SWIMMING LESSONS: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY OF EMPLOYEE

ONBOARDING AND ENGAGEMENT IN ENROLLMENT AND STUDENT AFFAIRS

by

LYNDSEY S. WILLIAMS MAYWEATHER

(Under the Direction of Laura Bierema)

ABSTRACT

Starting a new job can be likened to be thrown into the deep end of a pool and being expected to swim with no prior lessons. Not only is this practice dangerous at actual swimming pools it is also detrimental in the workforce. Student Affairs is a high turnover field with over 50% of new employees leaving the field completely within the first 5 years (Tull, 2006). Onboarding to a new work environment serves multiple purposes ranging from socializing new employees on organizational culture (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015) to maintaining compliance (Bailey, 2016). Onboarding is considered a high-impact practice that leads to high performance in employees (Selden & Sowa, 2015). Researchers (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Klein et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2009; Tull, 2006) have noted when practices such mentoring, coaching, and ongoing professional development are embedded in onboarding there are benefits such as increased job performance and lower turnover rates. The study of employee onboarding practices within Student Affairs is limited (Tull, 2006). A team of action researchers at Border University, a pseudonym for study site, set out to discover and implement methods to increase support in the first year of employment to enhance employee onboarding among staff in the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs. The question this research attempted to answer

was what is learned at the individual, group, and system levels in a higher education work setting using action research when a division embraces onboarding for new employee development? From the action research project, we saw that a.) Connections are made from a result of onboarding that led to better experiences for employees (new and supervisors); b.) It takes a dedicated village to onboard new employees; c.) More training is needed on what onboarding is and how to do it properly; d.) The Inform-Welcome-Guide framework (Klein & Heuser, 2008) provides a structure for student affairs to create a divisional new employee onboarding process. Final conclusions include the need to create an environment where staff learning is encouraged and shared throughout the onboarding process from all levels. In addition, this information must be made accessible in a practical way for future student affairs professionals to implement. This dissertation is presented as the final requirement for graduation and provides future direction for creating, implementing, and assessing onboarding programs designed specifically for employees within Student Affairs in a higher education work setting.

INDEX WORDS: Onboarding, Employee Engagement, Student Affairs, Action Research

SWIMMING LESSONS: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY OF EMPLOYEE

ONBOARDING AND ENGAGEMENT IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

by

LYNDSEY S. WILLIAMS MAYWEATHER

BS, Clemson University, 2010

MS, The Florida State University, 2012

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2022

SWIMMING LESSONS: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY OF EMPLOYEE

ONBOARDING AND ENGAEGMENT IN ENROLLMENT AND STUDENT AFFAIRS

by

LYNDSEY S. WILLIAMS MAYWEATHER

Major Professor: Laura Bierema
Committee: Wendy Ruona
Caleb S. Han
Kathy L. Guthrie

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2022

DEDICATION

To my ancestors Darcus & A.C. for instilling in me the spirit of welcoming and kindness. To my mother, Carol, for her guidance and enduring love. And to my Village for their support and prayers of protection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give all honor, praise, and thanks to God on high; without her grace and mercy I would not be at this point. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their endless support. Specifically, my mother Carol whose prayers have kept me. I'd like to thank my Atlanta based family and friends who housed and fed me on weekends I had class (Crystal, Rodney, Tracey, Kia, Candace, & Fricretia) thank you for always opening your homes, hearts, and wallets! I'd like to thank my colleagues who went on this journey with me to study onboarding and create something from scratch that would make all of us proud; this project literally would not have happened without you! I'd like to thank my OG SLE crew for the lunches and pep talks. I'd like to thank my cohort mates for the support, especially there at the end (Lauren, Wade, & Erica you helped offer the push over the finish line). Lauren, I'm forever grateful for our sisterhood and friendship found through this experience. Many thanks to my committee for their guidance along the journey… Caleb, your positive outlook and crash courses on spss will forever be appreciated; Wendy, your laughter and jovial spirit go unmatched; Kathy, I'm so glad our journey from masters to doctorate has continued and your support from afar felt closer than ever (the forgiveness clock kept me on time); Laura, your determination, strength, and tenacity were extremely helpful and admired throughout this process. Many thanks to my friends near and far who continued to check-in on me, prayed for/with me, and offered words of encouragement throughout the process (21 I.F., Princess, Ayesha, Carolyn, Christie, Kenyatta, Honey, & Boss). I'm sure I've forgotten someone, so I'd also like to offer a big thank you to everyone I've crossed paths with during this journey!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION & THE LITERATURE

An exploration of the literature that supports the importance of the study is provided in

this chapter which is divided into the following sections: 1.) Student Affairs History and

Professional Competencies; 2.) Onboarding; 3.) Employee Engagement; 4.) Connecting

Onboarding and Employee Engagement for Future Research; 5.) Purpose and Research

Questions. First, a vignette designed to illustrate the research problem is offered to open the

chapter and ground the reader.

"The Deep End of the Pool"

When asked what the first few months in her new role as a student affairs

administrator were like, Nicole responded with a shrug and "I'm still trying to figure it

out, it feels like I was just thrown into the deep end of the pool and left to fight for my

life" Her first day included a quick tour of the office given by a work-study student, lunch

with her new coworkers, and a 15-minute meeting with her new supervisor to review the

role and responsibilities. Then she was given "desk time" to get her workstation

organized and to start on projects. With a large campus-wide event as her first big

priority, Nicole was unsure of whom to turn to for support and found herself struggling to

perform at her best in this new role. Nicole thought her introduction to the division of

student affairs might have been a fluke and probably didn't happen to people very often.

Until she started chatting with others in the division and learned they had the same

difficult time getting started. Nicole was left asking herself "If I can't figure these small

things out, how on earth am I going to learn enough to move up into higher-level

positions?" and "do I really want to be here?"

There are many "Nicole's" on college and university campuses nationwide, as depicted in the vignette, who are prepared to enter student affairs work by nature of a master's degree yet do not receive support from their employer within the first year to set them up for success. The literature and research that follow, explore ways to design an engaging first year of work to increase employee engagement.

Research in the field of student affairs, documents that 50% to 60% of professionals leave the field within the first 5 years (Tull, 2006). Aside from the obvious question of "why do people leave?" another important question to consider is "what impact does people leaving have on their institutions and the field?" With documented high attrition rates there is a need to explore how engagement is fostered in the workplace. Student Affairs divisions across the nation are working internally to create division level programs to strengthen and grow the expertise of their employees through a variety of creative programming. However, little research has been done on how student affairs engage employees and develop expertise beyond their graduate studies. Appendix A provides an empirical table highlighting articles that are discussed throughout this chapter providing background to support future research. This chapter provides context around potential frameworks, employee retention/engagement research, and gaps in the literature that direct my proposed study. To begin, a history of student affairs as a profession will be provided along with issues facing the profession such as attrition and engagement; finally, current efforts being implemented to solve these pressing issues will be presented.

