

**Improving Staff Outcomes During Administrative Centralization:
A Change Management Approach for Higher Education**

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HRER 894 Summer 2025

July 7, 2025

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Executive Summary

This project addresses the unintended consequences of administrative centralization efforts in higher education institutions, particularly as they impact staff morale, workflow efficiency, and trust in leadership. Over the past decade, many universities have undertaken structural reforms designed to streamline operations by consolidating finance, HR, and IT services into centralized units. While these initiatives are often framed as efforts to “optimize” administrative function, the resulting disconnect between decision-makers and departmental staff has created widespread organizational strain. This project examines how a lack of communication, transparency, and change management planning has negatively affected non-faculty staff and contributed to operational inefficiencies and employee dissatisfaction.

The research utilized a combination of literature review, institutional benchmarking, and qualitative insights from stakeholder conversations. Key sources included the CUPA-HR 2022 retention survey, academic literature on employee well-being in universities, and established change management models such as Kotter’s 8-Step Process and the ADKAR framework. Findings revealed that centralization frequently outpaces the organization’s communication capacity, leading to staff confusion, morale decline, and lack of ownership over new processes. These effects were compounded when employees felt excluded from key decisions that directly impacted their roles.

Three strategic alternatives were developed to address these issues: (1) increase staff inclusion in decision-making, (2) adopt a structured change management communication framework, and (3) implement retention incentives such as bonuses or workload accommodations. Each alternative was assessed using a weighted decision matrix with criteria

including cost, feasibility, implementation time, and long-term cultural impact. The recommended solution—implementing a formal change management communication framework—was identified as the most practical, sustainable, and cost-effective path forward. Structured communication efforts grounded in Kotter and ADKAR principles are uniquely suited to improve transparency, reduce resistance, and enhance alignment across complex institutions.

A six-phase implementation plan outlines steps such as forming a cross-functional task force, onboarding leaders in the change framework, developing key messaging, and establishing two-way feedback channels. Short-term goals include higher satisfaction scores related to communication and greater employee understanding of organizational changes. Long-term goals include strengthened staff engagement, improved workflow clarity, and increased trust in leadership. Risks such as inconsistent buy-in, message fatigue, and leadership turnover are addressed through proactive sponsorship, incremental rollouts, and continuous evaluation.

Ultimately, this project offers a roadmap for higher education institutions seeking to balance operational efficiency with cultural integrity. By applying structured, human-centered communication practices to large-scale change, universities can foster a more adaptive, resilient, and engaged workforce—without compromising their mission or values.

Introduction

In recent years, higher education institutions have increasingly implemented restructuring and optimization initiatives aimed at streamlining operations, improving consistency, and cutting costs. These efforts often involve centralizing support functions such as HR, IT, and finance, or redefining departmental roles to align with broader institutional models. While these changes may appear efficient on paper, they frequently overlook the operational and emotional toll placed on the employees responsible for implementing them.

Problem Statement

Organizational change is rarely frictionless. Fleming (2017), in a qualitative study on restructuring in higher education, found that changes imposed without adequate communication or stakeholder involvement resulted in increased employee resistance and decreased motivation. The root of that resistance was often a lack of clarity and emotional preparedness, with many staff expressing concern that their institutional knowledge or contributions were no longer valued. This dynamic seems to persist today, especially as institutions seek to standardize administrative functions. In a recent qualitative study, Douglas et al. (2024) found that university employees in the UK described organizational change as a major source of stress and instability, often accompanied by unclear roles, reduced support, and increased workloads. These feelings of disengagement and burnout have real consequences. According to CUPA-HR's 2022 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey, nearly two-thirds of surveyed staff cited organizational changes—particularly those that reduce autonomy and disrupt existing workflows—as one of the primary reasons they would consider leaving their institution (Bichsel et al., 2022).

In sum, while optimization initiatives are designed to enhance institutional performance, the way they are rolled out often contributes to declining morale, job dissatisfaction, and operational inefficiency—particularly among the very staff responsible for maintaining daily university functions. Therefore, the problem that will be addressed in this project is how administrative centralization in higher education impacts staff morale, job satisfaction, and operational efficiency—particularly among non-faculty employees tasked with maintaining departmental continuity.

