What is it and Why is it Important?

The first step in the *Building Belief* model is defining and understanding an organization's culture. Cameron & Quinn (2011) note that while more than 150 definitions of culture exist, the majority agree that culture is a sociological construct because it refers to something that an organization *has* rather than something that it *is*. They suggest that culture serves as "the social glue binding an organization together" (p. 18) and something that "conveys a sense of identity to employees" (p. 19). Denison, Hooijberg, Lane & Lief (2012) describe culture as being "the code, the core logic" (p. 3) that organizes the behaviour of

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people. As Schein (2010) puts it, “Culture is to a group what personality or character is to an individual” (p. 14).

Each of these named authors specifies that culture has various elements, which progress from the invisible to the visible and much like an iceberg, the strongest elements are those that lie beneath the surface and “operate outside of our awareness” (Schein, 2010, p. 7). At the bottom are underlying assumptions, which consist of unconscious, non-debatable, and taken-for-granted perceptions and feelings. Derived from them are espoused values and beliefs, which justify or govern people’s behaviour, and are sometimes codified into contracts, policies and norms. At the top are artifacts, which are tangible or visible products of the group, such as buildings, offices, technology and products, logos, public rituals and ceremonies.

The authors agree that culture is dynamic and socially learned. Shaw & Ronald (2012) suggest that culture embodies “past beliefs and practices that have become institutionalized as a result of past success” (p. 51). Schein (2010) adds that both cultures and groups are based on “shared patterns of thought, belief, feelings, and values” (p. 73). This integration stems from a human need for frames of reference to generate consistency and meaning. Schein (2010) adds that culture is fluid because it is “constantly re-enacted and created by our interactions with each other and shaped by our own behavior” (p. 3). Paradoxically, he notes that it is entrenched because it is “our major stabilizing force and will not be given up easily” (p. 16) and “after it has developed, it covers all of a group’s functioning” (p. 17).

Both Dennison et al. (2012) and Cameron & Quinn (2011) present models for helping organizations to diagnose and change corporate culture, both of which have been repeatedly

tested and used in published findings. Several of the dimensions that the models measure were incorporated into the survey instruments used in this study including leadership, management of employees, consistency (values, integration and agreement) involvement (empowerment, teamwork) and adaptability (customer focus and organizational learning).

Reputation: How it Develops and Why it Matters

In addition to culture, the *Building Belief* model requires an organization to define and understand its reputation as a key part of its corporate character. Fombrun & van Riel (2007) specify the six dimensions of this construct as being emotional appeal, products and services, financial performance, vision and leadership, workplace environment, and social responsibility. They outline the five key dimensions that are shared by companies with enviable reputations as being visibility, transparency, distinctiveness, consistency, and authenticity. Much like culture, van Riel (2012) shows how reputation is based on an assessment of past performance and future expectations and suggests that reputation lives in people's hearts and minds. Simcic Brønn (2010) suggests that good reputations are built on dialogue and stakeholder involvement while Dowling (2002) suggests that reputation is based on values such as authenticity and integrity. Like Simcic Brønn, Watson (2010) stresses the crucial importance of relationships with stakeholders, noting that reputation "does not occur by chance" (p. 339).

Eberl & Schwaiger (2004) argue that reputation is imprecise and inimitable, giving those who possess it an advantage. MacMillan, Money, Downing & Hillenbrand (2005) posit that when people have a good experience with an organization, it can influence positive feelings about a company and positive behaviours toward it. Cravens & Goad Oliver (2006) focus on

employees as the first step in creating and maintaining corporate reputation because they create a company's product or service and present the company's image and identity to customers and suppliers. They are also felt to "affect corporate reputation indirectly through word-of-mouth and loyalty" (p. 297).

Trust: The Foundation of Relationships and Cooperative Behaviour

The *Building Belief* model noted that trust develops when a culture and reputation are well understood and accepted, and that it is trust that breeds confidence and motivates people to act on behalf of a firm. A definition of trust is presented by Hurley (2012) who writes that "trust is the degree of confidence you have that another party can be relied on to fulfill commitments, be fair, be transparent, and not take advantage of your vulnerability" (p. 1). He outlines the dimensions of trust as being risk tolerance, adjustment, power, situational security, similarities, interests, benevolent concern, capability, predictability, integrity, and communication. The notion of vulnerability is also present in the Arthur W. Page Society / Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics (2009) report on trust in business. It suggests that the three dynamics of trust are mutuality (the pursuit of actions deemed to be of shared value), balance of power (built on symbiotic relationships with stakeholders) and trust safeguards (compliance mechanisms to promote fairness via punitive damages or reparative measures for offenders). The report stresses that trust is a "critical ingredient for social cooperation" (p. 14).

Much like reputation and culture, trust is also a relational concept. As Hurley (2012) outlines, trust is built through "common values, overlaps in trusted networks, shared aspects of

identity and other bonds of connectivity” (p. 68). The joint Page Society / Business Roundtable report agrees, adding that the basis for trust depends on a perception of a relationship with “people like me” (AWPS, 2009, p. 28). Much like the case with reputation and culture, the report also notes that trust depends on “expectations of future behavior” (p. 21). In her essay on creating corporate trust, Gower posits that “truthfulness must be combined with transparency” (p. 94). Transparency, in turn, is “a process” (p. 96) that is guided by the relationship between an organization and its various stakeholders and built on an organization’s ability to listen to stakeholders’ needs and expectations and craft messages to show how they are being met. Hurley, Gillespie, Ferrin & Dietz (2013) stress that trust violations occur when an organization “actively caters to a group (or groups) but fails to uphold responsibilities to others” (p. 77). To prevent this from happening, they advise that trustworthiness must be embedded into all elements of an organization’s infrastructure and core processes, including leadership and management, culture, systems, structure, strategy, product and service development, production, and delivery. They advise that this approach creates consistency and authenticity and earns organizations “reputations of trust” (p. 78).

Public Relations Theory

The stakeholder-centric approach outlined above by Gower (2006) and Hurley (2012) mirrors the Canadian definition of public relations which states that it is the “strategic management of relationships between an organization and its diverse publics, through the use of communication, to achieve mutual understanding, realize organizational goals, and serve the

public interest” (Flynn, Gregorgy & Valin, 2008). This overlap suggests that public relations scholarship has a great deal to add to the discussion on developing corporate character.

Relationship Management Theory

Given the importance of relationships to building the trust, shared identity, cooperation and motivation that people need to advocate on behalf of an organization, this study draws from relationship management theory. Grunig and Huang (1999) determined that trust, control mutuality, relational commitment, and relational satisfaction are “the most essential and pertinent indicators representing the quality of organization-public relationships” (p. 42). They explain that control mutuality “reflects the unavoidable asymmetry of power in organization - public relationships” while trust and satisfaction “reflect the cognitive and affective aspects of relationships” and commitment “reflects the degree of resource interchange, which includes emotional and psychological aspects of interpersonal relationships and behavioral aspects of interorganizational relationships” (p. 42). To measure these outcomes, Grunig and Huang suggest that the best approach is to “ask one or both parties to describe the relationship features” (p. 47). To assist in this process, Hon and Grunig (1999) built a scale to measure the four relationship outcomes. They added the need to determine whether relationships are exchange-based or communal and suggested that the latter are of higher quality. The findings of Grunig & Huang (1999) and Hon & Grunig (1999) support those of Scott & Lane (2008) who showed that a lack of identification with an organization reduces trust and results in only exchange-based relationships.

Stakeholder Theory

Given that an organization forges relationships with stakeholders, and that stakeholders are the individuals that the *Building Belief* model wishes to engage and activate, an examination of stakeholder theory is required. Friedman & Miles (2006) present a summary of 55 definitions, drawn from 75 texts, and conclude that the classic definition is the one created by Freeman in 1984, which states that a stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Friedman & Miles, 2006, p. 1). Stakeholders are considered to be “people with a distinguishable relationship with a corporation” (p. 13), which most often include shareholders, customers, suppliers and distributors, employees and local communities. In the post-secondary setting, important stakeholder groups include faculty and staff, students, parents, alumni, volunteers, government and communities. It is this theory, which views the concept of stakeholders from the perspective of the organization that is used in this study.

Situational Theory of Publics

Publics represent a group of people who want to communicate and interact with an organization, rather than groups of people who merely share a common view, interest or experience. Grunig (as cited in Grunig, 2006) developed the situational theory of publics by building on work related to cognitive dissonance theory that explained that “people were likely to selectively expose themselves to messages that supported their attitudes” (p. 154). He modified this idea to suggest that “people are more likely to seek information that is relevant to decision situations in their lives” (p. 155). Grunig & Grunig (2000) suggest that what causes a

public to form is “the extent to which people passively or actively communicate about an issue and the extent to which they actively behave in a way that supports or constrains the organization’s pursuit of its mission” (p. 312). In order to help segment people into active or passive publics, Grunig (as cited in J.E. Grunig and L.A Grunig, 2000) provides three factors that determine the extent to which publics are likely to communicate actively: level of involvement, problem recognition, and constraint recognition. The situational theory of publics is important for organizations interested in applying the *Building Belief* model because it enables an organization to make calculated choices about where to find the early influencers.

Self-Determination Theory

The desired outcome of the *Building Belief* model is self-motivated advocacy by stakeholders, which happens only after people identify with an organization because they recognize that its values mirror their own. Drawn from the field of psychology, self-determination theory is highly relevant to the *Building Belief* model, especially in its application to the higher education sector. Refined over three decades, the theory states that humans have three innate psychological needs -- competence, autonomy and relatedness (Baard, Deci & Ryan, 2004). Competence refers to the need to feel capable and effective. Autonomy entails a sense of volition or control over one’s choices. Relatedness involves the need to feel understood and connected to others. Baard, Deci & Ryan (2004) showed that when these needs are met on the job, employees’ performance ratings and psychological well-being improve. They further demonstrated that employees’ own orientation toward autonomy and employees’ perceptions of how supportive their managers are in creating an environment

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which supports autonomy positively correlate to a feeling that their innate psychological needs are being met. The authors note that creating an autonomy-supportive environment starts with taking subordinates' perspectives into account. They point to research showing that this theory held true in church organizations, suggesting it has merit outside the corporate sector.

Graves & Luciano (2013) extended this work on self-determination theory to show that high quality leader-employee relationships amplify the feeling that one's innate needs are met, spurring autonomous motivation among employees. Autonomous motivation, in turn, prompts three important outcomes. These include affective organizational commitment (feeling emotionally attached to an organization and identifying with it), job satisfaction, and vitality (feeling positive, robust and energetic at work). The notion of autonomous motivation is an important concern at educational institutions as faculty members often have a strong orientation toward autonomy and expectations of academic freedom.

Corporate Communications

Strengthening culture, reputation, trust and relationship management all rely on effective communication. This point is emphasized by van Riel (2012), who demonstrates how an organization's excellence in performance, when multiplied by its excellence in communication and divided by the social context within which it operates, keeps stakeholders onside because it cultivates their trust and support. Van Riel suggests that this formula results in alignment, which enhances an organization's reputation and helps it win the support that gives it leverage. Burton, Grates & Learch (2013) summarized ten best practices in employee communication based on interviews with communications leaders at ten highly-admired, global

organizations. Their findings include one that underpins the *Building Belief* model, namely the need to build shared purpose to create a “new basis for trust and organizational cohesion” (p. 4) and another that stresses the importance of authenticity and integrity in communication because “employees are looking for total values alignment with their employer” (p. 7).

Communications and relationship-building have also been shown to contribute to an organization’s overall success. The Conference Board of Canada and the Centre for Business Innovation (2013) linked these skills to supporting innovation in the workplace.

Employee Engagement

The fields of human resources and organizational psychology provide additional, important perspectives on the dimensions that help people build a sense of shared identity with an organization and motivate them to action. For over 15 years, Aon Hewitt has conducted employee engagement research, with the 2013 study involving 3.8 million respondents at over 2,500 companies on four continents. Employee engagement is defined as the “psychological and behavioural outcomes that lead to better employee performance” (Aon Hewitt, 2013, p. 4). The research measures the extent to which employees ‘say’ (speak positively about their organization), ‘stay’ (demonstrate a desire to belong to the organization) and ‘strive’ (are motivated to contribute to job and overall organizational performance). Two of the top five global drivers of engagement are directly relevant to the *Building Belief* model: organizational reputation and communication.

Based on three decades of research, development and refinement, the Gallup Q12 survey of employee engagement has been translated in 69 languages and administered to more than 22

million employees in 189 countries since 1998 (Harter et al., 2013). It measures the conditions that support engagement and the ones that managers have the capacity to change. These include knowing what is expected, receiving feedback and recognition, feeling as though one's opinions matter and understanding the importance of one's job to the success of the firm.