Student Affairs History and Professional Competencies

The Student Affairs profession began in the early 1900s with standards of the profession following in the early 1960s (Cowley, 1962; LaBarre, 1948; Miller, 1991). Through the turn of the millennium, standards were developed in terms of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes student affairs professionals across higher education should possess by national organizations including the American College Personnel Administrators (ACPA), then the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and the Council on the Advancement of Standards within Higher Education (CAS). The 2016 ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies are the current model outlining 10 knowledge and skill areas (see Figure 1.1) for student affairs professionals that are measured at foundational, intermediate, and advanced levels (ACPA & NASPA, 2016). The profession has successfully outlined the ideal level of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be considered an expert however little is known on the best methods to develop expertise in student affairs professionals.

Professional Competencies Supporting Onboarding and Engagement Practices

Student Affairs Professionals are employed in both public and private institutions of higher education as well as the business sector. The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) have outlined the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be considered a well-rounded student affairs professional by way of 10 competencies as depicted in Figure 1.1. The 10 competencies defined by ACPA and NASPA (2016) include: 1.) Personal and Ethical Foundations (PPF) — ability to develop and maintain integrity in one's life and work; 2.) Values, Philosophy, and History (VPH) — ability to connect the history of student affairs with present work; 3.) Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER) — the ability to design, conduct, critique, and use

various methods and results to inform practice; 4.) Law, Policy, and Governance (LPG) — the

ability to understand and apply the policy to one's practice; 5.) Organization and Human

Resource (OHR) — managing human capital, financial, and physical resources effectively; 6.)

Leadership (LEAD) — understanding the role of a leader with or without positional power

envisioning, planning, and affecting change; 7.) Social Justice and Inclusion (SJI) — a process

and goal to create and maintain equitable environments; 8.) Student Learning and Development

(SLD) — the ability to apply theory to improve and inform practice; 9.) Technology (TECH) —

the ability to use resources to advance student learning, development, and overall practice; 10.)

Advising and Supporting (A/S) — ability to support individuals and groups through challenges

such as critique and direction.

Figure 1.1

Visual Representation of the Intersection of the 10 Competency Areas (ACPA/NASPA, 2016)

PEF - Personal and Ethical Foundations
VPH - Values, Philosophy, and History
AER - Assessment, Evaluation, and Research
LPG - Law, Policy, and Governance
OHR - Organization and Human Resource
LEAD - Leadership
SJI - Social Justice and Inclusion
SLD - Student Learning and Development
TECH - Technology
A/S - Advising and Supporting
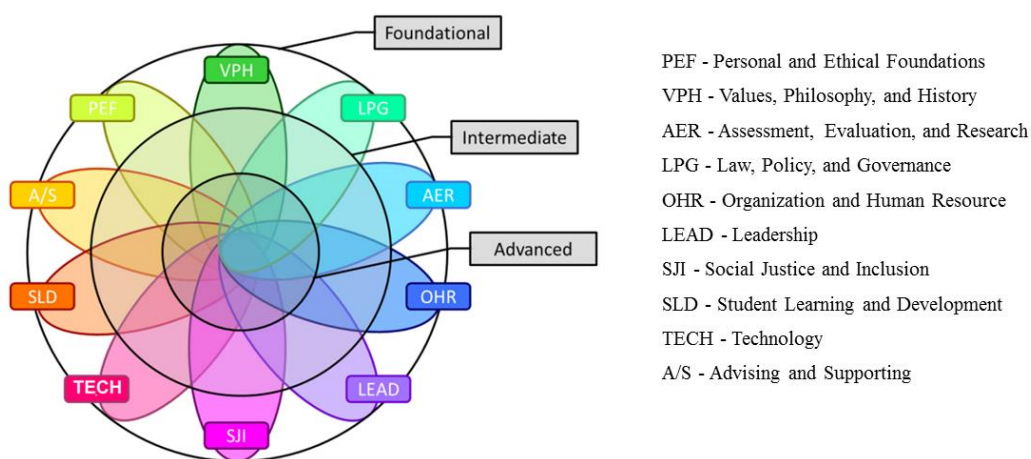
Each competency can be achieved at three levels: foundational, intermediate, and

advanced (ACPA/NASPA, 2016). The foundational level signifies the basic level of

understanding that all student affairs professionals should possess no matter how they entered the

field. Intermediate and advancing levels build on the outcomes and expected skills, knowledge, and dispositions within each competency area. It is possible to be at different levels in each competency. There is also no specific timeline for how long it would take to move through each of the levels. ACPA/NASPA (2016) note that advancing in rank does not guarantee proficiency or advancement in the competencies. At each level there are various amounts of intersection between the competencies. As you move closer to the advanced level it is more likely that experience in one competency area will require understanding and use of other competency areas as depicted in Figure 1.1 (ACPA/NASPA, 2016). For example, someone who is advanced in Law, Policy, and Governance may also lean heavily on their abilities in Organization and Human Resources to solve staffing issues.

Each functional area within student affairs may require various mastery levels of each competency. A Coordinator or entry-level position may only need to be at the foundational level to do their job satisfactorily. However, a Dean of Students, someone who typically has experience with several functional areas, may need advanced mastery in all competencies to be most effective in their positions. Interestingly, that same coordinator may move quickly to intermediate or advanced based on their daily encounters, while on the other hand a Dean may still be at foundational in one or more competencies. Having the Organization and Human Resources competency developed could be a key component for student affairs professionals wishing to improve practices of onboarding and engaging staff.

The majority of high-level jobs at the AVP or #2 role require a doctorate degree with a combination of years of experience. Most people take 3-5 years to achieve a terminal degree in higher education; however, they work for 5-15 years before moving into a dean or higher position. This might mean that much of the learning is a result of informal learning in the

workplace. Informal learning refers to learning that occurs through unstructured activity, typically daily interactions, and reflection (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). These daily work experiences give student affairs professionals the knowledge they need to handle larger and more complex issues as they move up or on to new positions.