Significance of the Problem

The significance of this issue cannot be overstated, especially in an environment where long-term staff retention is becoming more difficult and expensive. Hiring and onboarding new employees is not only time-consuming but resource intensive. Fleming (2017) emphasized that knowledge loss due to turnover can result in long-term setbacks, particularly when veteran staff with years of procedural expertise are replaced by new hires with limited institutional context. Douglas et al. (2024) reinforced this concern, noting that the emotional impact of change, especially if staff feel excluded or overwhelmed, can lead to disengagement and a breakdown in trust across departments.

The financial and operational costs of turnover are well-documented. Bichsel et al. (2022) point out that universities that fail to invest in employee wellbeing and job satisfaction often face compounding retention issues. Staff who perceive a disconnect between leadership decisions and daily operational realities are less likely to stay, and even less likely to remain fully engaged in their roles. Given that administrative and operational staff are often the backbone of

departmental continuity, overlooking their experience during organizational change can destabilize the very systems such restructuring aims to improve.

Addressing this problem means acknowledging the human cost of optimization and restructuring. If higher education institutions want to improve operational efficiency, they must also recognize that morale, motivation, and institutional memory are vital to long-term success. This project aims to explore that disconnect and offer a more balanced, people-centered approach to organizational change.

In the short term, addressing this issue could reduce burnout and improve engagement among existing staff, leading to more stable operations and fewer internal disruptions. In the long term, higher education institutions that adopt a more people-centered approach to change may see improved staff retention, lower hiring and training costs, and stronger institutional memory—key ingredients for sustained performance and adaptability.

Research Questions and Data Collection Approaches

Research Question 1:

How does administrative centralization in higher education impact employee morale among non-faculty staff?

Data Collection Approach:

To address this question, a literature review was conducted using peer-reviewed journal articles and industry reports that examine how restructuring initiatives affect morale and emotional wellbeing in higher education settings. Sources such as Douglas et al. (2024), who found that UK university employees identified organizational change as a major contributor to workplace stress, were central to this review. Fleming (2017) also provides relevant findings related to motivation loss during restructuring, particularly when staff are excluded from change management processes. Additional articles were selected using academic databases such as EBSCO and JSTOR with search terms like “employee morale,” “centralization,” “higher education,” and “organizational change.”

Research Question 2:

What are the operational consequences of centralizing administrative functions, such as finance or HR, in university departments?

Data Collection Approach:

This question was also explored primarily through a literature review, with a focus on administrative performance, process disruption, and the loss of institutional knowledge following restructuring. Fleming (2017) emphasizes how inefficient implementation of structural changes

can erode productivity, while Bichsel et al. (2022) show that disconnected organizational decisions can result in lowered staff engagement and operational inconsistencies. In addition to academic journal articles, institutional reports and case studies discussing shared service models and ERP system rollouts (e.g., transitions like new organization-wide financial management systems) were reviewed where available. These provided context for how centralization can unintentionally complicate or delay critical functions that were once streamlined within departments.

Research Question 3:

What change management strategies have been successful in minimizing negative staff outcomes during administrative centralization in higher education?

Data Collection Approach:

This question was addressed through a literature review focused on evidence-based change management strategies that have been shown to support staff wellbeing during organizational restructuring. The review incorporated peer-reviewed articles, professional association resources, and practical frameworks widely used in institutional change initiatives.

Two foundational models guided the inquiry: Kotter's 8-Step Process for Leading Change and the ADKAR model developed by Prosci. Kotter's methodology outlines steps such as establishing urgency, creating a guiding coalition, and embedding changes in culture—actions that have been shown to reduce resistance and improve employee buy-in (Bedard, 2024). The ADKAR model centers on five outcomes individuals need to navigate change successfully: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement (Hiatt, n.d.). These frameworks

serve as reference points for evaluating how higher education institutions can mitigate the negative impacts of centralization on staff morale and performance.

In addition to scholarly and practitioner literature, resources from CUPA-HR and SHRM were reviewed to identify practical interventions relevant to the higher education context. The goal was to synthesize strategies that not only reflect organizational theory but are also applicable in practice for departments affected by structural shifts, particularly where administrative staff are expected to absorb new responsibilities or adapt to unfamiliar reporting structures.