The 2011-12 Towers Watson Change and Communications ROI Study, based on data collected from 604 organizations around the world, finds that companies that are effective at both communication and change management are 2.5 times more likely to outperform their peers (Towers Watson, 2011, p. 3). Its authors suggest that successful efforts hinge on conveying the direction of the business to employees and ensuring they know how they can contribute, developing leaders and managers to convey confidence, and engaging employees to build a shared experience or sense that leaders and employees are "in it together" (p. 2).

Strategy

Leading management scholars also recognize the importance of building shared values and identity – the concepts that sit at the heart of the *Building Belief* model. Porter & Kramer (2011) suggest that a firm can help restore public trust in business and gain a competitive advantage through a quest for shared value. They define shared value as "creating economic value in a way that *also* creates value for society by addressing its needs and challenges" (p. 64). Kanter (2011) contends that at the heart of winning companies is "institutional logic" (p. 68), a philosophy that considers people and society core to a firm's purpose. Firms who embrace it default to using societal value and human values as decision making criteria, which means they work to create a profit, but the choices they make balance the needs of people and

society. She outlines the six facets of institutional logic as being common purpose, a long-term view, emotional engagement, community building, innovation and self-organization. Much like the theory proposed by Porter and Kramer and the *Building Belief* model, Kanter's theory stresses the importance of shared values that provide coherence and common identity. To keep up with today's connected customers, Gray & Vander Wal (2012) contend that companies themselves must reorganize to become more connected, a strategy that also places shared values, empowerment and engagement at its core. The model reinvents organizational structure and institutional culture, proposing that companies establish autonomous yet interdependent units or pods that take advantage of network attributes to enable learning, adaptation and innovation. The result is satisfying, long term relationships with customers and employees and the creation of value.

Leadership

The *Building Belief* model is meant to be an executive-level strategy for leveraging a firm's culture, reputation, values and purpose. As such, this study places a special emphasis on the impact of leadership on its related elements. The strong link between leadership and culture is explained by Schein (2010) who writes, "leaders as entrepreneurs are the main architects of culture; after cultures are formed, they influence what kind of leadership is possible; if elements of culture become dysfunctional, leadership can and must do something to speed up culture change" (p. xi). He adds that a leader's assumptions become more deeply embedded in an organization's culture each time an organization succeeds in accomplishing its primary purpose. These assumptions are reflected in what leaders pay attention to, measure

and control, how they react to incidents or crises and how they recruit, select, promote or excommunicate.

Kitchen & Laurence (2003) suggest that CEOs help set the tone and culture at a company because they are the chief focal point for communication. As such, they exemplify a firm's identity and their remarks reflect the firm's core values. The authors examined data from a Hill and Knowlton/Harris Interactive eight-country survey on reputation, which found that in every country, the CEO was felt to be the most important manager of a firm's reputation.

From Hurley's (2012) vantage point, leadership is critical to trust. He observes that "when the leader is trustworthy and expects this behavior from others, trust cascades throughout the organization and can eventually become embedded in the culture" (2012, p. 91). Qualities that are paramount to becoming a high-trust leader include the ability to help people understand and mitigate risk, empowering others and distributing power, and demonstrating humility, empathy and concern for people's welfare. In this way, Hurley views leaders as the chief social engineers of companies who help people integrate their interests with those of the firm – a task he suggests depends on trust.

The link between leadership and shared values and identity is expressed by Gray & Vander Wal (2012). They suggest that leaders must have deep contextual awareness, value diverse perspectives, help people understand the depth and urgency of tensions facing the firm, create common purpose, and embody the principles and purpose of the company. According to Collins (2001), achievements such as these, which are needed to take a company from being good to being great depend on something he termed 'Level 5 Leadership'. Collins

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suggests that such leaders are at the top of a hierarchy based on leadership capabilities. The distinguishing features of a 'Level 5 Leader' are a person's ability to combine deep personal humility (one of the attributes Hurley, 2012 linked to trust in leadership) with intense professional will. On a related note, Cuddy, Kohut & Neffinger (2013) suggest that to have influence, leaders must begin by exhibiting warmth as it "facilitates trust and the communication and absorption of ideas" (p. 56). They point to research showing that people pick up on warmth faster than competence and that projecting strength before warmth runs the risk of eliciting fear. They also contend that projecting competence without warmth can lead to a lack of trust, which may urge people to comply with a leader's ideas on the surface, but which prevents them from adopting the "values, culture, and mission of the organization in a sincere, lasting way" (p. 57).

For Grenny, Maxfield & Shimberg (2008), influence results from a combination of six personal, social and structural sources. These include a link to mission and values, skill-building, harnessing peer pressure, creating social support, aligning rewards and ensuring accountability, and changing the environment. They suggest that these multiple sources of influence help people develop the motivation to enact desired behaviours because they reveal the broad implications of people's actions and choices, an idea that is much like the notion of conceptual awareness espoused by Gray & Vander Wal (2012). Grenny et al. contend that motivation also occurs when people "connect the changes to their deeply held values" as this "establishes a moral framework that shifts people's experience of the new behaviors" (p. 49). Developing this intrinsic motivation, based on shared belief or values is precisely what gives people a sense of agency and purpose, which in turn leads to advocacy, according to the *Building Belief* model.

Storytelling

While the *Building Belief* model does not make any outright recommendation to use storytelling to drive desired behaviour, narrative has long been used in society to achieve this end. Gottschall (2012) shows how fiction continues to fulfill an ancient function of reinforcing shared values and binding people together through common culture. He draws from biology, psychology and neurology to demonstrate that fiction, which is based on a high degree of moralism, influences our moral logic and shapes our beliefs, behaviours and ethics in subtle ways. Gottschall points to research that shows that “when we are absorbed in a story, we drop our intellectual guard” (p. 152) to the point that our attitudes change to accept ideas presented in narrative. He shows that fiction is even more effective at altering beliefs than is non-fiction, whose purpose is to persuade. Gottschall stresses that story is commonly misunderstood as a passive pursuit, but when people experience story, their minds are churning. “A writer lays down words, but they are inert. They need a catalyst to come to life. The catalyst is the reader’s imagination” (p. 6).

This point is echoed by Adamson, Pine, Van Steenhoven & Kroupa (2006) who outline the fundamental errors that executives make when they simply dictate corporate strategy to employees and expect compliance. This approach erroneously and arrogantly assumes that employees have the required context to understand what is being communicated, that they accept the decisions that have been made without their involvement, that they do not have valid ideas of their own, that information alone is enough to persuade, and that the subject

matter of the message or the people delivering it are so important that they will be obeyed.

Instead, Adamson et al. (2006) advise that strategy should be couched in story because it

draws you in, places you at the center, connects to your emotions, and inserts its meaning into your memory . . . Stories create the experience that lets strategy be understood at a personal level. . . Storytelling develops relationships by helping everyone realize we all have issues in common. Stories crystallize common values and beliefs (p. 37).

Similarly, one of the steps that Cameron & Quinn (2011) outline for initiating cultural change in organizations is “identifying stories illustrating the desired future culture” (p. 102).

They suggest that stories are “more powerful in communicating the new culture to others than any number of culture plots, lists of strategies, or motivational speeches by the CEO” (p. 109).

Through knowledge gleaned from 140 interviews and four in-depth case studies, Forman (2013) suggests that for a business story to fulfill its potential to “capture attention, engage and influence people, create meaning, exemplify values and gain trust” (p. 6), it must be authentic and fluent. Authenticity refers to a story’s ability to be credible, realistic and tangible. Fluency relates to engaging people’s emotions and intellect and using the craft in a compelling way. In order to succeed, stories must also be “open to the needs, concerns, knowledge, values and interests – and even the voices – of others” (p. 26). Much like the *Building Belief* model which touts the importance of shared identity, Forman recognizes that stories resonate when people can “imagine themselves as characters” (p. 84).

For Denning (2011) who used storytelling over a period of several years to initiate a major shift in the strategic direction of the World Bank, the key is to use what he has termed a “springboard” story (p. 82). He chose this term for the story’s ability to act like a “tiny fuse that

ignites a new story in the listeners' minds" (p. 82). In this way, the listener and the storyteller work in "consonant conversation" (p. 85) because the story that is told by the organization is "a mere point of departure" (p. 86) that the listeners build upon to generate their own parallel tales based on their experience, context or environment. The *Building Belief* model suggests that when stakeholders feel a sense of shared identity and trust, it leads to the confidence and motivation to act in favour of an organization. Denning suggests that the stories that listeners generate in their minds, in response to the ones they hear from an organization, have a similar effect. He writes, "Because the stories are the listeners' own, they are blessed with all the pride of ownership, and along with it the will to implement" (p. 87). He outlines the three attributes a springboard story must contain -- connectedness (linking the audience to an idea that is positive, using a protagonist they can relate to), strangeness (surprise, incongruity or the unexpected, to violate the listener's expectation or frame of reference) and comprehensibility (eerily familiar and relatable, like a premonition of the future). In this way, Denning's storytelling philosophy is supported by self-determination theory, which stresses the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. As Denning notes, "The power of the springboard story therefore comes not from the story itself, but from the reaction it elicits in the listener. The inputs of the listeners make the difference between a springboard story and the mere transmittal of information" (p. 129).

Social Media

Building Belief is an extension of the Arthur W. Page Society's earlier work, *The Authentic Enterprise* (2007), which suggested that the rise of the digital network revolution has

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empowered stakeholders and overturned a corporation's "traditional ability to . . . manage how it wishes to be perceived" (AWPS, 2007, p. 6). As Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden (2011) explain, today's social media-driven business model is defined by "consumer connectivity and interactivity" (p. 266), and built on a culture in which consumers are "intelligent, organizing, and more trusting of their own opinions and the opinions of their peers" (p. 267). The traditional, vertical pyramid of authority that cascaded messages downward has been replaced by a horizontal, flexible diamond of influence fueled by community dialogue and co-creation (Edelman, 2013). As Kent (2010) observes, rather than using social media to push out one-way messages, the future lies in "stepping past the technologies as marketing and advertising tools and embracing them as tools capable of solving problems and engaging publics" (p. 655). The extent to which a company can achieve this goal depends on selecting the right ecosystem, engaging influencers and relinquishing control.

As Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) point out, determining which channel to use depends on the target group a company wishes to reach and the reason for connecting. Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre (2011) segregate social media by the user experience they enable – whether they are about enabling identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputations or groups. Fournier & Lee (2009) break down sites into pools (forums that connect people with shared values or activities), webs (that run on the strength of personal relationships) and hubs (that draw people around a strong central figure). Both sets of authors suggest that understanding how the channels vary in function and impact helps a firm to enter the space that can best help it achieve its social media objectives.

Regardless of the channel that a firm selects, the goal is often to engage the people who matter – the influencers. Li and Bernoff (2008) stress the importance of understanding whether an individual that a company wishes to engage with is a creator, critic, collector, joiner or spectator. Just like in traditional communications and public relations, knowing who you are trying to engage influences the strategy, medium and message that should be used.

Given that the *Building Belief* model strives to motivate people to promote a firm with their networks, it is useful to examine how companies can create content that is compelling and worth sharing. Berger & Iyengar (2013) have shown that to increase online discussion, products should be framed in an interesting, unexpected or surprising way, similar to Denning's (2011) notion of strangeness. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) observed that when it comes to social media conversations, "nobody is interested in speaking with a boring person . . . if you would like your customers to engage with you, you need to give them a reason for doing so – one which extends beyond saying you are the best" (p. 66). They further suggest that the best way to deliver meaningful content is to first uncover stakeholders' interests and expectations. Their idea is congruent with the storytelling approach proposed by Forman (2013) who stressed the need for stories to be engaging and meaningful. Hanna et al. (2011) stress a similar point, arguing that uniqueness and authenticity form the groundwork that motivates engagement. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) add the need to be humble, honest and 'unprofessional', which means avoiding rhetoric or simply repeating the party line. Stewarding digital relationships requires room for conflict and dissent or "highlighting, not erasing, the boundaries that define them" (Fournier & Lee, 2009, p. 109). As Booth & Matic (2011) assert "Companies cannot control the conversations with social media, but they can influence them" (p. 186). True to the

philosophy of the *Building Belief* model, Booth & Matic assert that “Consumers are now the individuals broadcasting personal or second-hand stories to their social networks and the world. They are a brand’s storytellers and the new brand ambassadors” (p. 185).

Drawing from theories and best practices on organizational identity, culture, reputation, trust, relationship management, human motivation, public relations, communications, employee engagement, strategy, leadership, storytelling or social media, one notion is abundantly clear: Inspiring commitment and cooperation starts by (i) uncovering people’s opinions and taking them into account, (ii) connecting with them on a personal or emotional level, (iii) making sure that stakeholders know that they are valued, and (iv) making it safe and easy for people to share their opinions. For this reason, this study aims to determine how two stakeholder groups who are connected to one, anonymous post-secondary institution in Ontario view their organization’s culture and reputation, characterize their sense of identification with it and rate their ability to advocate on its behalf – all propositions of the model being tested. It also explores the impact of leadership on creating an environment that is conducive to building cooperation, commitment and shared belief. These areas directly align with the conditions that must be in place for the *Building Belief* model to work.