Developing Competency in Organization & Human Resource

This section explores the concept and current research on expertise development. In addition, the process of how expertise is developed will be reviewed. Ending with how the expertise development process occurs in the field of Student Affairs. To define expertise development, it is easier to first define what it means to be an expert. Experts are differentiated from beginners due to either having extensive professional experience (over 10 years) or being viewed by their peers as knowledgeable and/or accomplished, or a combination of both (Chi, 2006). Due to the length of this study and the length of time it takes for expertise to develop expertise development is not a primary focus however it will be imperative to understand how to develop and grow practitioners' competence in areas such as onboarding and employee engagement. There are many different types of expertise and ways that individuals obtain their expertise. Expertise and learning styles are important factors to consider when developing an onboarding program and growing the practice of onboarding within a division.

Learning Styles

Moving from foundational to an advanced level requires strategic planning to foster growth and learning. Fenwick (2003) offered research on implementing mandated Professional Growth Plans (PGPs) to facilitate individual and organizational learning. Professional Growth Plans are systems that encourage "individuals to establish and review personal learning goals and activities related to their work regularly" (Fenwick, 2003, p. 60). For example, after completing

the self-assessment professional competency rubric an individual could sit down and write a list of specific activities such as finding a mentor, attending a conference, or serving on a committee that will foster development.

Through in-depth interviewing of both teachers and senior administrators, Fenwick (2003), provided future direction for human resource theory and practice regarding PGPs and learning. The study found requiring the creation and regular review of a PGP was met favorably by teachers and administrators and assisted in learning (Fenwick, 2003). Various types of learning such as implicit learning, informal and incidental learning, and adaptive learning both at the individual and organizational levels were affected by PGPs (Fenwick, 2003). Implicit learning is when learning occurs through unconscious efforts to acquire new knowledge (French & Cleeremans 2002). Informal and incidental learning is usually intentional but unstructured (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Adaptive learning implements resources such as technology into the learning environment to best meet the needs of the learner (Oxman, Wong, & Innovations, 2014). Overall, the study showed "professional learning flourishing particularly where a visible commitment to learning was evident at all organizational levels" (Fenwick, 2003, p. 76).

Not all researchers agree competencies are the best framework for professional development. Work by Eaton (2016) called for a critical review of the *competency-based movement*. The competency-based education movement refers to models that embrace efficiency and cost-savings by placing value on demonstration of proficiency and acquired knowledge, usually measured through standardized assessment practices or the awarding of educational badges and credits based on experience (Porter & Reilly, 2014; Selingo, 2013). Currently, the ACPA/NASPA core competencies are centered in graduate curriculum planning and ongoing professional development; possibly overly applied (Eaton, 2016). A deeper look at how

competencies are being utilized in developing student affairs professionals as well as ways to better situate competency-based learning in the graduate curriculum and professional development is needed (Eaton, 2016).

To research implementation practices of competencies Eaton (2016) employed Complexity Theory, a way to disrupt and challenge linear thinking to create more complex understanding, as a framework to critique and recommend improvements for the use of competencies (Eaton, 2016). The concepts of complexity theory that were studied include nonlinearity, unpredictability, and difficulties associated with fragmenting, reducing, and standardization (Eaton, 2016). Nonlinearity challenges assumptions made on empirical data that lead to linear causation and equilibrium (Capra, 1996, 2002 as cited in Eaton, 2016). Fragmentation and Reduction refer to the use of the competencies being viewed in silos (Eaton, 2016). While standardization looks at the one size fits all approach to the competencies (Eaton, 2016). A postmodern curriculum theoretical framework, reframing learning and curriculums in the 21st century, was also used to study the use of the core competencies within student affairs graduate curriculum and professional development; stating curriculums need to have the flexibility to meet the needs of future generations (Eaton, 2016). As a result of research by Eaton (2016), I would assert that more research should be done on best practices using competencies as a framework for learning and engagement of student affairs professionals. Eaton highlights that the competencies do not account for ways of learning past the individual, there is currently no method to assess the role of the overall organization or group. Also, Eaton noted that the competencies do not allow for incidental, experiential, or process-based learning. In other words, if all professionals are only assessed based on the current 10 competencies there may be learning occurring that does not fit nicely into one of those areas. It is still unknown if these are

the only competencies needed to be an expert in student affairs or if other skills are useful to this field.

Workplace Learning and Development

According to previous research, expertise development takes at least 10 years of practice (Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018). The term "practice" in this regard refers to working and learning from continuous experience in a particular field. Alluding to the notion expertise development ties to adult learning theory. Researchers argued that a focus on self-directed learning as well as the social context of learning will help shed light on how expertise is developed (Knight, 2002; Tynjala, 2008; Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018). Workers should have the opportunity to direct their learning, select and form social groups for learning, and be in environments where they can learn and grow. Tynjala (2008) also added that both formal and informal learning drive the process of expertise development. Formal learning refers to learning where there is an explicit goal or outcome examples include classroom learning when a teacher uses a lesson plan. On the other hand, informal learning happens through participation in the learning process that may occur through day-to-day experiences. Both formal and informal learning happen when opportunities to problem solve and reflect happen in tandem (Tynjala, 2008; Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018). For example, in Student Affairs this may look like a program planner trouble shooting changing to a rain location then having the opportunity to reflect on the event with their supervisor.

Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen (2018) offered five tenets of learning needed to develop expertise through Work Based Higher Education (WBHE) as depicted in Figure 1.2. WBHE is defined as any postgraduate higher education that supports the continuing professional development of qualified and experienced professionals (Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen,

2018). They arrived at these five tenets through an in-depth literature review of existing research on how expertise is developed in the workplace. An initial search gave them 2,020 articles around various levels of expertise and workplace learning, after several layers of inclusion criteria they were left with 19 studies to review (Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018). These 19 studies included both empirical and conceptual research with various research methods (Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018). The five tenets of WBHE are "(1) knowledge transformation and integration, (2) problem solving, (3) reflection, (4) learning from errors and (5) boundary crossing" (Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018, p 367). Within each area there are many activities that can take place that lead to expertise development (Figure 1.2). Each of these elements offers an important piece of the puzzle of better understanding and creating opportunities for expertise development. Knowledge transformation and integration is featured at the center as it is seen as a key piece that must be woven through all other elements (Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018). There must be a delicate balance between theoretical and practical knowledge (Slotte & Tynjala, 2003; Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018). The element of knowledge transformation and integration acknowledges individuals have some level of expertise and knowledge and should be able to self-regulate learning and meaning making individually or as a group (Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018).