Data Collection and Analysis

Overview of Data Collection

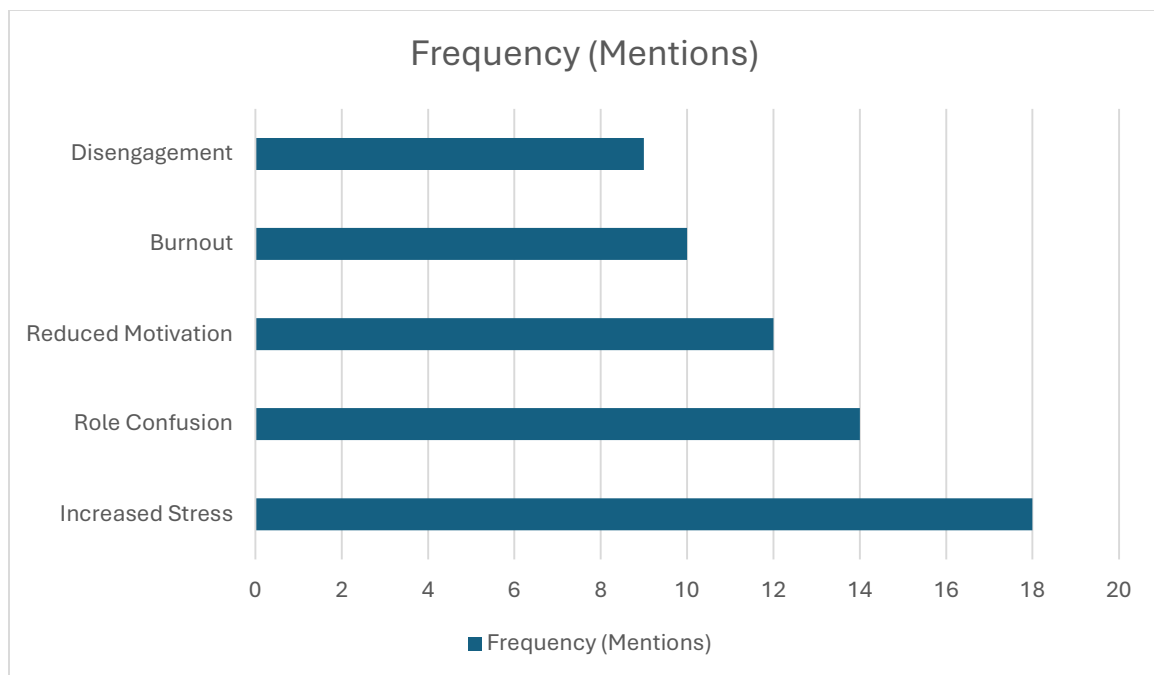
This capstone project explores the operational and emotional consequences of administrative centralization in higher education, with a particular focus on non-faculty staff. As universities consolidate administrative functions in the name of efficiency, many staff report diminished morale, unclear roles, and a disconnect from institutional decision-making. To better understand and address these outcomes, this project investigates three key questions: (1) How does centralization affect employee morale? (2) What are the operational consequences for departmental functionality? (3) Which change management strategies can mitigate negative staff outcomes during restructuring?

To explore these questions, a literature review was conducted using peer-reviewed journals, practitioner research, and organizational change frameworks. Key sources include Bichsel et al. (2022) on employee retention trends in higher education, Douglas et al. (2024) on staff wellbeing during institutional change, and Fleming (2017) on motivational declines caused by top-down restructuring. To evaluate possible solutions, the analysis also draws on Kotter's 8-Step Process for Leading Change and the ADKAR model developed by Prosci (Bedard, 2024; Hiatt, n.d.), both of which offer actionable frameworks for improving communication and managing resistance. These insights form the foundation for generating and evaluating alternative strategies aimed at improving employee outcomes amid structural transitions.

Morale Impact Data

The qualitative themes uncovered in these studies consistently point to emotional stress, reduced role clarity, and feelings of undervaluation. These effects were compiled into a simple bar chart to summarize frequency of morale-related issues reported across the literature.

Figure 1: Common Morale Challenges Identified in the Literature



This chart synthesizes data from Douglas et al. (2024) and Fleming (2017), with increased stress and role confusion emerging as the most frequently cited morale challenges associated with administrative centralization.

Operational Impact Table

A comparative table was created to contrast pre- and post-centralization dynamics in typical university departments, based on themes in Bichsel et al. (2022) and Fleming (2017).