Research Problem

This case study aims to determine the readiness of the organization under review to activate the *Building Belief* model. In so doing, it simultaneously serves as a test case to examine the relevance of this model to post-secondary institutions. The ability to meet the former goal does not preclude success with the latter. The *Building Belief* model is a hypothesis

that has been created for further testing – one that proposes the future state of cutting-edge, enterprise communications. Few organizations would be expected to meet the model's underlying conditions at present. The point of the model is to raise the awareness of communications professionals about what needs to change in order for their organizations to build a sense of shared identity with their stakeholders and inspire them to advocate willingly on their organization's behalf. Although colleges and universities are not corporations, the concepts that serve as the foundation of the model -- culture, reputation, values, purpose, and stakeholders who have the potential to identify with and advocate for an organization – are equally common to institutions of higher learning. Based on this central assumption, the model was felt to have salience in this distinctive sector.

The *Building Belief* model may also provide post-secondary institutions in Ontario with another vehicle to help them respond to external challenges that require them to become more distinctive. Ontario is home to 24 publicly-funded colleges, 20 publicly-funded universities and over 400 registered private career colleges (MTCU, 2013a). While public-sector colleges and universities receive provincial operating grants for each full-time student enrolled, they are teaching more students per faculty member with less funding per student than they were a decade ago (HEQCO, 2013). Ontario's new tuition fee framework capped tuition fee increases at an average of three per cent per year and eliminated the introduction or the increasing of deferral fees (MTCU, 2013c). This curtailed the ability of institutions to raise much needed capital. Constrained resources and consistent demand for programs have resulted in a need to increase productivity in order to maintain levels of quality (HEQCO, 2013). Financial pressures also mean that raising more revenue comes down to attracting more students.

An examination of several college and university websites shows that institutions are already trying to distinguish themselves in the eyes of applicants by promoting their programs of strength. The University of Waterloo emphasizes technology, innovation, science, engineering and co-operative education (Waterloo, 2014). The University of Ottawa stresses its commitment to bilingual education (Ottawa, 2014). Niagara College touts its campus dedicated to training and development for the tourism industry, living labs for horticulture and an onsite winery that takes advantage of its proximity to Ontario's wine region (Niagara, 2014).

These efforts seem to align with the Ontario government's new differentiation strategy, which aims to help publicly-funded institutions set themselves apart based on their distinctive strengths (MTCU, 2013b). The eight stated components of the framework, however, omit aspects of the *Building Belief* model which help to set an organization apart – culture, reputation, and values. The scholarly literature provides clear evidence that these attributes contribute to an organization's overall success, from attracting customers to increasing innovation, and recruiting and retaining top talent (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Dennison, Hooijberg, Lane & Lief, 2012; Grant & Shamonda, 2013; Aon Hewitt, 2013). If differentiation is the goal for post-secondary institutions in Ontario, there is much to gain by examining how to go beyond a sole focus on program strength and outcomes as the key drivers of distinction.

Research Questions

Three research questions were formulated to help determine the extent to which the organization under review meets the conditions needed to enact the *Building Belief* model being tested. These conditions include a well understood and accepted definition of the

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organization's character (the summation of its culture, reputation, values and purpose) and the consistent and authentic expression of this character across all areas of the organization including operations, management systems and interpersonal relationships (AWPS, 2013).

RQ1: *How do employees of the organization perceive the institution's culture and reputation, characterize their relationship and sense of identification with the institution, and rate their ability to advocate on its behalf?*

RQ2: *How do advisory committee members of the organization perceive the institution's culture and reputation, characterize their relationship and sense of identification with the institution, and rate their ability to advocate on its behalf?*

RQ3: *To what extent do the organization's leaders shape the institution's character and create an environment that promotes trust, engagement and a sense of shared identity?*

Methodology

Organization Being Studied

This case study examines the extent to which one post-secondary institution in Ontario meets the preliminary conditions needed to enact the *Building Belief* model. A particular requirement of this study was the need to ensure the anonymity of the organization reviewed, which prevents the inclusion here of additional details about the organization. The stipulation to protect the institution's anonymity also prevented an examination of whether the organization's character is consistently expressed in all of its brand expressions or the extent to which its communications have targeted calls to action aimed at individuals rather than groups of publics – the subsequent elements of the *Building Belief* model. What can be, and was

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examined, are the foundational elements of the model. These include the extent to which the organization's stakeholders have a well understood and accepted definition of the organization's character, people's sense of shared identification, shared values and relationship with the organization, and their ability to advocate on its behalf. The unit of analysis in this case study is the culture and reputation of the organization. The dependent variables are shared identity and engagement, which in turn are affected by the independent variables of trust, relationships, and leadership.

Yin (2009) suggests that the case study method for social science research is best suited to works such as this one, that focus on contemporary occurrences in real-life contexts, involve 'how' and 'why' research questions, and do not require the investigator to have a great deal of control over events. Yin also notes that a case study is an ideal method when "the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated" (p. 11), as was the case here.

The case study method was also deemed appropriate because case studies are "generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (p. 15). This research involved a single-case design that attempted to confirm a new theory for enterprise level communications. The authors state that they "offer it not as a finished construct, but a hypothesis – intended to spark further research, exploration and refinement" (AWPS, 2013, p. 5). As a representative case, it was meant to "capture the circumstances and conditions of [a] commonplace situation" (p. 48), namely the state of communications in a particular institution, which may inform the experiences at other institutions. This approach addressed the issue of external validity, which determines "the domain to which a study's findings can be generalized"

(p. 40). To foster reliability, a case study database was created to store the interview notes, the articles consulted and the survey data collected.

This study cleared approval by two ethics boards – the McMaster Research Ethics Board and the ethics board of the anonymous educational institution involved in this case study.

Data Collection Methods

Unlike the use of histories, Yin (2009) adds that case studies allow for interviews of the persons involved. Given that culture and reputation have been shown to live in the hearts and minds of stakeholders (Schein, 2010; van Riel, 2012) and that trust and relationship management are both relational concepts (Hurley, 2012; Grunig & Huang, 1999) this study relied on gathering the opinions of stakeholders. The questions used were formulated on the basis of the literature review, meaning that they aligned with the findings of published studies and established theories that relate to the concepts that were felt to underpin the model (AWPS, 2013; Denison et al., 2012; Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Fombrun & van Riel, 2007; Hurley, 2012; Grunig & Huang, 1999; Towers Watson, 2012; Harter et al., 2013).

This case study unfolded in three phases. Phase I involved an online, anonymous and voluntary survey of the institution's employees. Phase II entailed an online, anonymous and voluntary survey of the organization's advisory committee members. Phase III invited a selected group of the organization's leaders to share their opinions through qualitative interviews. The quantitative survey method was selected for its ability to classify features, such as the organization's culture and to construct statistical evidence to help measure subjective concepts such as shared identification, belonging and involvement. Given that the case study is

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about human affairs and behavioural events, qualitative interviews were needed to add depth to the survey findings and to triangulate the evidence gathered through the surveys. In this way, the interviews helped to develop “converging lines of inquiry” (Yin, 2009, p. 115) and substantiate the survey data collected. The qualitative interviews were also chosen to help construct a more detailed description of how the different variables might impact the unit of analysis and to possibly uncover variables that the researcher had not previously considered.

Phase I: Employees

The 3,348 employees of the organization being studied were invited to participate in an online, anonymous survey, which yielded a response rate of 9.2% (n=309). Employees are both faculty and staff and work full time, part time or less than part time. The invitation to participate (including a link to the survey) and informed letter of consent were sent to employees’ work email addresses on October 28, 2013. The survey closed on November 10. One email reminder was permitted by the institution, which was sent on November 4.

The employee survey asked 58 questions (48 close-ended and five open-ended) pertaining to culture, reputation, trust, relationship management, identification with the organization, and the ability to advocate. Participants were also asked five demographic questions. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey instrument. Constructed in Survey Monkey, it was structured as a one-shot sample that did not allow participants to skip the close-ended questions, but that made the open-ended ones optional. In order to facilitate comparisons, all close-ended questions measuring the levels of people’s agreement were stated in affirmative

language and used the same seven-point likert scale. If a participant quit, the data from completed questions were still collected.

To help ensure construct validity, a beta test of the survey was conducted. The beta test could not be completed with members of the organization under study as the investigator felt that this would preclude those participants from completing the actual survey as their opinions may be prejudiced from having completed the test survey. Given that the survey had to be sent using a group email distribution list, there would have been no means to prevent people who participated in a beta test from receiving the actual survey. Instead, the beta test was sent to 15 communications professionals on October 15, 2013 who were asked to complete the survey by keeping their own organization in mind. This was felt to be an acceptable second choice because this model is applicable to any organization, public or private, not just the organization under review. Feedback was received from nine respondents and was used to modify several of the questions. Time constraints prevented an extension of the beta test to other individuals.

Phase II: Advisory Committee Members

The organization's 900 advisory committee members were invited to participate in the second online, anonymous survey. This survey yielded a response rate of 20.6% (n=186). These individuals consist of industry, business and community stakeholders. The invitation to participate (including a link to the survey) and informed letter of consent were sent to their work email addresses, on file with the institution, on November 5. The survey closed on November 24. One email reminder was permitted by the institution, which was sent on November 18.

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This second group was asked 46 questions (39 close-ended and three open-ended) pertaining to culture, reputation, trust, relationship management, identification with the organization, and the ability to advocate. They were also asked four demographic questions. See Appendix B for a copy of the survey instrument. This survey was also structured as a one-shot sample and used Survey Monkey. Participants were not able to skip the close-ended questions however, the open-ended questions were optional. In order to facilitate comparisons, all close-ended questions measuring the levels of people's agreement were stated in affirmative language and used the same seven-point likert scale. If a participant quit the survey, the data from their completed questions were still collected. As this second survey was modeled after the first, a beta test was not conducted with this questionnaire.

Phase III: Leaders

Focused, qualitative interviews were conducted with a targeted convenience sample of 10 leaders of the organization. All interviews were held during the period of November 13 – 27, 2013. Participants were recruited by an email invitation sent by the investigator. A conscious effort was made to select an equal distribution of men and women as well as representatives from the various Faculties, campuses and administrative units. Each interview was one hour in length and involved 15 pre-determined, open-ended questions that concentrated on culture, leadership, and the environment of the organization. See Appendix C for a copy of the interview questions. Eight of the interviews were conducted in person at the organization under study, with the final two conducted by telephone.

To safeguard the privacy of the participants, interviews were conducted in an area of the organization that had a separate entrance and was located in a low traffic area. To control for bias and maintain the confidentiality of the responses, a research assistant was hired to conduct the interviews. In addition, two people from each of the position levels of Vice President, Director, Manager, Dean and Associate Dean were selected. As such, if a response was identifiable to a position level, it would not be clear which one of the two people in that position made the comment. The interviews were recorded and written transcripts, not identifiable to the interviewee and labeled in random (as opposed to chronological) order were given to the investigator to further protect the participants' identities.

Data Analysis Techniques

This case study followed the theoretical propositions related to the new *Building Belief* model. This model proposes that when people understand, accept and identify with a corporation's character because its values mirror their own, this creates a level of trust and confidence, which in turn motivates stakeholders to believe in and advocate for the organization. Yin (2009) suggests that "the better case studies are the ones in which the explanations have reflected some theoretically significant propositions" (p. 141). For this reason, the data were analyzed against the extent to which they supported proven theories for understanding culture, reputation, trust, relationship management, public relations, human motivation, communications, employee engagement, leadership, strategy, storytelling and social media – all areas felt to be foundational to the *Building Belief* hypothesis. Yin considers this strategy for data analysis to be the "most preferred" (p. 130) because propositions serve as

the “theoretical orientation guiding the case study analysis . . . [and help] to focus attention on certain data and to ignore other data” (Yin, 2009, p. 130).

For purposes of internal validity, explanation building was used to “stipulate a presumed set of causal links about . . . ‘how’ and ‘why’ something happened” (Yin, 2009, p. 141). The explanations were grounded with evidence, collected through survey data and with narrative, collected through the interviews, to enhance and validate the study’s findings.

The responses to the 15 questions asked of the 10 leaders were summarized in a spreadsheet, so they could be reviewed together to look for patterns. Similarly, the responses to the open-ended questions on the two online surveys were tagged, sorted and tallied in order to do the same. Responses to close-ended questions that were asked on both the employee and advisory committee member surveys were compared to determine if there were any differences in the replies from internal and external respondents. All of the answers to the close-ended questions were reviewed to determine the level to which people agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. For those with strong consensus on levels of agreement, the findings were presented as is. For questions that yielded a more even distribution of levels of agreement and disagreement, the responses were cross-tabulated with demographic data to look for patterns. These tables are shown in the section pertaining to areas for future research.