Figure 1.2

Central Elements of Expert Learning in WBHE recreated from Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen (2018)

Problem solving
- Introducing non-routine & practical problems
- Challenging to solve problems collaboratively
- Encouraging learners to acknowledge and solve professional identity issues

Reflection
- Stimulating critical refelction on learning and experiences
- Encouraging reconstruction of the meaning of experiences
- Promoting responsive guidance through mentoring

Knowledge transformation & integration
Integrating work-place learning with academic studies
Transforming experience to expertise through deliberate practice
structuring work-place learning opportunities and relating formal & informal learning
Developing self-regulative and metacognitive knowledge

Learning from errors
- Helping learners to resolve tensions and evelop flexible imagining
- Promoting epistemic processes to help identify flaws in one's mental models
- Developing learners' time and resource management
- Promoting critcal dialogue through collaboration and mentoring

Boundary crossing
- Developing learner identity and adaptation
- Creating multiple opportunities for participation and learning
- Retaining university and workplace perspectives
- Explicating cyclical expertise development process between work and academic contexts

Although the focus is not on expertise development the question remains on how to develop Organizational and Human Resource competency which informs our potential to be able to better engage and onboard employees. Combining the onboarding framework with the central elements of learning provides a potential model or way of thinking about creating work environments that lead to learning and engagement.

Employee Engagement

Institutional practices of engaging and welcoming new student affairs staff vary drastically from institution to institution. There is significant research that documents the

importance and long-term benefit of engagement practices leading to better work performance, sense of belonging in the workplace, and lower turnover rates (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015; Selden & Sowa, 2015; Thrasher & Walker, 2018; Trossman, 2017). This section will explore research related to various forms of employee engagement.

Employee Engagement in the field of student affairs is a topic that is on the rise. In the recent years there have been several dissertation studies on employee engagement from various angles but mostly considering what causes employees to leave. Current research points to the supervision styles and/or the lack thereof impacting engagement in the working and intent to leave the field (Womack, 2020). Employees who did not perceive a synergistic supervision behavior from their supervisor were less likely to be engaged and more likely to intend to leave the field of student affairs within three years (Womack, 2020). Dos (2021) focused on what factors influenced women of color to stay or leave their student affairs role. Eleven practices were suggested to improve the experience of women of color; three of them related well to employee engagement practices 1.) fostering inclusion, 2) establish effective, authentic, open communication, and 3) improve supervision practices. Further research on engagement of student affairs professionals focuses on happiness and perceived organizational support. Hempfling (2015) found that those with more years in students affairs showed higher levels of engagement, happiness, and perceived organization support. This research utilized the Utrecht Work engagement Scale to measure employee engagement of 299 student affairs professionals (Hempfling, 2015). Much of the research on employee engagement offers reactive solutions instead of proactive solutions; meaning research centers on issues with engagement once an employee is already having a negative experience. More research is needed on how to effectively engage student affairs employees at the begin of their tenure with an institution.

Research on employee engagement has increased since 2010 however is still a difficult area to research as many do not agree on how to define or measure engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). When describing engagement in the workplace Khan (1990) said that it was how employees' attach themselves to the work they are responsible for. Traits of engaged employees include drive, initiative, flexibility, and persistence to achieve goals set forth by the organization (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009). One way of measuring employee engagement is through satisfaction and how employees continue to engage in both their work and with people in and out of the work environment (Christian et al., 2011). There are several constructs that have been used in the field of human resource management to measure employee engagement ranging from work engagement, job engagement, and organization engagement. Although many organizations claim to measure employee engagement the scales being utilized are often not grounded in literature or theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, some scales claiming to measure engagement are actually measuring employee satisfaction. Popular employee engagement measures include the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufel, Bakker, & Salanova 2006); Job Engagement Scale (JES; Rich et al.); and intellectual, social, and affective engagement scale (Soane et al., 2012); Although commonly used, these instruments do not utilize an agreed-upon definition combined with a conceptual framework (Shuck, Adelson & Reio, 2017). Recent notable work in the measurement of employee engagement comes from Shuck et al. (2017) who studied the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energies that went into creating a positive psychological state in the work environment. The Employee Engagement Scale (Shuck et al., 2017) was developed and tested for validity across four separate studies. The Employee Engagement Scale and the constructs associated will be discussed further in chapter 2 methodology.

Onboarding in the Workplace

Prior to the turn of the millennium, Winston and Creamer (1997) stated, "Far too little is known about new-staff orientation in the field of student affairs. Little information about the topic is available in literature of the field. One suspects that orientation is taken for granted by vice presidents and deans" (p. 177). Nearly 25 years later in the field of higher education, specifically student affairs, the practice of onboarding and research on onboarding is still lacking (Dean et al. 2011; Lockwood, 2001; Mather et al. 2009; Winston et al., 2001). Notable research on the topic of onboarding in higher education is provided in an empirical table which highlights key findings of past research and implications for future study; see Table 1.1. Within higher education, research mostly focuses on faculty onboarding and even new students where there is an entire professional organization dedicated to the orientation transition and retention practices of college students. However, little on student affairs staff which is intriguing as most often student affairs as a division are responsible for onboarding incoming students. It is also important to note that terminology such as orientation and new employee training may also be considered in the onboarding process. I have selected to utilize the term onboarding as it refers to the overarching practices, activities, and experiences that new employees move through over a certain timespan.

Student affairs practitioners know the importance of onboarding and recognize the impact onboarding can have on the first year of employment. Saunders and Cooper (2003) suggest that structured orientation activities lead to better job performance and satisfaction within new employees. Dean et al. (2011) asserts onboarding programs assist in organizational commitment and good onboarding programs introduce new employees to their colleagues as well as institutional culture. Studies continue to show that student affairs professionals desire

information shared such as expectations from a supervisor and the opportunity to meet mentors and colleagues (Dean et al., 2011; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Saunders & Cooper, 2003).

Due to Tull's (2006) research on new student affairs professionals and retention much of the research that exists regarding onboarding focuses on new-student affairs professionals. New Student affairs professionals refer to those coming directly from graduate school or with less than 5 years of experience (reference). Mather et al., (2009) takes a slightly different approach by considering the unique needs of mid-level student affairs professionals. Mid-level professionals are typically defined at the associate/assistant director or direct level roles where they interface between front line staff and higher-level leadership such as deans or vice presidents (Mather et al., 2009). In addition, mid-level staff tend to make up the largest group of administrative staff (Rosser, 2000). Uniquely, mid-level professionals may be coming from another institution or moving into a new position from within the institution. The onboarding needs of mid-level professionals are another area of onboarding practice within student affairs that needs more attention. Mather et al. (2009) suggests a 4-step model to designing programs targeted at the needs of mid-level student affairs professionals. These 4-steps include 1.) assess current university, division, and department practices; 2.) identify desired outcomes; 3.) develop an action plan; and 4.) measure success (Mather et al., 2009). Considering the lack of research for both onboarding professionals new to student affairs and mid-level professionals I assert the need for general research on the practice of onboarding generally for any professional entering into a student affairs unit regardless of experience.

