A Reflection on Change and Academic Integrity During COVID-19

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I am an educational development specialist working at the University of Saskatchewan where I am the contact for academic integrity matters at the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning. How has COVID-19 impacted my work when it comes to academic integrity? Most obvious has been the increase in the proportion of my time devoted to the topic. Whereas previously I may have spent five to ten days each year on academic integrity workshops and resources, now I am spending at least one day a week on this area (from about 2% of my time to 20%). In this short reflection, I expand on this increased activity and the nature of the change process using the five key outcomes of an individual and organizational change management model known by its acronym, *ADKAR* (Prosci, n.d.).

"A" is for Awareness of the need for change. In March 2020, across Canada, higher education shifted to remote teaching and learning to reduce the risks associated with the COVID-19 global pandemic. An immediate implication was that in-person supervised final exams could not occur as usual. Some instructors replaced the final exam with another kind of assessment, while others shifted to an open book exam to be written on a scheduled day in a 24-hour period. Instructors warned that their students would cheat on the exams. My work, and that of my colleagues, became about helping instructors to communicate with their students about academic integrity expectations and to quickly adapt their exam formats and even their assessment purposes.

"D" is for Desire to support the change. In April 2020, some instructors reported that they had detected or suspected exam cheating. Some uncovered cheating via file-sharing sites. Some reported that final exam grades were higher or of a different distribution compared to past years. Although there had been a disruption to so many teaching and learning variables during the so called "pivot", many blamed the unsupervised and 24-hour nature of the exams as the cause of the academic misconduct. Many academic leaders said they would not require or recommend a 24-hour window again and asked for online invigilation services to be made available at the institutional level. While existing distributed programs and distance courses carried on with preset invigilation practices, only one program subscribed to a service and this was as an accreditation requirement. When the costs of online invigilation were determined to be too great and the questions of privacy and effectiveness too numerous, a desire for change in the approach to assessment was established.

"K" is for Knowledge of how to change. By May 2020, many instructors had accepted the need for change that remote teaching and learning had caused. There was widespread openness toward new ideas and approaches to assessments in the remote context. For some, the desire for automated grading became apparent for their large enrolment courses. For others, when tasked with developing well-designed open book exams, they realized both the challenge and opportunity of higher order application, analysis, evaluation-oriented questions. Our Centre responded with a plethora of online workshops and resources about assessment options and, where a preference for examinations remained, for making use of the exam functions in the learning management system. At each opportunity, I shared the research about the multi-faceted conditions linked to academic misconduct (Lang, 2013).

"A" is for Ability to demonstrate the skills and behaviours required for the change. In this case, the skills and behaviours are those required to implement new or adjusted assessments, clarify and teach about the rules for academic integrity, and build relationships of respect between instructors and learners. Anecdotally, we have heard instructors describe their approaches, lessons learned, and design adjustments for Winter 2021. In sessions designed for practice and feedback, we have observed participants' ability to craft higher order questions suitable for open book exams. To enable the shift to alternative assessments, additional funding was made available for student marking assistants. But this is scant evidence of the ability of instructors to enact the strategies that make academic misconduct less likely.

"R" is for Reinforcement to make the change stick. Whether evidence will suggest that new and adjusted practices reduce academic misconduct in our context remains to be seen. Without systematic collection of academic misconduct incidence data, the reinforcement will be hit and miss. At the level of the institution, a project has been initiated by the collegial governance committee with the mandate for teaching and learning (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.) I have been asked to participate as a subject matter specialist. The proposed focus is on the near, intermediate, and longer-term strategies for improved attention and action related to academic integrity and assessment. Activities like this at the governance level have the potential to reinforce the changes and, according to the ADKAR model, it is reinforcement that is often missed to the detriment of change management processes.

As I reflect on the past seven months, I note that it was the speed of change early on that led me to join a weekly participant-driven online meeting facilitated by Dr. Sarah Elaine Eaton at the University of Calgary. Through 'Integrity Hour' I have gathered useful resources and evidence-informed insights when they have been most urgently needed and established beneficial collegial relationships with respected peers. Writing this reflection for the CPAI reinforces the value of taking the time, as a professional, for "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1983) and, as an educational developer, to share "practice wisdom" (Bamber & Stephani, 2015). Said in simple terms, these authors call professionals to conceptualize and disseminate the knowledge and thinking that occurs during and as a result of experience.

I have composed this reflection to respond to their call and done so during a time of increasing individual and collective anxiety across Canada. I am grateful that most in-person activities were moved to remote delivery at my university to allow a safer way to carry on with teaching and learning. At the same time, I recall a variably phrased and variously attributed recommendation to "never waste a good crisis." Indeed, some of the changes we have made in response to COVID-19 should and undoubtably will be retained. I hope we—those of us who care about student learning in higher education—can incorporate what we have learned during this unprecedented time to foster more academic integrity more of the time.

References

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