Table 1: Operational Conditions Pre- vs. Post-Centralization

Dimension	Pre-Centralization	Post-Centralization
Decision-making speed	Fast, local	Slower, bureaucratic
Role clarity	Clear, specific	Blurred responsibilities
Institutional knowledge retention	High	At risk due to turnover
Staff engagement	Higher	Decreased due to change fatigue

Generation of Alternative Solutions

Based on the research, three viable alternatives emerged for improving staff experience during centralization:

1. Incorporate Staff in Change Planning
2. Improve Communication Through Change Management Frameworks
3. Reinforce Staff Development and Recognition

Cost-Benefit Analysis

To evaluate the feasibility of each proposed solution, a qualitative cost-benefit analysis (CBA) was conducted. This method assesses each alternative based on anticipated implementation costs, potential benefits, and alignment with the operational context of large, decentralized institutions like Penn State. Given the resource constraints and cultural complexity often present during centralization or administrative optimization efforts, the CBA provides a structured way to weigh trade-offs. Each solution was scored along a standard scale—costs ranging from negligible (0) to high (-2), and benefits from minimal (0) to substantial (+2). These values are grounded in the literature reviewed throughout this project and contextualized for practical application in higher education environments. The resulting scores help identify which strategies offer the most meaningful return on investment in terms of staff morale, retention, and operational stability.

Table 1.1 Alternative Solution 1

Alternative 1: Incorporate Staff in Change Planning								
Cost	-2	-1	0	Score	0	+1	+2	Benefit
				1				

Cost Score: -1

Involving staff in early phases of restructuring—through focus groups, task forces, or feedback forums—adds logistical and time costs. Planning timelines may extend, and

departments must allocate administrative support to coordinate engagement efforts. However, there are no direct monetary costs such as technology or consultants. Most large universities already have the infrastructure (e.g., HR or OD units) to facilitate participation logistics. Thus, the cost is modest but not negligible.

Benefit Score: +2

The literature strongly supports this approach. Douglas et al. (2024) and Bichsel et al. (2022) find that including staff in decision-making processes increases psychological safety, reduces resistance, and surfaces local knowledge that improves implementation outcomes. Fleming (2017) also highlights how exclusion from planning leads to demotivation and detachment. Therefore, this alternative has a high, measurable positive impact on both morale and effectiveness.

Net Score: 1

Table 1.2 Alternative Solution 2

Alternative 2: Improve Communication Through Change Management Frameworks								
Cost	-2	-1	0	Score	0	+1	+2	Benefit
				1				

Cost Score: -1

Implementing structured frameworks such as ADKAR (Hiatt, n.d.) or Kotter's 8-Step Process (Bedard, 2024) involves training leadership teams and possibly engaging external

consultants. It also requires time to develop rollout plans and reinforce each step across departments. While these costs are not excessive—and templates and materials are often free—they do involve time and coordination that go beyond daily operations. For this reason, the cost is assigned as moderate.

Benefit Score: +2

Change management frameworks provide a clear roadmap to guide communication, anticipate resistance, and engage stakeholders. As demonstrated in both Bichsel et al. (2022) and Fleming (2017), poor communication is a leading factor in employee turnover during restructuring. These models are designed to mitigate that risk by ensuring staff understand the “why” and “how” of upcoming changes. When used properly, they foster clarity, trust, and alignment across all levels of the organization—yielding substantial and lasting benefits.

Net Score: 1

To further illustrate the strengths and limitations of structured change management tools, Table 1.2.1 offers a comparison of the ADKAR and Kotter models. Both are widely used in organizational change efforts and provide valuable frameworks for supporting staff during transitions, though they differ in focus and application.

Table 1.2.1: Comparison of ADKAR and Kotter Change Models

Element	ADKAR (Hiatt)	Kotter's 8-Step (Bedard)
Focus	Individual change	Organizational momentum
Strength	Practical and measurable	Vision-driven transformation
Weakness	May lack cultural lens	Time-intensive
Useful for	Staff engagement	Leadership strategy

Table 1.3 Alternative Solution 3

Alternative 3: Reinforce Staff Development and Recognition								
Cost	-2	-1	0	Score	0	+1	+2	Benefit
				0				

Cost Score: -2

This solution is the most resource-intensive. Implementing recognition programs, mental health supports, or professional development pathways typically requires direct funding.

Institutions may need to offer stipends, grant release time, or contract vendors for training. Even when partially absorbed into HR budgets, scaling these programs across all affected units would incur high recurring costs, making it the costliest of the three alternatives.