For the purposes of construct validity (ensuring the accuracy of the findings), the final draft of this case study report was reviewed by one of the interview participants. This was done to help confirm that the proper measures were being used to investigate the related concepts at the institution under study.

Results by Research Question

This study identifies seven key findings which are presented by their corresponding research question. Given that the first two research questions ask the identical elements of two different audiences, they are analyzed together. This approach makes it possible to look for similarities and differences in the answers provided by internal and external stakeholders.

RQ1: *How do employees of the organization perceive the institution's culture and reputation, characterize their relationship and sense of identification with the institution, and rate their ability to advocate on its behalf?*

RQ2: *How do advisory committee members of the organization perceive the institution's culture and reputation, characterize their relationship and sense of identification with the institution, and rate their ability to advocate on its behalf?*

Findings

- 1. Neither employees nor advisory committee members have a strong, unifying interpretation of the organization's culture. The internal group views the culture less positively than does the external one.**

Employees (n=210) used 484 words overall to describe the organization's culture (153 of them being original words that did not repeat), while advisory committee members (n=142) used 368 words altogether (158 being original words that did not repeat). Table 1 and Table 2 show the most commonly used word choices.

Table 1:**Top Words (N=484) That Describe Culture for Employees (n=210)**

Response	Count	Percentage	Rank
Creative	32	6.6	1
Innovative	30	6.1	2
Diverse	15	3.1	3
Top-down management	13	2.7	4
Collaborative	11	2.3	5
Disjointed/Siloed	11	2.3	5
Bureaucratic	10	2.1	6
Divisive	10	2.1	6
Dynamic	9	1.9	7
Student-focused	9	1.9	7
Transition	9	1.9	7
Money/profit focused	8	1.7	8
Open-minded	8	1.7	8

Note: Responses will not add up to 210 as employees were able to list more than one word. Only the top choices are shown here out of 484 words provided (153 of which were original words that did not repeat). This optional question asked "When you think about the organization's culture, what words come to mind?"

Table 2:**Top Words (N=368) That Describe Culture for Advisory Committee Members (n=142)**

Response	Count	Percentage	Rank
Open-minded	24	6.5	1
Innovative	23	6.3	2
Collaborative	14	3.8	3
Inclusive	13	3.5	4
Creative	12	3.3	5
Professional	12	3.3	5
Diverse	9	2.4	6
Excellence	8	2.2	7
Future-oriented	7	1.9	8
Honest	7	1.9	8
Respectful	6	1.6	9
Responsive	6	1.6	9
Supportive	6	1.6	9
Transition	6	1.6	9

Note: Responses will not add up to 142 as advisory committee members were allowed to list more than one word. Only the top choices are shown here out of 368 words provided (158 being original words that did not repeat). This optional question asked "When you think about the organization's culture, what words come to mind?"

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On the whole, words used by advisory committee members were much more positive in tone than words used by employees. The fact that advisory committee members chose words such as open-minded, inclusive and supportive may reflect the fact that each committee consists of approximately 10 members who are valued by the organization for their role in providing strategic advice and input into its programs. Words such as respectful and collaborative suggest mutuality in the relationship, which helps to create a sense of trust, shared values and shared identity.

With respect to employees, creativity and innovation were the most cited words. This is not surprising given that many universities stress their ability to innovate, through the commercialization of their research activities. Many colleges are also known for applied programs in creative fields of study. Other sentiments provided by employees were not as positive. Words such as top-down management and divisive suggest less control mutuality (the ability to influence each other) than what was expressed by advisory committee members. It is also interesting to note that while open-minded was the top word choice by advisory committee members it was a much lower level choice by employees. This could reflect the fact that employees are in larger organizational units, with more layers of management, than are advisory committee members and have less opportunity to influence decisions. Sentiments such as disjointed/siloed and bureaucratic may reflect the nature of many post-secondary institutions whereby faculty and staff often associate more with their Departments or Faculties than with the larger institution itself, and where protocol is often deemed to be important. Employees may also feel uneasy due to the institution's rapid growth. As one of the leaders said, "I've likened the institution . . . to a small town that grew really large, really fast."

2. Employees and advisory committee members believe that the organization has a good reputation.

Employees and advisory committee members were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding several dimensions that Fombrun & van Riel (2004) have shown to be critical to an organization's reputation. Both groups rated the organization well, however advisory committee members felt more positively than did employees.

Table 3:

Gap Analysis of Reputation: Advisory Committee vs. Employees (Agree & Strongly Agree)

	Volunteer			Employee			Delta
	n	N	%	n	N	%	(% +/-)
I respect the organization	175	186	94.1	235	309	76.1	+ 18.0
I admire the organization	154	186	82.8	198	309	64.1	+ 18.7
Programs are high quality	144	182	79.1	225	298	75.5	+ 3.6
Programs provide good value	142	182	78.0	213	298	71.5	+ 6.5
Clear vision for the future	114	181	62.9	216	289	74.7	- 11.8
Responds well to external trends	113	181	62.4	150	289	51.9	+ 10.5
Org. has highly capable leaders	129	181	71.3	149	289	51.6	+ 19.7
The org. is respected by peers	128	179	71.5	181	285	63.5	+ 8.0
It is a good citizen in the community	125	179	69.8	185	285	64.9	+ 4.9

Note: The question posed was "The first series of questions ask you about factors that impact an organization's reputation". Respondents were presented with a seven-point likert scale that asked for their level of agreement with each statement listed in the table above and included an option for 'don't know'. As the number of responses changed per question asked, the total number of responses for each statement is shown through a line-by-line basis.

The one area where employees felt more positively than advisory committee members regarding reputation was the extent to which the organization has a clear vision for the future.

While vision is important, one of the leaders astutely observed that "the vision is the easiest part".

3. *Employees and advisory committee members do not feel as strongly about the strength of their identification and relationship with the institution. Advisory committee members feel more engaged, connected and valued than do employees.*

The *Building Belief* model asserts that shared identification manifests when people understand and accept an organization's character because they believe that its values mirror their own. For this reason, people were asked to articulate the values, beliefs or characteristics that guide daily decisions or help people bond. On this question, the notion of supporting student success was top-of-mind among all 10 leaders. As one said, "There's a strong ethical connection to our job . . . we don't come to work and make widgets, we come to work and transform people daily." Another said that employees are "doing what they do because they love it, because it's the right thing to do. They're not doing it because the organizational structures or cultures are encouraging them to do it."

Student success was also top of mind among survey participants. Employees used 244 terms to describe values (65 terms being original ones that did not repeat), listing student success 44 times (18.1%), while advisory committee members used 257 terms (77 of them being original terms that did not repeat), mentioning student success 30 times (11.7%). Beyond this notion there was little consensus on values and beliefs among survey participants. The next most frequently used terms by employees were don't know/unsure (8.6%, n=21), creativity (5.74%, n=14) and the institutional vision and mission (4.51%, n=11). The high level of responses for 'don't know/unsure' suggests a lack of clarity regarding values and beliefs, which would make it hard for people to develop a sense of shared identification with an institution. For advisory committee members, the top values cited were ensuring program quality (9.3%,

n=24), advancing the profession (5.8%, n=15), and a tie between respect and delivering the best graduates (4.3%, n=11). This likely reflects the fact that committee members, who are industry professionals, have a vested interest in advancing the quality of the programs and ensuring they deliver capable graduates who will leave the institution to join their fields of practice.

Table 4 shows that advisory committee members expressed a stronger sense of shared values and interests with the organization than employees.

Table 4:

Gap Analysis Shared Values & Interests: Adv. Cmte. vs. Employees (Agree & Strongly Agree)

	Volunteer			Employee			Delta
	n	N	%	n	N	%	(% +/-)
We have shared values/beliefs	111	175	63.4	112	259	43.2	+20.2
Our interests coincide	119	175	68.0	124	259	47.9	+20.1

Note: These two questions were “The organization shares my values and/or beliefs” and “The organization’s interests coincide with mine.” Respondents were presented with a seven-point likert scale that asked for their level of agreement with each statement and included an option for ‘don’t know’.

It is perhaps not surprising that advisory committee members felt more positively on elements related to their sense of identification and shared interests with the organization. Once again, they may have responded from a mindset of vested self-interest. By the very nature of their role, they choose to willingly support the institution even without financial reimbursement. It is also not unusual for members of advisory committees in higher education to be alumni of the organization.

Employees and advisory board members were also asked to rate their levels of agreement with the dimensions that underpin relationships (Grunig & Huang, 1999; Hon &

Grunig, 1999). Tables 5 and 6 are related in that relationships are stronger when there is mutuality (Grunig & Huang, 1999, Hurley, 2012). Once again, the responses from employees are found to be weaker than those from advisory board members.

Table 5:

Gap Analysis of Relationship Drivers: Advisory Committee vs. Employee (Agree/Strongly Agree)

	Volunteer			Employee			Delta
	n	N	%	n	N	%	(% +/-)
Process is clear re: decisions affecting me	102	177	57.6	72	267	27.0	+ 30.6
My interests are considered re: decisions affecting me	98	177	55.4	51	267	19.1	+ 36.3
Org. treats me fairly and justly	141	176	80.1	123	266	46.2	+ 33.9
Org. can be relied on to keep promises	120	176	68.1	105	266	39.5	+ 28.6
Org. wants long term commitment w/ me	127	176	72.2	106	265	40.0	+ 32.2
I'm glad to work/volunteer w/ the org	152	176	86.3	202	265	76.2	+ 10.1
We both benefit from our relationship	135	176	76.7	193	265	72.8	+ 3.9
I feel important to the org.	105	176	59.7	147	265	55.5	+ 4.2

Note: The question posed was "The next series of questions ask you to rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements that pertain to the nature and quality of your relationship with the organization." Respondents were presented with a seven-point likert scale that asked for their level of agreement with each statement listed in the table above and included an option for 'don't know'. As the number of responses changed per question asked, the total number of responses for each statement is shown through a line-by-line basis.

Commenting on the importance of maintaining strong relationships, one of the leaders who was interviewed said "It's so hard to win people back once you've lost them . . . It just takes one or two really inauthentic or disappointing exchanges for them to become disengaged. And then it's a lot of work to re-build." Another spoke of the barriers to building relationships, suggesting the need to:

find a way to have more meaningful communication with each other . . . and it's difficult, because people are really, really busy. We're a large organization, and ultimately, it's about one on one conversations, getting to know each other, which means that you've got to make time in a world that doesn't allow for much time.

Given that trust is a key dimension of relationships (Grunig & Huang, 1999), both groups were also asked questions pertaining to trust. Once again, advisory committee members felt more positively than did employees.

Table 6:**Gap Analysis of Trust Drivers: Advisory Committee vs. Employees (Agree & Strongly Agree)**

	Volunteer			Employee			Delta
	n	N	%	n	N	%	(% +/-)
Org. conducts business ethically/morally	137	178	77.0	168	280	60.0	+ 17.0
Org. values cooperation/collaboration	152	178	85.4	154	280	55.0	+ 30.4
Org. communicates with me openly	133	178	74.7	121	277	43.7	+ 31.0
Org. communicates with me consistently	107	178	60.1	144	277	51.6	+ 8.5
Org. can deliver on its commitments	126	177	71.2	141	272	51.8	+ 19.4
Org. engages in open dialogue	134	177	75.7	126	272	46.3	+ 29.4
Org. is honest	136	177	76.8	143	271	52.8	+ 24.0
Org. is predictable	93	177	52.5	129	271	47.6	+ 4.9

Note: The question posed was "The following questions ask you about factors that impact your sense of trust in the organization. Respondents were presented with a seven-point likert scale that asked for their level of agreement with each statement listed in the table above and included an option for 'don't know'. As the number of responses changed per question asked, the total number of responses for each statement is shown through a line-by-line basis.

The lower levels of agreement by employees on the dimensions outlined in Table 6 may shed some light on what drives their sense of trepidation regarding their relationship with the institution. A similar, lukewarm level of agreement was shown from employees on their responses to two additional questions that only their survey group was posed about inclusion, which is a dimension of trust. Only 40.0% (n=111, N=277) of employees agreed or strongly agreed that the organization is concerned with the interests of all of its stakeholders. When asked if their areas are represented in institutional strategic planning, 55.0% (n=149, N=277) agreed or strongly agreed that they were.

4. *Employees and advisory committee members identify more strongly with their specific teams, programs or industries than they do with the organization as whole.*

In the words of one of the survey respondents, the institution can best be described as:

A collection of tribes – with little holding these tribes together in terms of culture, etc. As such, I see the predominant influencing culture is very dependent on where the individual works in the organization. It is akin to [the institution] being the European Union, with different Faculties/areas being the different European countries. The cultures vary tremendously.