Much of what is currently known about onboarding student affairs professionals was grounded in original research from the business sector. Winkler and Jager (1998) found effective orientation programs incorporated the following three types of support: 1.) Supervisor

involvement; 2.) Having a mentor; 3.) Trained staff to give information on policies, procedures, and benefits. Early research on the process of onboarding student affairs professionals revealed that nearly half of survey respondents reported their orientation ran less than one day and the responsibility fell mainly on department directors (Winston et al., 2001). Winston et al. (2001) go on to suggest that a "statement of principles specifying exemplary, acceptable, and unacceptable staffing practices in student affairs," (p. 18) be developed by the major professional associations. This provides a call to action that policies and procedures need to be researched and developed that speak specifically to the practice of onboarding within the field of student affairs. Research also provides insights into potential strategies for onboarding programs. Lockwood (2001) provided early research on ways to develop and assess new employee orientation protocols. The protocols developed by Lockwood (2001) incorporated aa self-directed orientation module, a handbook, and a live presentation. Strategies suggested by other researchers include providing staff with clear expectations on job duties and performance metrics; unspoken expectations such as organizational culture; involving and training supervisors (Dean et al., 2011). Dean et al. (2011) advocates for future research on the efficacy of onboarding programs within student affairs and the impact of implementing effective onboarding programs might have on the field.

Research shows positive correlations between onboarding programs, employee productivity, employee satisfaction, and employer satisfaction of new employees (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015; Selden & Sowa, 2015; Thrasher & Walker, 2018; Trossman, 2017). Onboarding is both informal and formal practices, programs, and policies utilized by organizations and people to facilitate newcomer adjustment (Klien & Polin, 2012 as cited in Klein, Polin, & Sutton 2015). The onboarding process is defined by different time periods and

milestones at each organization. In some organizations the onboarding process begins at the time of application, through the collection of paperwork and concludes after the first day (Bailey, 2016). In these types of organizations, the onboarding process can also be used to achieve state compliance through a new hire notification process (Bailey, 2016).

Onboarding can happen in various capacities such as in person, virtually, or a combination of many tactics. Research shows that some organizations focus more on the identity of the organization while others are also encouraging the new employee to discover their personal identity (Cable, Gina, & Staats, 2013). Klein, Polin, & Sutton (2015) explored the specific onboarding practices that assist in the socialization of new employees. Using the Inform-Welcome-Guide framework, researchers showed how different practices have more influence in each area (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015). Inform-Welcome-Guide refers to the practices in place to inform a new person as well as the people in place to welcome and guide a newcomer (Klein & Heuser, 2008; Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015). For example, to "inform" some divisions have new employee handbooks or websites dedicated to new employees; "welcome" may happen through a dedicated committee or welcome basket left at the newcomers workstations; in the area of "guide" organizations my opt to pair new employees with one point of contact or a buddy/mentor to guide them through their entry into the organization. They found that successful onboarding programs had aspects that focused on informing, welcoming, and guiding new employees.

Pierce (2017) stated that a successful onboarding process should include leadership development, working with an executive coach, and being paired with a mentor to extend through the first year. Bradt (2010) outlined how transformational leadership can be used as a framework for hiring managers to approach the onboarding process. When hiring managers

understand their roles as producer, director, and stage manager as well as when and how to play each role, it has a tremendous impact on both the new employee and the overall organization (Bradt, 2010). Another key aspect that researchers Thrasher & Walker (2018) focused on is that onboarding needs to be timely and structured. In the fields of Athletic Training and Nursing, onboarding is used to create psychologically and physically safe work environments through the dissemination of policies, procedures, mission, department plans, and one on one meetings during the employee orientation process (Thrasher & Walker, 2018; Trossman, 2017). Specifically, within the field of Student Affairs the most notable research regarding the relevance of onboarding comes from Tull who reminded us that the field of student affairs has a high turnover rate for new professionals; with 50% of new graduates exiting the field within the first five years. The solution presented in his research is to create meaningful onboarding programs for new professionals.

Selden & Sowa (2015) studied eight work practices that led to high performance in employees; onboarding was one of those practices. Other onboarding and engagement practices, discussed later in this section, include mentoring & coaching (Cooper & Miller, 1998; Schmidt, Wolfe, & Sutera, 2009; Schwartz, 1998); however, these are not mutually exclusive. Another aspect of onboarding that helps staff perform to the best of their ability is ongoing professional development (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Bryant-Shankin & Brumage, 2011; NASPA, 1990; Roberts, 2007; Roscoe, 2002; Schwarts, 1998). Some researchers also argued that an employees' ability to participate in onboarding and professional development can lead to benefits such as increased job performance and lower turnover rates (Bradt, 2010; Cable, Gina, & Staats, 2013; Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015; Tull, 2006).

Table 1.1

Empirical Table of Onboarding Literature within Higher Education

Author(s) & Year	Title	Key Findings/Implications for Future Study
Winston & Creamer, 1997	Improving Staffing Practices in Student Affairs	Little was known about new-staff orientation. More research should be made available to the field of student affairs. Policies and procedures need to be developed. Training opportunities to become more competent in the practice of onboarding staff.
Lockwood, 2001	Enhancing Employee Development: Development and testing of a new employee orientation protocol	Dissertation focusing on creating a three-step orientation program. Found that new staff who participated had a great knowledge of organizational culture.
Winston et al., 2001	Staffing in Student Affairs: A survey of practices	Survey to 263 Chief student affairs administrators that focused on aspects of staff recruitment, selection, new employee orientation, supervision, professional development, and performance procedures. Found nearly half of respondents reported orientation program less than 1 day. Protocols need to be developed for basic staffing practices across the field by professional organizations as a guideline.
Saunders & Cooper, 2003	Orientation: Building the foundations for success	A structured experience should be provided to introduce new staff to the role, coworkers, and overall organization (individual, group, system). Clear expectations, job duties, and performance evals should be covered in the process.
Tull, 2006	Synergistic Supervision, Job Satisfaction and Intention to Turnover of New	Showcases the relevance of onboarding programs in the field of student affairs. There is an overwhelming number of new