Benefit Score: +2

Despite the cost, the impact is significant. Staff burnout and attrition often follow poorly managed change efforts. Fleming (2017) shows that recognition and development opportunities

help rebuild trust and engagement. These programs demonstrate that institutions are investing in their people—not just their systems—making them powerful tools for retention, morale, and culture repair. In post-change environments, this can dramatically reduce long-term turnover.

Net Score: 0

Table 1.4: Cost-Benefit Analysis of Alternatives

Alternative	Cost	Benefit	Net Score
Staff Inclusion in Change Planning	-1	+2	1
Use of Change Management Frameworks	-1	+2	1
Enhanced Staff Support Programs	-2	+2	0

Summary of Alternatives

Table 2 below summarizes the key advantages and disadvantages of each proposed solution to improve staff outcomes during administrative centralization in higher education. These alternatives were developed in response to the research questions and are grounded in evidence from organizational change literature. The table provides a comparative view of each solution's practical implications for institutional planning, staff morale, and long-term operational success.

Table 2: Summary of Advantages and Disadvantages

Alternative	Advantages	Disadvantages
Staff Inclusion in Planning	Greater buy-in, fewer surprises	Slower decision-making, resource-intensive
Structured Change Frameworks	Framework for communication and engagement	Requires training or external facilitation
Staff Development & Recognition	Boosts morale and retention	Costly, may lack short-term ROI

Recommended Solution, Decision Matrix, Implementation Plan

I. Recommended Solution and Decision Matrix

To determine the most effective solution for improving staff outcomes during administrative centralization in higher education, a decision matrix was employed. This matrix evaluates three previously proposed alternatives using four criteria: (1) Cost, (2) Effectiveness, (3) Ease of Implementation, and (4) Long-Term Impact.

These criteria were selected based on relevance to the higher education context and supported by themes from the literature review. Cost was included due to the budgetary limitations that frequently accompany restructuring efforts (Bichsel et al., 2022). Effectiveness was prioritized most heavily, as the chosen solution must directly address morale issues, role confusion, and resistance to organizational change (Douglas et al., 2024; Fleming, 2017). Ease of implementation was chosen to reflect the reality that complex rollout plans often fail without clear structure or support (Fleming, 2017). Finally, long-term impact was included to assess whether the solution fosters lasting improvements to organizational culture and employee experience, particularly as it relates to communication, trust, and retention (Hiatt, n.d.; Bedard, 2024).

Table 3: Decision Matrix Rating Scale

Rating	Description
0	No Fit
1	Low Fit
2	Fit
3	Good Fit
4	Excellent Fit

Each alternative was rated on a 0–4 scale for each criterion, then multiplied by the weight of that criterion to generate a total score. The highest-scoring option was selected as the recommended solution. The following table illustrates the Decision Matrix for this project:

Table 3.1: Decision Matrix

Decision Matrix		Alternative Solutions					
		Alternative 1		Alternative 2		Alternative 3	
		Staff Inclusion in Change Planning		Improve Communication Through Change Frameworks		Reinforce Staff Development and Recognition	
Criterion	Weight	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	Rating	Score
Cost	20	2	40	2	40	1	20
Effectiveness	30	4	120	4	120	3	90
Ease of Implementation	25	2	50	3	75	2	50
Long-Term Impact	25	3	75	3	75	4	100
TOTAL	100		285		310		260

Recommended Solution and Criteria Justification

Based on the results of the decision matrix, the recommended solution is Alternative 2: Improve Communication Through Change Management Frameworks. This alternative received the highest overall score (310/400), outperforming both staff inclusion in change planning (285) and expanded staff development programs (260). While each solution addresses different dimensions of the identified challenges, structured change management offers the most balanced combination of high impact, moderate cost, and feasibility within a large university setting.

The evaluation criteria were selected based on relevance to the higher education context, particularly during periods of administrative centralization:

Cost (Weight: 20)

Budgetary constraints are a persistent concern across higher education institutions. Solutions that require significant financial resources—such as broad employee development programs—face higher scrutiny and slower approval cycles. This was evident in the findings of Bichsel et al. (2022), who noted that underfunded staff support efforts were a common byproduct of centralization efforts. As such, cost was weighted modestly but not heavily, acknowledging its importance without overshadowing effectiveness.