This silo effect was prevalent in the ideas shared by the leaders who participated in the qualitative interviews. When asked to describe the relationship between different areas, one called it “cordial”, another described it as “contentious” due to the “jockeying for resources including space and financial aspects” and a third described it as “victims and victors”.

While silos may be apparent, employees do feel connected to their immediate teams. When asked to select from three possible choices about where one’s sense of connection lies, the strong majority of employees (69.3%, n=178, N=257) chose ‘immediate team’, while only 17.5% (n=45) felt it was with the institution as a whole and a mere 13.2% (n=34) suggested it was with their larger units, departments or Faculties. When asked if they trust the people they work with most closely, 67.5% of employees (n=185, N=274) agreed or strongly agreed that they did. There was agreement or strong agreement from 63.1% (n=173, N=274) that one’s supervisor is responsive to ideas or questions, and from 60.2 % (n=165, N=274) that one’s supervisor is a trusted source of information. One employee wrote, “I value my immediate colleagues immensely and trust them totally. The administration is on a completely different track which seems unrelated to what I do.” Given employees’ weaker levels of connection with the institution or its senior leadership, it is perhaps their relationships with peers and

immediate areas that helped contribute to some of the positive sentiments expressed. When asked if they understood why their role matters, 75.1% (n=193, N=257) agreed or strongly agreed they did. There was agreement or strong agreement from 70.5% of employees (n=194, N=275) that they feel good about the organization where they work and from 76.2% (n=202, N=265) that they were glad to be employed there.

Many responses to the open-ended questions demonstrated that advisory committee members viewed their roles and connections to the institution as being purposeful and narrowly defined which aligns with their function at the organization. One person suggested that they help ensure that “the skills taught are skills that meet the needs of the business world”. Others stated, “Our interest is in improving the profession”, or that committee members have a “common idea to provide a better education for current and future industries.” Yet another noted that they need to be “looking out for the best interests of the future clients that will be served” by graduates. Several people also explicitly stated that when they were answering the survey questions, they did so with the mindset of describing the program with which they volunteer, not the organization as a whole.

5. People’s ability to share their knowledge about the organization with their networks stands to be improved.

While the end goal of the *Building Belief* model is to have stakeholders promote their organization among their personal networks, responses provided by both employees and advisory committee members (shown in Table 7) indicate that more work needs to be done to facilitate this aim.

Table 7:

Gap Analysis of Sharing Belief: Advisory Committee vs. Employees (Agree & Strongly Agree)

	Volunteer			Employee			Delta
	n	N	%	n	N	%	(% +/-)
Locals know a lot about the org.	76	179	42.5	130	285	45.6	- 3.1
I can act as an ambassador for the org.	107	175	61.1	155	257	60.3	+ 0.8
The org. makes it easy for me to do so	117	175	66.9	104	257	40.5	+26.4

Note: Participants were asked to provide their level of agreement to statements that included “People in the surrounding communities know a lot about the organization”, “Employees/Volunteers at my organization have the opportunity to act as ambassadors for the institution”, and “The organization makes it easy for me to share my opinion or experiences about the organization with my personal network.” Respondents were presented with a seven-point likert scale that asked for their level of agreement with each statement listed in the table above and included an option for ‘don’t know’. As the number of responses changed per question asked, the total number of responses for each statement is shown through a line-by-line basis.

While respondents felt that the organization currently may not be doing an outstanding job communicating with the surrounding community, it is encouraging that its employees and advisory committee members feel that, philosophically at least, they can serve as ambassadors to help make this happen. It is not surprising that advisory committee members feel more strongly than do employees that the organization makes it easy for them to serve as ambassadors. Institutions expect advisory committee members to advocate on their behalf within the industry they represent to help find co-op placements for their students or permanent employment opportunities for its graduates. They would naturally be provided with information about the program and the institution in order to facilitate this goal.

RQ3: *To what extent do the organization’s leaders shape the institution’s character and create an environment that promotes trust, engagement and a sense of shared identity?*

6. Employees feel that leadership impacts culture – and not always positively.

On a forced choice question, employees were asked to rank the importance of six variables that shape culture. True to the literature (Schein, 2010), leadership was felt to have the strongest impact, taking the top vote by 41.2% of employees (n=107, N=206) while only 5.0% (n=13) felt it was the least important factor. As Table 8 demonstrates, as a first choice response, employees felt that they only had more impact shaping the culture than did the physical surroundings.

Table 8:**Factors Shaping Culture**

	1		2		3		4		5		6	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Leadership	107	41.2	60	23.1	34	13.1	25	9.6	21	8.1	13	5.0
Mission/Vision	53	20.4	44	16.9	37	14.2	38	14.6	46	17.7	42	16.2
Students	40	15.4	33	12.7	50	19.2	47	18.1	68	26.2	22	8.5
Programs	33	12.7	44	16.9	55	21.2	65	25.0	50	19.2	13	5.0
Employees	27	10.4	75	28.9	68	26.2	50	19.2	26	10.0	14	5.4
Surroundings	0	0	4	1.5	16	6.2	35	13.5	49	18.9	156	60.0
Total responses	260											

Note: The question asked "Please rank the following factors in terms of their importance in shaping the corporate culture at the institution. Please select '1' for the most important factor and '6' for the least important factor: Leadership, programs, employees, mission/vision/values, students, physical environment/facilities".

While leadership was viewed to be the most important factor in shaping culture, it was not always viewed as a positive force. Recall that two of the words employees used most frequently to describe the culture were "top-down" and "divisive" (see Table 1). A participant wrote, "Attempts to engage employees or give them a voice often amount to empty exercises which are tightly controlled by those managing them." Another noted, "We have wonderful people and if the institution would intentionally try to harness that passion and add fuel to it

the institution would gain a much stronger character than the one it tries to force from the top down.”

When asked whether the organization had highly capable leaders, there was agreement or strong agreement from 71.3 % (n=129, N=181) of advisory committee members, but from only 51.9% of employees (n=150, N=289). This may reflect the fact that advisory committee members likely have more direct interactions with who they perceive to be leaders of the institution (the academics or Deans in charge of the programs they advise) than the average employee has with the senior leadership of the institution at large.

As for the leaders interviewed, each one felt that leaders play a role in shaping the culture, though not the exclusive role. Several commented on the fact that leaders’ actions are constantly monitored, with employees “paying attention in spades”. As one leader elaborated:

I think what creates a lot of angst in the organization is when the tone from the top isn’t in line with what’s there, or there’s a lack of communication . . . the lower levels may not be aware of what the intent or the directive is . . . they hear bits and pieces, but see different actions, and it’s misinformation, that’s what builds distrust in the organization.

Another leader interviewed spoke of the disconnect between leadership and the lower levels of the organization, saying:

from an employee perspective, there’s not a lot of focus on operational excellence . . . on understanding down to the lowest levels this is what the issues and challenges are . . . not a lot of that management by walking around . . . that’s definitely an opportunity for the institution and the senior leadership . . . to understand the different perspectives.

7. The environment, which employees feel that leaders do play a role in shaping, is not always conducive to building trust, engagement and shared identity.

Only employees were asked to comment on the prevailing atmosphere at the organization, given that only they have direct, daily dealings with it. There was a close split between positive

and negative sentiments. Of the 203 employees who provided statements, 37.9% (n=77) made positive comments and included words such as “benevolent” and “optimistic” while 34.5% (n=70) expressed negative ones, including “dysfunctional” and “toxic”. While the majority of responses repeated only one to five times, Table 9 shows only the words that were most commonly cited. Much like the question about the characteristics of culture, there was no strong consensus on the words used to describe the atmosphere.

Table 9:

Top Words (N=324) Used by Employees (n=203) to Describe Atmosphere

Response	Count	Percentage	Rank
Positive	24	7.4	1
Forgotten/unappreciated	18	5.6	2
Excited about the future	16	4.9	3
Overworked/overstressed	16	4.9	3
Uncertain/unsettled	12	3.7	4
Divisive	9	2.8	5
Inconsistent	8	2.5	6
Low morale	7	2.2	7
Conflict	6	1.9	8
Distrust	6	1.9	8
Transition	6	1.9	8
Friendly	6	1.9	8
Secretive	6	1.9	8
Tense	6	1.9	8

Note: Numbers will not add to 203 as employees were allowed to list more than one word. Only the top choices are shown here out of 324 words provided (125 being original words that did not repeat). As this was an optional question, not all employees responded. The question asked “How would you describe the prevailing atmosphere at the organization?”

While the most commonly cited word was ‘positive’, many of the words cited in Table 9 such as forgotten/unappreciated, overworked, uncertain, divisive, inconsistent, low morale, distrust, secretive and tense run counter to the attributes that are conducive to building trust (Hurley, 2012), engagement or shared identity.

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Among those employees who had positive interpretations, one wrote “It’s a fantastic place to work. I hope to retire here!” Another commented:

I feel like I’ve won the job lottery. Even after a long crazy week, and a long drive home, I can still smile to myself and say ‘you lucky, lucky dog!’ The program I work for is special and I think our students feel it as much as the faculty do. Our leadership is wonderful, but it is in every way a group effort.

One of the leaders who was interviewed suggested, “This place has a special energy and a special magic associated with it. I think that the possibilities are endless . . . The people are good. They’re here because they want to be here.” From the opposite perspective, one employee commented “It used to be the most envious place to work where one felt like you were a part of everything. Now the atmosphere is that most employees (staff and faculty) and students are a group who are separate from the decision makers who have their own agendas.” During the qualitative interviews, a leader also said “I do definitely think there’s a disconnect between how our senior managers think things are going and the faculty’s perspective on how things are.” Another commented that “the frustrations are real and I think pose a really scary threat organizationally.”

Recall that Tables 1 and 2 at the beginning of the results section showed the most commonly used words for organizational culture. Mining further through the list of all the words used to describe culture reveals some interesting findings regarding people’s perceptions of whether the environment at the organization is conducive to trust, engagement and shared identity. The total list of words was put in alphabetical order and filtered for words that describe attributes that either support or detract from building a sense of trust, engagement and shared identity. Table 10 shows the positive word choices expressed by both groups surveyed, while Table 11 shows the negative ones.

Table 10:**Positive Words Related to Trust, Engagement, Shared Identity**

Response	Advisory Committee Word Count	Employee Word Count
Accommodating	2	0
Adaptable	2	0
Appreciative	1	0
Authentic	1	0
Caring	4	3
Close-knit	0	1
Cohesive	2	0
Collaborative/teamwork oriented	14	11
Collegial	2	2
Committed	5	2
Communicative	1	0
Encouraging	2	1
Engaging	3	2
Empowering	0	1
Ethical	2	0
Family	1	1
Fair/egalitarian	3	2
Flexible	1	3
Freedom/latitude	0	2
Friendly	3	5
Fun	1	4
Helpful	0	1
Home	1	0
Honest/Earnest	7	5
Inclusive	13	2
Inspiring	0	5
Integrity	4	1
Inviting	2	0
Nurturing	1	0
Open-minded	24	8
Supportive	6	3
Transparent	1	4
Welcoming	1	2
Total Count	110	71

Note: This optional question asked “When you think about the organization’s culture, what words come to mind?” Responses will not add up to 210 for employees or 142 for advisory committee members, as respondents listed more than one word. Employees provided 484 words in response to this question (153 being different words that did not repeat) while advisory committee members provided 368 words (158 being different words that did not repeat). Only words that describe attributes related to trust, engagement and shared identity are shown here.

Table 10 shows that 29.9% of the words that advisory committee members used to describe the culture (n=110, N=368) relate to positive attributes for trust, engagement and shared identity, while only 14.7% of the words that employees used (n=71, N=484) did the same. Table 11 shows the findings for the negative sentiments expressed.

Table 11:**Negative Words Related to Trust, Engagement, Shared Identity**

Response	Advisory Committee Word Count	Employee Word Count
Abandoned	0	1
Aggressive	1	0
Arbitrary	0	1
Autocratic/Power-driven agenda	0	2
Condescending	1	0
Conflicted	0	1
Contentious	1	0
Controlling	1	6
Disconnected	0	6
Dishonest	0	1
Disjointed/siloed	0	11
Disrespectful	0	3
Distrust/untrustworthy	0	3
Divisive	0	10
Dysfunctional	0	3
Elitist	0	2
Exploitative	0	1
Favoritism	0	2
Fear-based	0	1
Forced	0	2
Fractured	1	0
Greedy	0	2
Haughty	1	0
Hypocritical	0	1
Impersonal	0	1
Inauthentic	0	5
Inflexible	0	1
Low on morale	0	1
Misguided	0	1
Neglectful	0	1
Oppressive	0	2
Paranoid	0	1
Poor/unskilled, dishonest leaders	0	7
Pressure-filled	0	1
Restrictive	1	3

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Secretive/non-transparent	1	5
Superficial	0	1
Top-down management	0	13
Top-heavy	0	2
Unresponsive	0	1
<hr/>		
Total Count	8	105

Note: This optional question asked “When you think about the organization’s culture, what words come to mind?” Responses will not add up to 210 for employees or 142 for advisory committee members, as respondents listed more than one word. Employees provided 484 words in response to this question (153 being different words that did not repeat) while advisory committee members provided 368 words (158 being different words that did not repeat). Only words that describe attributes related to trust, engagement and shared identity are shown here.

