The University of Central Florida began planning for an inclusive college experience for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) at the end of 2014, and enrolled the first students in the fall of 2015. John Kotter’s eight-step change model describes a progression used by the planning team to build the inclusive experience.

Kotter’s model has been influential in business leadership for more than 20 years, and is widely accepted across all industries. His simple, clear description of the change process in his book Leading Change provides eight steps any organization can follow to implement a change process. Kotter’s award-winning article “Accelerate!” updates the process in light of today’s “100 mile per hour” society. He suggests that change is best led from up, down, and across an organization, and that change needs the agility to operate outside of “but in conjunction with” traditional hierarchies.

So, how can we use Kotter’s simple, clear leadership thinking to create and move forward inclusive initiatives in higher education? The following eight steps can guide the building of inclusive programs and practices for students with IDD and set the stage for sustainable change.

**Guiding Questions:**

- Do we have widespread buy-in?
- Is there a sense of urgency? If not, what can we do to generate it?
- What is our kick-off date?
- What other key dates need to be set well in advance?
FORM A POWERFUL COALITION

A key statement in Kotter’s second step is to “ask for an emotional commitment from key people.” He states that a “want-to and a get-to—not just a have-to” mindset is needed if the work group is to have maximum energy and brainpower. Work group members must want to be change agents and feel they have permission to do so.

Because an inclusive initiative is based on philosophical beliefs, it is possible that the planning team will have to defend its choices and answer tough questions about inclusion presented by both the school and community. Having the right people in place who represent a wide range of interests and expertise and who possess personal conviction about the topic is imperative.

Looking for different voices within the field and casting a wide net is one way to generate momentum and start pulling in key leaders and stakeholders from the community. With new ways to communicate and engage teams using technology-based platforms and tools, Kotter calls for a volunteer army that has size, speed, and power. Allowing multiple voices to be heard in advance of forming a more specific leadership team can generate interest, enthusiasm, and a sense of ownership. As leaders emerge, identifying members for the planning and advisory group is critical.

Guiding Questions:

- Who are our community partners in the area of IDD?
  - Local education agencies
  - Transition groups
  - Families
  - Employment agencies
  - Housing providers for persons with IDD
- What areas of campus will be directly impacted by this change? Who are the stakeholders who represent each area?
  - Housing
  - Enrollment services
  - Student support services
  - Faculty
  - Administration

CREATE A VISION FOR CHANGE

According to Kotter, clear vision can help everyone understand the “why” behind the change. With a concept such as “inclusion,” however, clarity is at times elusive. Shaping views on inclusion can be a challenge at every level of schooling.

Expect some discrepancy in stakeholders’ understanding of what inclusive higher education looks like. Community members and some educators may be coming from a more restrictive service delivery model that reflects K-12 educational practices rather than norms and expectations in higher education. Identify a work group member or outside speaker who can provide an overview of inclusion, or can help shape the group’s views and understanding of the term.

Deciding how inclusive the program will be is also a consideration to be addressed early in the process. What does inclusion mean to the group? Do all members share the same ideals in terms of an inclusive program? Will students be fully included, or will the program operate as a separate system? Ensuring that there is an expert on inclusion—even if not in the area of IDD—who can articulate the meaning and help craft the group’s mission statement is valuable.

Guiding Questions:

- What is the mission statement?
- How inclusive will the program really be?
- What is the maximum number of students we can support?
- How will tuition be paid?
- Will courses be credit-earning, audit, or other?
- Will there be special courses designed for the program? Realizing the impact these courses will have on the inclusive nature of the program, what is the rationale for separate classes?
COMMUNICATE THE VISION

The vision statement needs be communicated frequently and powerfully, and applied to all aspects of operations. For example, a focus on ability rather than disability may be emphasized campus-wide, indicated by changes to language such as a shifting to Student Support or Accessibility Services rather than Disability Services. Formally renaming such services using terms consistent with the new initiative illustrates that change in focus.

Using consistent language and phrases across the planning team, such as “our program will presume competence and will use person-centered planning,” will help guide others’ thinking about the potential of new students and begin setting the tone for the initiative.