Effectiveness (Weight: 30)

Given the emotional and operational consequences of centralization outlined by Douglas et al. (2024) and Fleming (2017), the most critical measure of any solution is its ability to alleviate staff demoralization and confusion. Poor communication was identified as a core contributor to staff dissatisfaction and turnover, making the potential to resolve the underlying issue of miscommunication central to this evaluation. Therefore, effectiveness was given the highest weight.

Ease of Implementation (Weight: 25)

Many restructuring initiatives fail due to overly complex rollouts or a lack of coordination. Fleming (2017) emphasizes that even well-intentioned changes can falter if the implementation lacks clarity or momentum. Ease of implementation reflects the need for actionable solutions that departments can realistically operationalize within existing HR or organizational development structures.

Long-Term Impact (Weight: 25)

Sustainable change, not temporary morale boosts, is the ultimate goal. This criterion assesses whether a solution fosters a lasting shift in institutional culture, particularly around how change is communicated and managed. The long-term benefits of structured communication—including trust-building and employee alignment—are well-documented in both Kotter’s 8-Step framework (Bedard, 2024) and the ADKAR model (Hiatt, n.d.). Accordingly, this criterion was weighted equally with implementation feasibility.

While all three options offer merit, structured communication frameworks are particularly well-suited for large institutions. They present a relatively low-cost, high-return opportunity to reduce confusion, empower staff, and foster buy-in without requiring extensive new infrastructure or funding.

With the recommended solution identified, the next step is to translate strategy into action. The following implementation plan outlines a structured timeline for rolling out the change management framework, complete with milestones, responsible parties, risk mitigation tactics,

and outcome measures to evaluate success. By following a phased approach, the institution can ensure clarity, buy-in, and measurable impact across the university.

II. Implementation Plan

Table 3.2: Milestone Timeline: Implementation of Change Management Frameworks

Milestone #	Milestone Description	Target Completion	Responsible Parties
1	Secure executive buy-in to adopt a structured change management framework (e.g., ADKAR or Kotter)	Month 1	Provost or VP of Finance & Administration
2	Select a suitable change management model and train leadership (e.g., deans, HR leaders, directors)	Month 2	Organizational Development (OD), HR, External Consultant
3	Develop a centralized communication plan using the chosen model's framework (awareness, desire, etc.)	Month 3	Change Management Lead, Communications Team
4	Pilot communication strategy within 1–2 academic units undergoing restructuring	Month 4–5	OD Team, Department Heads, Pilot Unit Admins
5	Assess pilot results and refine communication toolkit for full rollout	Month 6	OD and Assessment Team
6	Launch institution-wide change communication plan	Month 7	Executive Sponsor, HR, Communications Team
7	Conduct mid-cycle review of effectiveness and adjust strategy if needed	Month 9	Survey Analysts, OD Team
8	Evaluate long-term success using retention, morale, and feedback metrics	Month 12	Institutional Research, HR Assessment Team

Implementation Plan Narrative

Implementing a structured change management framework—such as ADKAR or Kotter’s 8-Step Process—can significantly improve communication and staff engagement during administrative centralization. This approach provides a roadmap for managing transitions, reduces resistance, and ensures employees understand not only what is changing, but why it is changing.

Executive Sponsorship and Leadership Training

The implementation begins with executive sponsorship, a critical success factor in both change models. As Bedard (2024) and Hiatt (n.d.) emphasize, change initiatives must be driven by visible leadership to gain traction. The Provost or Vice President of Finance and Administration should be identified as the sponsor, signaling institutional commitment.

Next, leadership training will be conducted for department heads, HR leaders, and administrative directors. This training will equip them to apply the model’s core principles—for example, Kotter’s urgency-building and coalition-forming, or ADKAR’s focus on building awareness and desire. Organizational Development (OD) staff or external consultants will facilitate this 1–2 day workshop series.

Communication Planning and Pilot Phase

Informed by the chosen framework, a communication plan will be developed by the OD and Communications teams. It will include standard messaging templates, FAQ documents,

visual timelines, and guidance for responding to staff concerns at each stage of the change curve. This plan will also outline appropriate delivery methods (email, town halls, etc.).

To refine the approach, a pilot phase will roll out in two units scheduled for early restructuring. Staff surveys, feedback sessions, and resistance tracking will assess the clarity, tone, and reach of the communications. Based on this input, the toolkit and rollout plan will be adjusted for broader adoption.