Table 11 shows that 21.7 % of the words that employees chose to describe the culture (n=105, N=484) relate to attributes that are barriers to trust, engagement and shared identity, while only 2.2% of words used by advisory committee members (n=8, N=368) reflected the same. Clearly, employees have a much more negative tone than do advisory committee members. When Table 10 and Table 11 are taken together, it is also observed that 21.7% of the words used by employees were negative, while only 14.7% were positive ones. Given that employees also feel that leadership does impact culture, this suggests that a negative undercurrent exists among employees regarding the impact of leaders on creating a character that promotes trust, engagement, and shared identity.

Discussion and Recommendations

Based on the knowledge gleaned from the literature and the findings from the three data points, this study makes four recommendations.

1. Come to a Consensus on Character

The *Building Belief* model begins with the effort to come to a consensus on corporate character (which embodies culture, reputation, beliefs, values and sense of purpose). The tremendous diversity of responses that were provided to describe the organization’s culture

and the fact that employees described the culture much more negatively than did volunteers suggests that this organization would need to make a concerted effort to articulate its culture and shared values with its stakeholders prior to applying the remaining elements of the model. To move forward, the organization should begin by formally articulating its culture and doing so through an inclusive, institutional conversation to crowd-source the answer. Since 2009, when Netflix Founder and CEO Reed Hastings publicly released his company's Culture Code on SlideShare (Hastings, 2009), many others have followed suit including educational institutions (NYU, 2013). These codes do not stress the institutional values or vision statements that are typically found in strategic plans. Rather, they present the values and principles that are shared, believed, lived and recognized among the people who constitute an organization – the values and principles they instinctively rely on to guide their decisions.

2. Find a way to Involve Employees and Actively Listen to Them

Of all the questions on the survey, the two which elicited the lowest levels of agreement from employees pertained to decisions that are made at the organization that affect them (see Table 6). One of the leaders interviewed noted:

The senior leadership team meets regularly but they don't really document the meetings . . . it becomes the telephone game of this was said, you tell so-and-so, so-and-so tells so-and-so, and by the time you get down to the lowest levels of the organization, you might not even get the message at all, or you might not get the full picture, and the rumour mills start.

In commenting on the mechanisms that exist for employees to influence decisions or provide feedback, another leader suggested, "I think there's a lot of mechanisms. I'm not sure if there's a lot of awareness of where those mechanisms are or how to do it."

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To build trust and inspire involvement, individuals need to feel that their interests have been taken into account and done so in a transparent way, that their ideas are worth hearing, and that they are valued members of the organization. This process begins with involving people in making decisions on matters that affect them, letting them know that they've been heard, implementing the ideas that have merit, and being open and honest about the ones that do not. As one leader said:

You know you are going to have the unhappy camp. You just have to be able to get to them before it becomes a bigger issue and they can talk off their soapbox. So it's all about the relationships and continuing to foster those knowing that it can get contentious down the road. You don't have to be buddies with them but you have to think about where they're coming from.

Listening and involving must also be embraced as an ongoing activity. In this light, the organization should make a commitment to two-way communications and make it a habit to survey its employees about their perceptions on shared identity. Year over year analyses would be helpful in determining if or where any corrective action needs to be implemented.

The institution must also find a way to reach those employees who do not speak up publicly. One of the leaders interviewed said:

People are intimidated by senior management and do not always say what they think when they have the opportunity, and so it's a weird situation when you're in a meeting, you're asking people their opinions, you know they have opinions, but they don't want to say anything, and so it's very quiet.

Another noted that, "There's also a chain of command, which in some ways stops people from stepping up . . . I've found that people are intimidated by senior management and do not always say what they think when they have the opportunity."

In the college and university setting, great care must also be taken to balance the expectation that faculty members may have for academic freedom or latitude, which may lead to the mindset that one is being controlled by the daily decisions that are imposed by management. As one leader noted, “An academic institution’s faculty are quite autonomous, that’s just the nature of the beast.”

Effort also needs to be made to explore novel ways to elicit feedback and involve employees in decision making outside of asking for opinions on anonymous surveys. Recall that only 9.2% of employees (N=309) participated in this study. This might include creating a place to post anonymous questions or suggestions on the institution’s intranet – the responses to which could come from anyone in the organization and could be posted as a conversation for all to see. This repository has the potential to become a fruitful source of new ideas, especially if it were accompanied by a commitment from senior leadership to critically review and discuss those suggestions that garner the greatest traction online. The intranet could also be channeled as a vehicle to break down traditional departmental or Faculty silos. This could be achieved by introducing auxiliary features (such as an institutional Ki-Jiji or online forums) that focus on helping people make connections or self-organize around topics of shared interest.

3. Find, Engage and Support the Early Influencers

While many negative sentiments were shared, almost half of all employees who participated in the survey used positive words to describe the culture (see Table 1) and more employees used positive sentiments than negative ones to describe the atmosphere of the organization (see Table 4). Approximately 60% of both employees and volunteers also agreed

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that they had the opportunity to act as ambassadors. These findings suggest that there is significant potential to find people who could be inspired to serve as advocates for the organization.

At present, employees and volunteers feel more strongly connected to their immediate teams, programs or areas than with the institution as a whole. This is not surprising given that best practices for internal communications suggest the need to utilize line-of-sight managers because of the strong levels of trust they generate among employees (Burton et al., 2013). Rather than viewing this as an obstacle to creating a cohesive culture, the institution could mine the strength of these connections. Employees suggested that they trusted their immediate supervisors and their most direct co-workers. Early advocates who are found in the organization could spread their beliefs about the organization with their internal counterparts, not just their external networks.

Given that less than half of the employees (40.5%) and only two-thirds of advisory committee members (66.9%) suggested that the organization makes it easy for them to share their experiences about the organization (see Table 8), an audit is required to determine the obstacles that stand in the way. The formal channels of communication that exist must be made clear to people and organized in a way that is easy to find and use. Content must be created that is relevant, timely and interesting (Berger & Iyengar, 2013) and must be made available for people to share proactively. The institution should also consider offering free tutorials in social media usage to ensure that stakeholders who want to share their experiences with their networks feel confident in their ability to do so.

4. Embrace Storytelling, Especially the Springboard Type

For all of its potential to equalize, inspire, involve and engage, the organization should embrace a storytelling approach to its stakeholder communication and adopt it from the outset of new initiatives. This approach could be helpful in converting skeptics into influencers. Stories connect with people's hearts and minds, enable them to imagine themselves as the characters, and involve people as active participants in the co-creation of where the story goes next. As such, the potential exists to build the kind of shared identity and commitment that is required to motivate people to advocate on behalf of the organization. Given people's strong sense of identification with the notion of student success, this is an ideal starting point for the development of the type of springboard stories outlined by Denning (2011). A repository for these 'starter' stories could be created as part of an institutional blog that allows for comments from readers. Each story could feature the role that one faculty member, staff person or advisory committee member played in making a positive, yet unexpected difference in a student's life. This would satisfy the conditions for springboard stories to be positive, feature a protagonist people can relate to, be eerily familiar and relatable, and provide the element of incongruity needed to sustain interest. Given that the powerful part of the story comes when it is internalized and extended by the listener, this approach also supports the need for self-determination (Baard, Deci & Ryan, 2004) which is critical in academic settings.

Limitations

As no published research could be found that has tested the *Building Belief* model in either the private or the public sector, this case study is limited by its relative newness and a lack of published evidence and knowledge upon which to build.

The questions used in the survey instruments and the leadership interviews were constructed based on findings in related literature. As such, all of the questions that were used warrant further testing before this study could be replicated on a larger scale.

Another limitation exists in the potential for bias among the leaders who participated in the qualitative interviews. While a conscious effort was made to protect their identity, it is possible that they provided guarded answers. Survey participants did not face this constraint as they were able to respond anonymously. However, the relatively small response rate (n=309, 9.2%) from employees also poses a limitation. Had their participation rate neared the levels of the advisory committee members (n=186, 20.6%), even more confidence could be attributed to their answers.

Finally, the study is limited by the fact that it was open to only employees, advisory committee members, and a handful of the organization's leaders. Colleges and universities have many other stakeholders, including two key groups who have a vested interest in their institution's success – students and alumni. These populations certainly would have strong ideas about the institution's culture. Given their active role in helping to create it, they should also be made part of any formal process aimed at defining it.

Conclusions

This study attempted to address the research problem of determining one organization's state of readiness for adopting a new model for corporate communication and examining whether this model could be applied to the post-secondary education sector.

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The new model, called *Building Belief* encourages organizations to identify their corporate character (a combination of culture, reputation, values, beliefs and enduring purpose). This in turn, builds a sense of shared identity, trust and connection among an organization and its stakeholders so as to motivate them to advocate willingly on its behalf. Based on the evidence gathered and reviewed, *RQ1* and *RQ2* were answered. It is clear that employees and advisory committee members at the organization have disparate notions of culture. These differences hamper efforts to create shared identity within or among these groups. The results also proved that culture is perceptual, given the variety of answers provided and the low level of consensus reached. Without this common base, the institution's character cannot be fully activated. Both employees and advisory committee members had positive impressions of the organization's reputation but less positive feelings about their relationship with the institution. Employees felt that their strongest sense of connection is with their immediate teams. They also felt negatively about the extent to which the organization engages them and considers their interests in its decision making, two elements that are critical to building trust and relationships. Advisory committee members had more positive feelings about the dependent variables shared identity and engagement than did employees, although the data suggests that advisory committee members responded from the mindset of their specific areas and not the entire institution. It was important to understand their perceptions as they provide a valuable point of reference for comparing employee sentiment. Advisory committees also constitute a large and influential stakeholder group. Both advisory committee members and employees indicated that they do have the opportunity to advocate on behalf of the institution.

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Based on the data collected, RQ3 was also answered. Employees felt strongly that leaders do impact the culture but felt less certain about the capability of the leaders and their personal sense of connection to the institution's leadership. Employees felt there were more attributes that impede rather than facilitate a climate that supports the building of belief. This suggests that employees feel that leaders do not create an environment that strongly promotes trust, engagement and shared identity.

To fully apply the *Building Belief* model to this institution, two other important stakeholder groups, namely students and alumni, would need to be consulted. A concerted effort would also need to be made to understand the impact on culture that results from the unique tension that exists at academic institutions. While faculty members value autonomy, administrators who run the institution often have a business mindset that stems from the need to respond to decreasing levels of government funding.

This case study concludes that it is important to mind the gap that exists in people's sense of identification with the organization under review. It recommends embracing a consistent and transparent two-way approach to communication and the creation of opportunities for people to become involved in decision-making. Both are needed to strengthen people's relationships and sense of trust in and identification with the institution. The organization should also find, engage, and empower the early influencers or believers who can help to lead the way. Only then can a common definition of culture and shared values be reached. These shared values should be articulated in a formal culture code that the organization creates with its stakeholders. The process should begin with storytelling, based on

the concept of student success, to engage people's hearts and minds, generate involvement, and inspire people to own the stories which they can then proudly share with their networks.

Finally, this study does have the potential to serve as a representative case. Even though the cultures, reputations, values and purposes may be distinct at different institutions, the study's general tenets and findings may prove useful as factors to consider for the many institutions who seek to inspire their stakeholders to build a sense of shared identification with their organization and advocate on its behalf. While the institution being studied is not a corporation, it shares key attributes with corporations that are relevant to this model such as culture, reputation, organizational identification and the desire to attract the best people. Given the recent emphasis by the Ontario government regarding the need for its colleges and universities to adhere to a differentiation framework, the idea of applying this model to help an institution to further distinguish itself based on its character should have merit. It is hoped that this study will prompt further research, such as the application of this model to other institutions in the post-secondary education sector or the testing and refinement of the survey instruments used.

Future Research Directions

This study identifies three areas for further research which equate to rival explanations that may impact the findings. It also suggests the need to further test the application of the *Building Belief* model in other post-secondary institutions.

Survey answers that elicited a fairly even distribution of levels of agreement were cross-tabulated with demographic data to look for patterns (as shown in Tables 12, 13 and 14). Given

that advisory committee members were in greater agreement than employees, this secondary level of analysis was limited to the employee survey. These efforts suggest three possible rival explanations that require additional probing: i) campus association (ii) years of service and (iii) position type (part time, full time, staff or faculty). Gender and age did not radically alter the responses.

1. Association with a Particular Campus

As Table 12 demonstrates, viewing the responses through the lens of the campus where people work impacted two questions very clearly -- the extent to which employees felt the organization shared their beliefs or values and the extent to which employees felt that their interests were taken into account when the organization made decisions that affected them.