At this stage, public announcements may also be appropriate, both in the community through traditional public relations sources and also through university communications with faculty and administrators. Sharing the mission and providing opportunities for stakeholders to ask questions and voice concerns might take place through brief announcements at faculty meetings and through announcements via e-mail and websites.

**Guiding Questions:**

- How can we clarify the differences between this initiative and traditional K-12 special education and transition services?
- How can we support workgroup or community members that may have not had access to or success with inclusive practices?
- What major points will be included in the “elevator speech” (i.e., short summary that clearly and quickly defines the initiative) that each group member can deliver fluently?
- How can we disseminate information about this initiative to the community? To faculty and administrators?
- What is the forum for people to express concerns?

REMOVE OBSTACLES

Moving the program forward means continually checking for barriers. Admissions, housing, and academic affairs should be represented during the development of the mission statement so confusion and obstacles are minimized and buy-in is maximized. Handling logistics (e.g., how students are coded in PeopleSoft or other management systems, how they are enrolled in courses) does present many potential obstacles, and it is important to address those with the relevant staff throughout the process.

In addition to admission considerations and obstacles, housing is also a consideration. Will students be housed in dorms with their peers? If so, what potential obstacles might stand in the way of student success in a new independent lifestyle?

Considering potential obstacles for faculty and staff is also necessary, but in all cases the first consideration should be: How are these obstacles like those of other incoming freshmen? How do we work around these obstacles for other students? Bringing the planning team back to this central question will help the program keep its inclusive focus.

**Guiding questions:**

- What types of housing are available? Which will be best for the new students?
- What supports already exist on campus for incoming students? How can these existing supports be used?
- How will the admissions process work--parallel system or adapted shared system?
CREATE SHORT-TERM WINS

According to Kotter, a feeling of victory and “visible wins” early on help fend off critics and negative thinkers who might hurt progress. Recognition for faculty and staff on campus never hurts, and receptions or a kick-off celebration provide a way for the community to come together and celebrate once the mission statement is in place and the planning team has the “elevator speech” on hand.

Broad communication about an achievement—even quick notices about the creation of the initiative, or updates through social media and other informal outlets—keeps the positive energy flowing for the team and promotes progress. It is also important early on to begin defining what a “win” is for the initiative. This might be accomplishing planning goals early on, receiving the first application to the new program, finding the right people to run the program, and setting up a structure for collecting data on the program itself once it begins.

Guiding questions:

- How will we define a “win” for this initiative?
- How can we identify and recognize the short-term wins?
- Who will be responsible for recognizing the wins within the planning group and in the broader community?

BUILD ON THE CHANGE

While the quick wins are important to keep the initiative in motion, Kotter argues that many change projects fail because victory is declared too early. The movement for more inclusive practices in education has been decades in the making in K-12 schools, and is still a limited reality for some. Change on college and university campuses takes time, so attention should focus on how to build the climate for change and the attitudes needed to sustain inclusive practices.

Reflection and goal setting should remain a continued part of the initiative, even once it has taken off. Taking opportunities to weave key language into mission statements at the departmental and university level should remain a focus. Collecting data on what’s working and building on those successes early on will keep energy flowing in a positive direction.

Introducing “College Prep” Saturday opportunities for adolescents and adults in the community is another way to inspire change. Many young people with IDD and their families never have considered college as an option, so inviting more participation from this group on campus may help plant the seed for new academic goals among these students. As students and families set goals to pursue postsecondary opportunities, local educational agencies may also take note and provide more academic opportunities, thus promoting independence.

Guiding questions:

- How can we use partnerships and community involvement to generate fresh ideas and perspectives?
- Are we providing a variety of ways for students with IDD and their families to learn about the program and visit campus?
- What regular meeting pattern do we have in place to reflect on successes and to set new goals?
- How do we assess effectiveness from multiple viewpoints?
ANCHOR THE CHANGES IN CORPORATE CULTURE

Top down, or bottom up—what direction will change take? In some institutions, a strong persuasive administrator might be the catalyst needed to set the culture for inclusion in place. But the message of inclusion will need to be shared broadly and deeply if the change is to be long lasting.