Author(s) & Year	Title	Key Findings/Implications for Future Study
	Professionals in Student Affairs	professionals who leave the field of student affairs within their first five years. Indicates that a practical solution would be to create meaningful orientation and socialization programs for new professionals.
Renn & Hodges 2007	The First Year on the Job: Experiences of new professionals in student affairs	Over three distinct phases of "pre-employment/orientation," "Transition," and "settled in" the following themes came up: importance of relationship, good fit, and issues of competence and confidence. Suggestions to streamline how to prepare and supervise new professionals were suggested.
Mather et al. 2009	Orienting Mid-Level Student Affairs Professionals	Most onboarding programs are geared towards the needs of new professionals straight from graduate programs. More needs to be uncovered on needs and orientation process for mid-level positions.
Dean et al., 2011	Efficacy or Orientation for New Student Affairs Professionals	Although informal orientation strategies are most utilized survey found that structured programs that made key introduced were rated most effective. Opportunities for the development of more purposeful orientation activities outlined.

Overall, onboarding has been regarded as a high impact practice for creating high performing employees. These relationships have been studied extensively in the business and corporate sector, but much needs to be done in the realm of higher education.

Ongoing Professional Development in the Workplace

Professional organizations within student affairs place ongoing professional development (PD) as a pillar of the profession, stating that professionals should engage in continued professional development (NASPA, 1990). National organizations that influence the development of student affairs practitioners include the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the Association for College Personnel Administrators (ACPA), and Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education are some of the most notable. There are additional organizations that are functional area specific that professionals are encouraged to be involved. Some institutions are also creating their own internal PD committees whose purpose is to create PD Opportunities on their home campuses. Within the profession, both on a national and institutional level, practitioners are encouraged to refer to CAS characteristics of Individual Excellence and ACPA/NASPA core competencies as standards that guide professional development. Within student affairs, professional development is a term that researchers have been trying to define since the late 90's (Schwartz, 1998). Schwartz (1998) emphasizes that professional development should be a commitment that is central to the mission of the division; staff participation in development should be mandatory. Cooper and Miller (1998) consider professional development a process and went on to study the process in which it occurs within student affairs.

It is widely believed that student affairs professionals should participate in PD because it allows them to learn about and improve their skillset (Bryant-Shankin & Brumage, 2011; Roberts, 2007; Roscoe, 2002; Schwarts, 1998). The timeframe for PD varies depending on the format it is being delivered in. Some may participate in a one-time PD activity while others are in ongoing PD. Roscoe (2002), made a case that continuing profession development (CPD) is

beneficial because it allows for an ongoing practice that can be monitored over time. PD may come from a professional organization or can be homegrown within the organization. Within the field of student affairs there are many professional organizations that offer various forms of PD.

The Professional Development Model (PDM) suggests there are four stages of professional development and specific activities and behaviors that are accomplished through relevant developmental tasks (Cooper & Miller, 1998). PDM was originally proposed by Miller and Carpenter in 1980 and was used by Cooper and Miller (1998) to further understand how professionals within student affairs are developed. Involvement in a mentoring relationship is one task that is thought to be a form of professional development (Cooper & Miller, 1998). Research aspects of professional development that we will continue to explore through this literature review include mentoring along with their frameworks and methodologies.

Developmental Relationships in the Workplace

In the workplace there are various types of relationships that aid in the development of an employee. Examples include sponsorship, networking, coaching, and mentorship. Coaching as described by DiGirolamo (2015) is a transformative process that partners a client and coach to produce a change; the coaching process is useful when moving into new roles, environments, or when needing a new perspective. The practice of coaching in student affairs varies from level to level and type of coaching style. At the vice-president and dean levels some individuals may be paired with an executive coach. The idea of "self-coaching" is also an emerging trend in Student Affairs (Guttman, 2012). Self-Coaching has the person involved in the process ask a series of questions to gauge their readiness for change, identifying intended area of change, potential supporters, ability to ask for and accept feedback, creating a plan, and setting goals (Guttman, 2012). Across career fields, mentoring is used in a variety of ways to increase personal and

professional learning and development. There are many definitions of mentoring. For the purpose of this research mentoring is defined as the process by which mentees are guided, taught, and influenced in important ways (Darling, 1985). The research on mentoring usage and benefits, specifically, in the field of student affairs is limited. Current research on mentorship within student affairs focuses on program type, structure, and benefits to both mentor and mentee. In the late 1990s the field of student affairs started to see an increase in research specifically on mentoring within the profession. Schwartz (1998) as well as Cooper and Miller (1998) showcased the successful assessment of mentorship relationships within the field of student affairs. Assessing mentorship provides a broader understanding of the developmental impact this professional development strategy has on new professionals (Cooper & Miller, 1998). Clifford (2009) showed that mentoring is a mutually beneficial relationship to both the mentor and mentee. Benefits include professional growth and increased job satisfaction (Clifford, 2009). The International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS) created a successful global mentoring program that matched new professionals with leaders in the field (Seeto, 2016). Further, the program through the IASAS showed that mentoring does not only have to be in person but can be held in a virtual environment. The IASAS program was a fully online program where relationships were cultivated virtually. Participants in the IASAS mentoring program recommend that a specific time frame be given to mentoring relationships, goals should be outlined by the mentee, a structured discussion guide be provided, and a program coordinator should be in contact with pairings as best practices of a mentoring program (Seeto, 2016). Other examples of the virtual environment include e-mentoring. Research shows that e-mentoring has the potential to provide individuals with mentors who may have been previously disadvantaged (Bierema & Merriam, 2002).

The benefits of mentoring are numerous. Mentoring has positive effects on both the mentor and mentee, personally and professionally (Bolton, 2005; Cooper & Miller, 1998). Mentoring relationships can be beneficial to new professionals as they are working to find a balance between work and career (Bolton, 2005). Other benefits include increased professional confidence, feelings of empowerment and validation (Long, 2018). In addition to benefits, mentors also help cultivate a variety of skills within their mentees. Mentors can provide guidance as newer professionals develop a professional identity and they are able to challenge and support them through this development process (Long, 2018). Schmidt & Wolfe (2009) tout mentorship as one method of discovering professionalism for new professionals in the work force.

Connecting Onboarding and Employee Engagement for Future Research

With the information provided about expertise development, onboarding, and employee engagement a major question remains; how are Student Affairs and Human Resource Departments cultivating a work environment that develops the Organization & Human Resource competency in specific regards to onboarding and engaging new employees?