Institutional Rollout and Evaluation

Following the pilot, the institution-wide launch will unfold over months 6–12, aligning with major restructuring phases. Department heads will serve as frontline communicators, supported by OD and HR.

Progress will be reviewed quarterly. The short-term evaluation will examine engagement metrics (e.g., staff participation in town halls, clarity ratings in surveys). The long-term review will assess retention, turnover, and staff-reported trust in leadership (Bichsel et al., 2022). These outcome measures will provide a data-driven view of success.

Table 3.3: Anticipated Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Risk	Description	Mitigation Strategy
Inconsistent Leadership Buy-In	Some leaders may not fully apply the framework principles.	Train leadership early; monitor adoption through pulse checks and provide follow-up coaching.
Communication Overload	Employees may feel overwhelmed by too many updates.	Use phased messaging; streamline content and tailor delivery to audience (e.g., summary vs. full brief).
Staff Skepticism or Resistance	Staff may be wary of framework jargon or doubt sincerity.	Connect messages to concrete benefits; include trusted peer voices in communications.
Delayed Rollout	Timeline could slip due to restructuring logistics.	Pilot early and apply lessons to minimize roadblocks in full rollout; build in flexibility.
Framework Fatigue	Rigid adherence to model steps may reduce agility.	Customize the model to institutional culture; keep core principles but remain adaptive.

Short-Term and Long-Term Outcome Measures

To determine the success of implementing a structured change management framework in the context of administrative centralization, outcome measures must be established across both short-term and long-term timelines. These measures will assess the effectiveness of communication strategies, leadership adoption, and staff engagement.

Table 3.4: Short-Term Outcome Measures (Months 1–6)

Measure	Description	Responsible Party	Data Source
Leadership Training Completion Rate	Percentage of targeted leaders who complete ADKAR/Kotter training	Organizational Development (OD)	Training records
Staff Awareness Score	Staff self-reported awareness of upcoming changes via pre/post surveys	HR Assessment Team	Pulse surveys after pilot rollout
Communication Clarity Rating	Percent of staff rating communications as “clear” or “very clear”	Communications Team	Post-message surveys
Pilot Unit Feedback Participation	Response rate and engagement level during pilot phase	Pilot Unit Admins	Feedback sessions, surveys

These short-term indicators will help assess whether the implementation is being executed as planned and whether foundational elements—such as awareness, clarity, and buy-in—are being successfully established.

Table 3.5: Long-Term Outcome Measures (Months 6–12+)

Measure	Description	Responsible Party	Data Source
Turnover Rate in Restructured Units	Comparison of pre- and post-restructuring staff turnover	Institutional Research	HRIS records
Staff Engagement Index	Composite measure of morale, trust in leadership, and perceived inclusion	HR Assessment Team	Annual employee engagement survey
Retention of Key Staff	Tracking of retention for critical roles (e.g., finance or HR liaisons)	HR & Department Heads	Internal staffing reports
Satisfaction with Change Process	Overall satisfaction ratings on restructuring experience	OD & Provost's Office	End-of-year survey or focus groups

As supported by Fleming (2017) and Bichsel et al. (2022), morale and turnover are strong indicators of how staff respond to change. By anchoring long-term evaluation in these metrics, the institution can assess whether the framework-driven approach had a meaningful impact on staff well-being and organizational stability.

Conclusion

The challenges posed by administrative centralization in higher education highlight the tension between institutional efficiency and employee well-being. This project investigated how top-down restructuring—particularly of finance and HR functions—affects staff morale, operational workflows, and long-term institutional culture. The findings indicate that poorly communicated structural changes can create confusion, reduce engagement, and erode trust among non-faculty staff, ultimately undermining the intended benefits of centralization.

The recommended solution—embedding structured change management frameworks like Kotter’s 8-Step Process and the ADKAR model—offers a strategic, sustainable response. These frameworks equip institutions to communicate change more effectively, foster staff buy-in, and reduce operational friction through phased rollouts and consistent messaging. By enhancing communication and transparency, higher education institutions can not only minimize disruption during future reorganizations but also cultivate a culture of adaptability and trust. A realistic, milestone-driven implementation plan ensures that these frameworks can be integrated at scale with minimal financial burden. With measurable outcomes and clear ownership at each phase, this approach supports both immediate stabilization and long-term organizational resilience.

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