To make any change stick, you must ensure that it is reflected in every aspect of your organization. This will help give that change a solid place in your organization’s culture.

Publicly recognize key members of your original change coalition, and make sure the rest of the staffers—new and old—remember their contributions.

In “Blue Ocean Strategy,” W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne cite four hurdles to instituting broad change in an organization:

- **Cognitive shift for stakeholders.** This means making sure the mission is clear, and that gradually everyone at the institution can give the “elevator speech” on the topic of inclusion in higher education.

- **Resources.** Changing any organization requires shifting resources away from some areas and towards others. Using existing tutoring programs, peer support programs, etc., and adding to these resources financially (rather than building a competing system) creates more synergy.

- **Motivation.** A change in culture is dependent on having stakeholders at all levels who want to make the change.

- **Politics.** Organizational politics need to be considered when developing a program that may challenge long-held assumptions. Creating a program based on the expertise of the learning community and needs of students requires flexibility in the early planning stages, and creating a feeling among team members that anything is possible.

**Guiding questions:**

- Is our mission clear?
- Can everyone on our team deliver the elevator speech fluently?
- Are we allocating resources in a way that will allow us to reach our goals?
- Does our organizational culture support this change?

Kotter acknowledges that hierarchies are an important part of organizations. He also notes, however, that old methodologies often cannot handle rapid change. At a time of fast-paced change in how education is delivered, existing structures are already being challenged. Rethinking accessibility in higher education, re-crafting mission statements to incorporate more inclusive language, aligning resources, setting goals for a successful program, and taking note of key successes are specific ways that change theory can help leaders plan for inclusive postsecondary programs.

**REFERENCES**


The University of Central Florida is partnering with the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, Florida International University, and the Florida State College of Jacksonville to form the Florida Consortium on Inclusive Higher Education to accomplish three major objectives.

First, the Consortium will expand the number of inclusive postsecondary education programs on campuses across Florida for young adults with intellectual disabilities and their families. The Consortium will provide targeted technical assistance, professional development, initial funding support, and shared resources and strategies reflecting research-based methodologies and field best practices.

Secondly, the Consortium plans to collaborate with all Florida postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities and other key stakeholders to facilitate alignment of curriculum and credentialing among the institutions.

The third major objective of the Consortium is to develop a base of meaningful research in this area and to disseminate the research through peer-reviewed articles, conference presentations, and training.

To achieve these objectives, the Consortium is partnering with the Florida Department of Education’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and its Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services. The Consortium will also collaborate with other partners to design and deliver professional development, an annual symposium, and strategic program evaluation, and to ensure reporting to and collaboration with the Think College National Coordinating Center for Transition Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSIDs).

For more information, visit: http://ies.sdes.ucf.edu/ or email us at: ies@ucf.edu

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The CTP programs for students with intellectual disabilities served approximately 1,000 students through grants to 66 institutions in SY2015-2016. The programs, enacted through the HEOA, provide transition support for students with intellectual disabilities. Under provisions in the HEA, CTP programs for students with intellectual disabilities are not required to lead to a recognized credential (e.g., bachelor's). Students with developmental disabilities go to college: description of a collaborative transition project on a regular college campus. Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 17(4), 236â€“241. CrossRef Google Scholar. Eckes, S., & Ochoa, T. (2005). Students with disabilities: Transitioning from high school to higher education. Postsecondary Education Options for Students with Intellectual Disabilities. Paper presented at Research into Practice, Institute for Community Inclusion. Google Scholar. Lancaster, S., Mellard, D., & Hoffman, L. (2001). Current status on accommodating students with disabilities in selected community and technical colleges, University of Kansas, Center for Research on Learning, Division of Adult Studies. Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities present unique parenting challenges that may be stressful to caregivers, but may also bring out positive feelings such as empathy, gratitude and increased sense of purpose and priorities (Hastings & Taunt, 2002; Stainton & Besser, 1998). Caregiver Stress and Depression. The literature on family well-being in intellectual and developmental disabilities has primarily focused on the negative impact of the child with intellectual and developmental disabilities on maternal psychological well-being, often focusing on maternal stress and depre... Although informal supports, more than formal supports, are thought to play a critical role.