Onboarding is an important and needed activity for individuals entering any career field. There is a high value placed on professional development within Student Affairs. Research on professional development methods, structures, and practices needs to be further developed as it relates to developing onboarding programs for staff within Student Affairs. Specific practices such as mentoring, orientation, and training have unique attributes that focus on socializing new professionals. A focus on the engagement and onboarding of the new employee may help to stabilize and lower the current high turnover rates in the field of student affairs.

Future research should be focused on the impact onboarding has on engagement factors such as sense of belonging, job performance and job satisfaction in student affairs professionals.

This type of research would be beneficial to higher education institutions; specifically, student affairs professionals and divisions across the nation as they look for strategic and fiscally responsible ways to onboard new employees as well as offer continuing professional development and engaging activities. These practices will in turn help student affairs departments to better service and support their students.

Purpose & Research Questions

This research explored how action research can be utilized to create an onboarding program to increase employee engagement. The action research project at Border University, a pseudonym selected, aligned with my research goal to explore employee onboarding practices while solving a problem that the division of student affairs faced. Border University is a four-year research institution with a Student Affairs division of nearly 150 employees. Prior to the start of the study Border University gained a new Vice-President of Student Affairs along with many other director and entry level positions. Additionally, during the three-year study two new Associate Vice-Presidents and three new Directors joined the division. With previous employee engagement surveys showing low employee engagement and issues with communication Border University sought to implement initiatives that will lead to lasting change. The literature suggests there is a gap in understanding and developing onboarding techniques that positively benefit student affairs areas through employee engagement.

The purpose of the action research project was to discover and implement methods to increase support in the first year of employment by enhancing employee onboarding among staff in the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs. The question this research attempted to answer was what is learned at the individual, group, and system levels in a higher education work setting using action research when a division embraces onboarding for new employee

development? Using Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen's (2018) five tenets of learning to develop expertise in the workplace as a theoretical framework the study will focus on growing capacity for effective onboarding. The Welcome-Inform-Guide framework (Klein & Heuser, 2008) will be the primary framework considered for development of an onboarding program that can potentially influence employee engagement. As a result of developing and implementing an onboarding program within the division of student affairs learning occurred at the individual, group, and system level that also impacted employee engagement, communication, and collaboration. The problem that the Action Research team worked to solve was the lack of adequate support in the first year of employment within the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs. My proposed model, Figure 1.3, hypothesized by utilizing tenets of work based higher education and onboarding constructs of inform, welcome, and guide to inform interventions there would be an improvement in perceived first year support which ultimately influences employee engagement. This hypothesis evolved numerous times throughout the life of the study.

Figure 1.3

Theoretical Model for New Employee Development
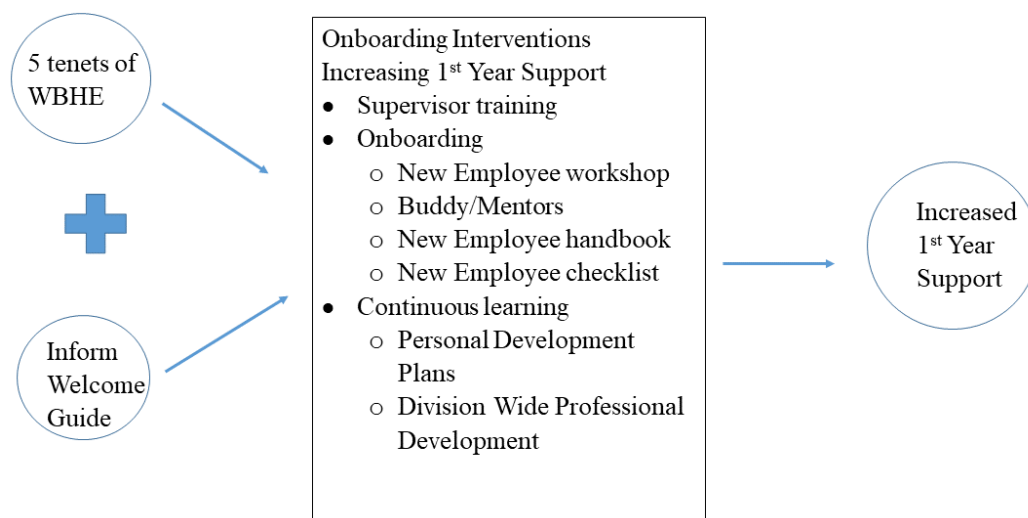
The research problem and action research project had a primary focus on onboarding and improving employee engagement through various interventions. Choice of interventions were informed by onboarding and employee engagement theories. For this study, employee engagement was defined using the groundbreaking work of Shuck, Adelson & Reio (2017) which defines employee engagement "as an active work-related positive psychological state operationalized by the intensity and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy" (p. 954). This definition focuses on the overall positive regard that employees have about their job and how that positivity effects how they think about their role, behave, and perform at work. Research shows positive correlations between onboarding programs, employee productivity, employee satisfaction, and employer satisfaction of new employees (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015; Selden & Sowa, 2015; Thrasher & Walker, 2018; Trossman, 2017). The primary way in which employee engagement for new employees would be measured is through the employee engagement scale (Shuck, Adelson, & Reio, 2017) which is a 12-item instrument focused on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement factors. Onboarding is both informal and formal practices, programs, and policies utilized by organizations and people to facilitate newcomer adjustment (Klien & Polin, 2012 as cited in Klein, Polin, & Sutton 2015). Ultimately by combining the onboarding and learning frameworks to improve employee engagement we created an environment where first-year employees felt more supported and employees were engaged on multiple levels.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Research in the field of student affairs, documents that 50% to 60% of professionals leave the field within the first 5 years (Tull, 2006). Reasons as to why professionals leave point to a lack of focused transition or onboarding into the field (Tull, 2006). There is significant research that documents the impact employee engagement and onboarding can have on both the employee and the work environment leading to better work performance, sense of belonging, and lower turnover rates (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015; Selden & Sowa, 2015; Thrasher & Walker, 2018; Trossman, 2017).

Onboarding is a critical practice and skill set that is underdeveloped in the field of student affairs. The study discovered and implemented methods to increase support in the first year of employment to enhance employee onboarding among staff in the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs. At Border University there was an opportunity to work on a project to add to the body of work within onboarding and employee engagement within the field of student affairs (Appendix B). Border University was experiencing issues with employee engagement, communication, and knowledge sharing; all which may have stemmed from how employees were introduced and welcomed into the environment. Therefore, the gap this study addressed were issues regarding onboarding and employee engagement stemming from lack of support in the first year of employment in the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs.