Table 12:
Shared Values and Included Interests (Agree & Strongly Agree) by Campus Affiliation

	Campus 1	Campus 2	Campus 3	Campus 4	No campus affiliation
	n N %	n N %	n N %	n N %	n N %
Shared Values	32 60 53.3	14 26 53.8	51 132 38.6	2 6 33.3	10 26 38.5
Included Interests	17 60 28.3	6 26 23.1	18 132 13.6	1 6 16.7	5 26 19.2

Note: These two questions were “The organization shares my values and/or beliefs” and “The organization’s interests coincide with mine.” Respondents were presented with a seven-point likert scale that asked for their level of agreement with each statement and included an option for ‘don’t know’.

In order to determine how to build a stronger sense of inclusiveness and belief among all employees, further research could be conducted to understand what is causing these discrepancies. Questions could be asked to determine whether the programming mix changes on each campus and the extent to which people’s perceptions relate to their identification with

a program rather than with the campus itself. Another factor to consider might be the presence (or lack thereof) of institutional leadership at each location.

2. Years of Service

As Table 13 shows, the variable of years of service was noticed to impact responses about one’s sense of job security with, and fair treatment by the organization. The most populous group, employees with 0-5 years of service felt the least secure but they felt that they were better treated than those working for the organization between 6-20 years.

Table 13:
Position Security and Fair Treatment (Agree & Strongly Agree) by Years of Service

	0-5			6-10			11-15			16-20			21-25			26-30			31+		
	n	N	%	n	N	%	n	N	%	n	N	%	n	N	%	n	N	%	n	N	%
I feel secure	44	131	31.2	24	52	46.1	17	28	60.7	6	1	54.5	7	15	46.6	5	8	62.5	5	8	62.5
Fairly treated	72	131	55.0	18	52	34.6	6	28	21.4	5	1	45.5	9	15	60.0	5	8	62.5	3	8	37.5

Note: The questions posed were “I feel secure in my position in the organization” and “The organization treats me fairly and justly.” Respondents were presented with a seven-point likert scale that asked for their level of agreement with each statement listed in the table above and included an option for ‘don’t know’.

Further work could be done to study employees’ overall levels of happiness based on the length of their relationships with the institution. During the qualitative interviews, two leaders remarked on the organizational impact of having long-term employees. One noted, “People never leave . . . that’s a good thing, that’s loyalty . . . but it’s bad in that it can sometimes make certain things harder to change.” Another noted, “We have so many employees that have been here 25, 30 and 35 years so the culture of the place is really hard to change. You often hear them say ‘Oh yeah, we tried that 15 years ago and it didn’t work.’”

3. Position Type

Four survey respondents provided comments to indicate a sense of abandonment by part time employees:

[The institution] is geared toward daytime programs. [It] should consider putting resources towards creating a sense of community and belonging to the evening employees . . . It is a fragmented group that has little to no opportunity to interact.

As a part-timer . . . on contract . . . it’s difficult to feel connected, or valued.

I live from contract to contract so we are never really ‘part’ of the organization no matter how long we’ve taught here.

As part time staff we are not able to participate in the routines or practices that define the institution.

Despite such sentiments, part time employees felt stronger than did their full time counterparts that the organization shared their values, as shown in Table 14.

Table 14:
Shared Values (Agree & Strongly Agree) by Position Type

	FT Fac			PT Fac			FT Staff			PT Staff		
	n	N	%	n	N	%	n	N	%	n	N	%
Shared Values	18	57	31.6	23	39	59.0	18	43	41.9	8	16	50.0

Note: These question posed was “The organization shares my values and/or beliefs.” Respondents were presented with a seven-point likert scale that asked for their level of agreement with each statement and included an option for ‘don’t know’.

To better understand what prompted this sentiment, additional work could be done to explore perceptions of workload and work-life balance to see if they have an effect on part time employee’s attitudes or mindsets.

To better understand the comparatively lower levels of shared values by full time employees, additional questions could be posed that address the tension that exists between

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faculty members and administrators. Faculty members often have expectations related to academic freedom that come in concert with dedicating one's lifework to the intellectual pursuit of creating and imparting knowledge. One survey respondent wrote that when an educational institution is run like a business it:

seems to disenfranchise professors and separates them from administrators, who are perceived as careerists and who become different, perhaps to ensure their own survival, once they ascend the ranks. The sense of being managed is devastating to personal autonomy, academic freedom, and freedom of expression in general.

Another participant wrote:

Faculty want to see their students be successful but we also want to maintain integrity (eg. support faculty in the decision they make in their classrooms re: delivery and evaluation). Discussion with faculty regarding their views on teaching, learning and assessment are crucial to the success of the institute.

A related issue that surfaced was the extent to which people's opinions are influenced by their membership in separate union bodies that govern faculty and staff. One survey respondent suggested that "the union creates a sense of friction between managers and support staff, as well as a sense of entitlement among union members". From the leaders' perspectives, there was frustration with the lack of formal and monetary rewards, little in the way of formal performance measures for unionized staff, and not being able to hold people (especially faculty members who have tenure) accountable for their actions beyond maintaining their collective agreement requirements. The impact of these elements on shaping the institution's culture could be more deeply examined in further research.

As the fluid and context-specific nature of culture prevents these results from being readily generalized to other colleges and universities, further testing of *Building Belief* should be conducted at peer institutions to determine if similarities or differences exist in the findings. In

this way, a more convincing case could be made to colleges and universities to define their character and leverage it to help them differentiate themselves from their competition.

Knowledge Mobilization

This case study answers the call in the *Building Belief* model for research that evaluates the validity of the model and develops “deeper case studies that will help executives adapt the model to their own circumstances” (AWPS, 2013, p. 35). As a separate deliverable of this study, the author has also created the “*Building Belief*” S. A. T. (Snapshot Assessment Tool). It is based on the questions that were created for the surveys used in this study. The tool is designed to provide organizations with a quick estimation of the extent to which shared values exist and the readiness of its stakeholders to act as organizational advocates (See Appendix D).

Additional knowledge mobilization activities include a commitment to share these findings with broader audiences in the way of presentations at conferences geared toward higher education administrators or public relations professionals. A summary of the findings (see Appendix E) and an Executive Summary of this case study will be created for this purpose. The study will also be summarized in an article that will be submitted for consideration to journals of communications research in Canada such as the *Journal of Professional Communications*. It will also be shared with the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to spur discussion and the Arthur W. Page Society to provide this latter organization with a case study that applies its model outside of the private sector. The results will also be shared with the senior leadership team of the organization that was involved in this case study.

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Appendix A: Employee Survey Instrument

Thank you for participating in this voluntary, anonymous survey. It is part of a study that investigates the role that corporate culture plays in inspiring individuals to feel connected to their organization and to want to share stories about it with their personal networks.

The results of this survey will help me to determine whether a corporate communications model that was created for private enterprise can be applied to public, postsecondary institutions in Ontario. The study will help me to complete my Major Research Paper (MRP) a core requirement for the completion of my Master's degree. This study has not been commissioned by [name of institution]. No one at [name of institution] will know whether you participate or not, unless you choose to tell them.

The survey closes on Sunday November 10 at 11:59 P.M. It should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Christine Szustaczek, B.A. (Hon.)
Masters Candidate in Communications Management
McMaster University

and Dr. Laurence B. Mussio
Assistant Professor, Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia, Faculty of
Humanities, McMaster University
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The first series of questions ask you about factors that impact an organization's reputation. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. There are 18 questions in total for this section.

1. I respect my organization

Strongly agree
Agree
Somewhat agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

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2. I admire my organization
3. I feel like I belong at my organization
4. The programs we offer are high quality
5. The programs we offer are innovative
6. The programs we offer provide good value
7. The organization is a good place to work
8. The organization cares about its employees
9. The organization rewards its employees fairly
10. The organization manages its finances effectively
11. The organization responds well to market opportunities
12. The organization is well positioned for future financial security
13. The organization has a clear vision for the future
14. The organization has highly capable leaders
15. The organization responds well to external trends
16. The organization is well respected by its peers
17. The organization is a good citizen in the communities in which it operates
18. People in the surrounding communities know a lot about the organization

The following questions ask you about factors that impact your sense of trust in the organization. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements (the same seven-point likert scale was provided). There are 15 questions in total for this section.

19. The organization conducts its business in an ethical and/or morally just way
20. The organization values cooperation and/or collaboration
21. The organization is concerned with the interests of all of its stakeholders
22. When the organization undergoes strategic planning, my area of the institution is represented
23. The organization communicates with me openly
24. The organization communicates with me consistently
25. I feel secure in my position in the organization
26. I feel good about the organization I work for
27. My supervisor is a trusted source of information about what is going on at the organization
28. My supervisor is responsive to employee ideas or questions
29. I trust the people that I work with most closely at the organization
30. The organization is capable of delivering on its commitments
31. The organization engages in open dialogue
32. The organization is honest
33. The organization is predictable

The next series of questions ask you to rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements that pertain to the nature and quality of your relationship with the institution (the same seven-point likert scale provided). There are 8 questions in this section.

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- 34. When the organization makes decisions that affect me, the process is transparent and clear
- 35. When the organization makes decisions that affect me, my interests are taken into account
- 36. The organization treats me fairly and justly
- 37. This organization can be relied upon to keep its promises
- 38. I feel that this organization is trying to maintain a long term commitment with me
- 39. I am glad that I work for this organization
- 40. Both the organization and I benefit from our relationship
- 41. I feel that I am important to this organization

The next question asks you to rank the importance of several factors that shape the institution's culture. There is only 1 question in this section.

42. Please rank the following factors in terms of their importance in shaping the corporate culture at the institution. Please select '1' for the most important factor and '6' for the least important factor.

- Leadership
- Programs
- Employees
- Mission/Vision/Values
- Students
- Physical Environment/Facilities

The next series of questions ask you to rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements that pertain to your sense of identification with the organization (the same seven-point likert scale provided). There are 6 questions in this section.

- 43. The organization shares my values and/or my beliefs
- 44. The organization's interests coincide with mine

45. Where does your sense of connection lie within the organization? Please select 1 for the area where your sense of connection is the strongest and 3 for the area where your sense of connection is the weakest.

- My sense of connection is with the institution as whole
- My sense of connection is with my immediate team
- My sense of connection is with my larger unit/Department/Faculty

- 46. I understand why my role in this organization matters (the same seven-point likert was provided scale).
- 47. Employees at my organization have the opportunity to act as ambassadors for the institution

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48. The organization makes it easy for me to share my opinion or experiences about my organization with my personal network

The following five open-ended questions invite you to elaborate on the organization's culture and character.

49. When you think about the organization's culture, what words come to mind?

50. How would you describe the prevailing atmosphere at the organization?

51. What are some of the rituals, routines or practices that help define the institution?

52. What are the values, beliefs, or characteristics that guide daily decisions at this institution or help people bond together?

53. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

The last five questions gather demographic data about individuals who participated in the survey.

54. How many years in total (not necessarily cumulatively) have you been employed by the institution, regardless of whether working full time or less than full time?

0-5

6-10

11-15

16-20

21-25

26-30

31+

Don't know

55. At which campus are you based?

Campus 1

Campus 2

Campus 3

Campus 4

Don't know

56. What is your employment status?

Full time faculty

Part time faculty

Partial load faculty

Part time support staff

Full time support staff

Part time administrative staff

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Full time administrative staff
Other
Don't know

57. What is your gender?

Male
Female
Other

58. What is your age?

16-25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56-65
66+
Other

Appendix B: Advisory Committee Member Survey Instrument

Thank you for participating in this voluntary, anonymous survey. It is part of a study that investigates the role that corporate culture plays in inspiring individuals to feel connected to an organization and to want to share stories about the organization with their personal networks.

The questions in this survey ask you about the organization where you volunteer as [an advisory committee member]. The results of this survey will help me to determine whether a corporate communications model that was created for private enterprise can be applied to a public, postsecondary institution in Ontario.

The study will help me to complete my Major Research Paper (MRP) a core requirement for the completion of my Master's degree. This study has not been commissioned by [name of institution]. No one at [name of institution] will know whether you participate or not, unless you choose to tell them. [Name of institution] will not be named in the final report.

The survey closes on November 24 at 11:45 P.M. It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Christine Szustaczek, B.A. (Hon.)
Masters Candidate in Communications Management
McMaster University

and Dr. Laurence B. Mussio
Assistant Professor, Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia, Faculty of
Humanities, McMaster University
lmussio@mcmaster.ca

The first series of questions ask you about factors that impact an organization's reputation. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the organization where you volunteer. There are 17 questions in total for this section.

1. I respect the organization

Strongly agree
Agree
Somewhat agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

TURNING BELIEF INTO ACTION

2. I admire the organization (same seven-point likert scale provided)
3. I feel like I belong at the organization
4. The programs offered at the organization are high quality
5. The programs offered at the organization are innovative
6. The programs offered at the organization provide good value
7. The organization is a good place to volunteer
8. The organization cares about its volunteers
9. The organization manages its finances effectively
10. The organization responds well to market opportunities
11. The organization is well positioned for future financial security
12. The organization has a clear vision for the future
13. The organization has highly capable leaders
14. The organization responds well to external trends
15. The organization is well respected by its peers
16. The organization is a good citizen in the communities in which it operates
17. People in the surrounding communities know a lot about the organization

The following questions ask you about factors that impact your sense of trust in the organization where you volunteer. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. There are 9 questions in total for this section (same seven-point likert scale provided).

18. The organization conducts its business in an ethical and/or morally just way
19. The organization values cooperation and/or collaboration
20. The organization communicates with me openly
21. The organization communicates with me consistently
22. I feel good about the organization I volunteer for
23. The organization is capable of delivering on its commitments
24. The organization engages in open dialogue
25. The organization is honest
26. The organization is predictable

The next series of questions ask you to rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements that pertain to the nature and quality of your relationship with the organization where you volunteer. There are 8 questions in this section (same seven-point likert scale provided).

27. When the organization makes decisions that affect me, the process is transparent and clear
28. When the organization makes decisions that affect me, my interests are taken into account
29. The organization treats me fairly and justly
30. The organization can be relied upon to keep its promises
31. I feel that this organization is trying to maintain a long term commitment with me
32. I am glad that I volunteer for this organization
33. Both the organization and I benefit from our relationship
34. I feel that I am important to the organization

TURNING BELIEF INTO ACTION

The next series of questions ask you to rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements that pertain to your sense of identification with the organization where you volunteer. There are 5 questions in this section (same seven-point likert scale provided).

- 35. The organization shares my values and/or my beliefs
- 36. The organization's interests coincide with mine
- 37. I understand why my role with the organization matters
- 38. I have the opportunity to act as an ambassador for the organization
- 39. The organization makes it easy for me to share my opinion or experiences about the organization with my personal network

The following 3 open-ended questions invite you to elaborate on the organization's culture and character.

- 40. When you think about the organization's culture, what words come to mind?
- 41. What are the values, beliefs, or characteristics that guide decisions made by your group or that help it bond together?
- 42. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

The last 4 questions gather demographic data about individuals who participated in the survey.

- 43. How many years in total (not necessarily cumulatively) have you volunteered at the organization?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31+
- Don't know

- 44. At which campus is the program for which you volunteer?

- Campus 1
- Campus 2
- Campus 3
- Campus 4
- I am not based at a particular campus
- Don't know

TURNING BELIEF INTO ACTION

45. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

46. What is your age?

- 16-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 66+
- Other

Appendix C: Questions – Leadership Interviews

1. What are the strong cultural values or beliefs that guide the daily decisions that are made at this organization?
2. How and to what extent do employees look to the leadership of this organization to set the tone or the example to follow here?
3. How and to what extent do leaders here shape the culture of the institution?
4. How would you describe the relationship between various operating groups (such as Departments, Faculties or Campuses)?
5. When you are involved in hiring decisions, how much emphasis do you place on cultural fit with the team, Department/Faculty, or organization?
6. What skills, behaviours, or performance measures are rewarded at this organization?
7. To what extent are people held accountable for their actions at this organization?
8. Do you feel that the leadership of the institution acts with integrity, humility, empathy or concern for others? Can you provide an example to demonstrate this behaviour?
9. To what extent does the organization value dialogue, listening, or hearing new ideas? How do you know?
10. To what extent do mechanisms exist for employees to influence policies, decisions, or strategic planning, or to provide feedback to the organization?
11. To what extent does management serve stakeholder interests before their own?
12. Are there any factors that keep the current culture in place and make change less likely?
13. What are the most frequent trust issues you encounter at work?
14. Are there any common stories or lore about this organization?
15. Is there anything that makes you proud to work for this organization? If so, what is it?

Appendix D: *Building Belief* S.A.T. (Snapshot Assessment Tool)¹

Research demonstrates that culture and reputation contribute to an organization's success, enhancing its ability to attract customers, increase productivity, and recruit and retain talent.

We also know that when companies have a well understood and accepted culture and reputation, this helps people to feel connected to an organization. The resulting sense of shared identity helps to build the trust, confidence and motivation people need to believe in a company and promote it within their networks.

The *Building Belief* S.A.T. (Snapshot Assessment Tool) provides you with a quick overview of how close your organization is to building shared belief and inspiring people to advocate on its behalf.

Rate each statement on a scale of 1-5, with the numbers corresponding to:

- 4 – This statement is absolutely correct and true.
- 3- This statement is mostly correct and true, but maybe not all of the time.
- 2- This statement is only somewhat correct and true.
- 1 – This statement is rarely true and correct, but it does occur on occasion.
- 0 – This statement is completely false

The quiz can be done two ways:

- 1) Add up the total score at the end out of 100. The higher your number, the more ready your organization is to implement the *Building Belief* model. Consider asking a cross-section of employees to take the survey and average out the responses.
- 2) Look at the average scores of your participants on a question by question basis, so you can identify the weaker links that need attention. The lower the number (out of 5), the more work that needs to be done on that dimension in particular to contribute to organizational readiness for *Building Belief*.

¹ A graphically-designed version of this assessment tool will be distributed at the capstone defense presentation.

TURNING BELIEF INTO ACTION

	My Score (0-4)	Statement
1.		I admire my organization.
2.		I feel like I belong at my organization.
3.		I think the product/service we offer is high quality.
4.		My organization has a clear vision for the future.
5.		My organization has highly capable leaders.
6.		My organization cares about its employees.
7.		People in the surrounding communities know a lot about my organization.
8.		My organization responds well to external trends.
9.		My organization conducts its business in an ethical or morally-just way.
10.		I feel secure in my position at my organization.
11.		My organization communicates openly with me.
12.		My organization treats me fairly and justly.
13.		My organization keeps its promises.
14.		My organization values collaboration or cooperation.
15.		My organization is concerned with the interests of all of its stakeholders.
16.		When my organization makes decisions that affect me, my interests are taken into account.
17.		My supervisor is a trusted source of information about what is going on here.
18.		My supervisor is responsive to employee ideas or questions.
19.		I feel that I am important to my organization.
20.		I feel like my organization is trying to maintain a long term commitment with me.
21.		My organization shares my values and / or beliefs.
22.		My organization's interests coincide with mine.
23.		I understand why my role in this organization matters.
24.		People at my organization have the opportunity to act as ambassadors for their institution.
25.		My organization makes it easy for me to share my opinion or experiences about it with my personal networks.
Total Score /100		

This worksheet is modeled after the Transition Readiness Assessment Tool by Dr. William Bridges. Source: http://www.wmbridges.com/articles/assessment_tools.html

Appendix E: Presentation Hand-out

Turning Belief into Action²

The Role of Relationships, Trust and Leadership in Building Shared Belief and Motivating Organizational Support

Prepared by: Christine Szustaczek Advisor: Dr. Laurence B. Mussio
MCM 740: Major Research Project / Capstone Presentation, February 10, 2014
Masters of Communication Management Program
Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia, McMaster University

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Abstract

This case study tests a new model for corporate communications called *Building Belief*, which urges a firm to constantly live up to its stated character and values to motivate its stakeholders to identify with it, support it, and promote it. The model was applied to a post-secondary institution in Ontario and found to be relevant to colleges and universities.

Building on published theories and best practices related to culture, reputation, trust, relationship management, communications, employee engagement, strategy, leadership, storytelling, and social media, this study asked key stakeholders to define their organization’s culture and rate the extent to which the organization shares their values.

This study finds that the institution’s stakeholders do have the potential to act as ambassadors, but just as in the private sector, a sense of shared belief is needed first. It recommends: the use of storytelling to build shared identity, the involvement of key stakeholders in the co-creation of a culture code, and the use of ongoing, two-way communications to deepen levels of engagement and strengthen people’s relationships with the institution.

As a result of this study, a new tool was created to help organizations quickly assess their level of shared values and connection with their stakeholders and gain insight into the dimensions that might need further attention to help build shared belief and turn it into action.

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About the Author

Christine Szustaczek (@szustac) has over 15 years of experience as a communications and fundraising professional working with numerous colleges and universities including U of T, McMaster, Guelph, Humber, George Brown, Mohawk, and Sheridan. She continually strives to create communications that spark an immediate connection with their audience so they are

² A graphically-designed version of this hand-out will be distributed at the capstone defense presentation. The intent of this piece is to be a high-level overview that is suitable for non-academic audiences. As such, the RQs are not mentioned and the seven findings of the study are condensed into five key points.

noticed and that resonate deeply so they are remembered. She is pursuing a Master of Communications Management (MCM) degree at McMaster University.

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The Arthur W. Page Society’s Building Belief Model:

What’s in it for me?

Culture and reputation contribute to an organization’s overall success – from attracting customers to increasing productivity, and recruiting and retaining employees. Ontario colleges and universities are being forced to differentiate based on areas of strength. The model can help post-secondary institutions leverage their unique cultures and reputations to further set themselves apart.

Foundations of the Model

Relationship management, trust, leadership, employee engagement, strategy, communications, storytelling, and social media

Related Theories

Organizational Identity & Identification Stakeholder Theory
Situational Theory of Publics Self-Determination Theory

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Putting the Model to the Test

Unnamed post-secondary institution in Ontario
Phase I: Employee Survey – 309 respondents (9.2%)
Phase II: Volunteer Survey – 186 respondents (20.6%)
Phase III: Qualitative Interviews – 10 leaders

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Findings

- 1. No strong, unifying interpretation of culture exists. The groups view culture differently.**

Employees

Creative 32
Innovative 30
Diverse 15
Top-down management 13
Collaborative 11
Disjointed 11
Bureaucratic 10
Divisive 10

Advisory Committee Members

Open-minded 24
Innovative 23
Collaborative 14
Inclusive 13
Creative 12
Professional 12
Diverse 9
Excellence 8

TURNING BELIEF INTO ACTION

Dynamic	9	Future-oriented	7
Student-focused	9	Honest	7
Transition	9	Respectful	6

2. Employees and advisory committee members think the organization has a good reputation but don't feel as strongly about their relationship and sense of identification with it.

	Adv.Cmte.	Employees	Delta
I respect the organization	94.1%	76.1 %	+18.0%
The organization has a clear vision for the future	62.9%	74.7%	-11.8%
I'm glad to work/volunteer at the organization	86.3%	76.2%	+10.1%
The organization shares my values/beliefs	63.4%	43.2%	+20.2%
My interests are considered when decisions are made	55.4%	19.1%	+36.3%
The organization wants a long-term commitment with me	72.2%	40.0%	+32.2%
The organization can be relied on to keep its promises	68.1%	39.5%	+28.6%
The organization communicates with me openly	74.7%	43.7%	+31.0%

3. The deepest bonds for employees are with specific teams, programs or industries – not the organization as whole.

My sense of connection lies with:

- my immediate team 69.3%
- the institution as a whole 17.5%
- my unit, department or Faculty 13.2%

4. People's ability to share their knowledge about the organization with their networks stands to be improved.

	Adv.Cmte.	Employees	Delta
People in the area know a lot about the organization	42.5%	45.6%	-3.1%
I can act as an ambassador for the organization	61.1%	60.3%	+0.8%
The organization makes it easy for me to do so	66.9%	40.5%	+26.4%

5. Employees feel that leadership impacts culture – not always positively.

What's the most important factor shaping culture?

Leadership	41.2%
Mission/Vision	20.4%
Students	15.4%
Programs	12.7%
Employees	10.4%
Surroundings	0%

TURNING BELIEF INTO ACTION

	Adv. Cmte.	Employees	Delta
The organization has highly capable leaders	71.3%	51.9%	+19.4%

How employees describe the atmosphere:

Positive	24
Forgotten/unappreciated	18
Excited about the future	16
Overworked/overstressed	16
Uncertain/unsettled	12
Divisive	9
Inconsistent	8
Low morale	7
Conflict	6
Distrust	6
Transition	6
Friendly	6
Secretive	6
Tense	6

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Recommendations for the Organization

- 1) Come to a consensus on character
- 2) Involve employees and actively listen to them
- 3) Find, engage and support the early influencers
- 4) Embrace storytelling and start with 'student success'

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Culture + Reputation + Values + Purpose = Corporate Character

A well understood and accepted corporate character makes an organization 'worthy of trust' and motivates stakeholders to believe in an organization and advocate on its behalf.

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Contributions to the Practice

Based on the questions used in this study, the *Building Belief* S.A.T. (Snapshot Assessment Tool) has been designed to provide any organization with a quick overview of how close it is to building shared belief and inspiring people to advocate on its behalf.