The purpose of the action research project was to discover and implement methods to increase support in the first year of employment to enhance employee onboarding among staff in the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs. The question this research attempted to answer

was what is learned at the individual, group, and system levels in a higher education work setting using action research when a division embraces onboarding for new employee development? Using Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen's (2018) five tenets of learning to develop expertise in the workplace as a theoretical framework the study focused on growing capacity for effective onboarding.

Research on onboarding and engagement practices within the field of student affairs will impact how supervisors learn to better onboard new employees in divisions of student affairs. I believe the overall purpose of research is to benefit society; this view is based in a pragmatic worldview. Research with a pragmatic worldview explores the consequences of actions, is problem-centered, pluralistic, and real-world practice oriented (Creswell, 2018). I believe that research should serve a bigger purpose for the greater good and that real-life problems can only be solved with the help of many hands and minds. Because I believe research should be used as a problem-solving tool and a group activity I selected Action Research (AR) as my chosen research approach. Utilizing AR allowed for the creation of needed change within an organization of people acting and learning together. To better understand learning at the individual, group, and system levels using an AR approach I utilized a variety of methods. These methods included interviews, reflection, and surveys. The sections that follow provide detail on AR as my approach and the methods used in the process of creating change at the project site.

Action Research Methodology

The next section overviews Action Research (AR) and why this was the best approach for this study. Within the AR approach I will outline the research design and methods. The latter half will review data collection and analysis procedures.

Overview of Action Research

Action Research as a methodology to solve practical and pressing problems in society by studying issues in places where we work (Coghlan, 2007; Dickens & Watkins, 1999; Reason & McArdle 2008). A working definition of Action Research comes from one of the originators of Action Research, Kurt Lewin, who laid much of the foundational work of what Action Research is considered to be today. Lewin (1948) considered research just for the sake of writing books was not enough and that research should be a form of social practice to help manage societal changes. A more famous quote of Lewin's (1945) "nothing is so practical as a good theory" lends to the practical nature of action research in the process of change. Kurt Lewin employed a combination of theory, data, collaboration, and repetition to build the framework of Action Research.

Action Research is useful in many of the social fields and anywhere that people may be working in groups, teams, or community in places where change is needed. Action Research explores problems within organizations in real time and attempts to uncover the first-, second-, and third-person perspective of all parties involved in the project. The first-person perspective refers to the role of the individual, the second person refers to interaction between individuals, and the third person perspective looks at the overall group interaction within a system. As a researcher I was responsible for my 1st person perspective, but every member of the AR team was also encouraged to explore their own 1st person roles. I along with the AR team utilized reflective practices such as journaling and video logging experiences to unpack learning and understand how positionality effects the research, organization, and the research team. My goal was to actively engage the 2nd person perspective by staying connected to the research team. This was done by regularly bi-weekly meetings. The 2nd person view is the "we" among others

on the team. It took the input of everyone to truly build a picture of where we were in each phase and where we needed to go. This 2nd person perspective was developed using a variety of team building activities within the AR team. Roles rotated on the AR team so everyone had the opportunity to lead meetings, take notes, etc. The 3rd person perspective is the "they", or others in the university who may be affected by our divisions culture (our students, faculty, other staff, the greater community, people who have yet to work in the division). The 3rd person perspective was engaged through activities such as listening sessions, pulse checks, and surveys to better understand the affects. Having members of the AR team lead listening sessions was a good way for them to develop their own leadership, communication, and research skills.

As an Action Research (AR) team, we constantly explored these perspectives together and kept them at the forefront of the research. All members on the AR team were asked to *reflect* and be *present* throughout the entire process. Reflection was implemented in a variety of ways from individual reflection via journaling and interviews, to group reflection using discussion prompts and/or "world café" (world café is an activity that allows people to share ideas and continue to build upon those ideas). Being *present* throughout the AR cycle meant being both physically, mentally, and emotionally present. AR team members were expected to dedicate time to attend meetings, create/review documents, and communicate to various stakeholders and constituents about the project. Our ability to effect change was a result of bringing our full selves to the experience.

There was a large focus on creating lasting and sustainable change. Action Research simultaneously adds to the knowledge base of the field while also creating a meaningful solution to a problem that is plaguing the organization. Action Research is a collaborative process which requires the active participation of everyone within the organization at various levels.

Lastly, a key aspect to Action Research is the cyclical pattern of problem identification, planning, taking action, and reflecting. As mentioned above this was all happening in real time, therefore when we realized something was not working, we were able to reflect, evaluate, and try something different. The process of reflection and trying new avenues was reflected in the three cycles of AR throughout the project. Action researchers, Herr & Anderson (2014) give 5 goals of Action Research:

1. Generating new knowledge

2. Achieving action-oriented outcomes

3. Educating both researcher(s) and participant(s)

4. Producing of relevant results for the setting

5. Using as a sound and appropriate research methodology across multiple fields.

The goals of Herr & Anderson were approached and achieved in the following ways as documented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Tactics and Outcomes to Achieve Goals of Action Research

Goal	Tactic	Outcome
1	Focus on role and capacity building of supervisors	Supervisor Training Developed
2	Specific goals identified for each cycle. SMART Goals	Onboarding Program and Materials Developed and Utilized
3	Review theories and frameworks around action research, onboarding, & employee engagement	ART and Supervisors become more component and confident in their abilities to onboard new employees
4	Focus on issues facing division	Improvements in communication and engagement

Goal	Tactic	Outcome
5	Read AR studies	Implement AR in a Student Affairs Higher Education setting

Utilizing a variety of methods under a framework of Action Research (AR) was my chosen approach for reasons above in addition to the ones that follow. First, AR allowed for the problem to be studied and solutions implemented in real time through a collaborative effort. For change in the division to be effective it needed to be a group effort informing and shaping the direction. Second, AR allowed me to study and understand onboarding and employee engagement from multiple perspectives. I explored the individual, group, and organizational implications of the practice of onboarding within student affairs. At the individual level I reflected on my own understanding and practice of onboarding with new employees and those on the AR team but also how new employees and supervisors participate in onboarding activities. At the group level I studied how involvement in the action research team and implementing change within the division has increased employee engagement. While on the organizational level I looked at how the implementation of onboarding interventions has changed communication, collaboration, and employee engagement within the division of student affairs.

Action Research took place within the organization in real time. The Onboarding Subcommittee at Border University served as the main Action Research Team (ART) who led the project to implement change however the entire division was asked to get behind the change. We conducted preliminary interviews and data gathering to get a better understanding of the climate we were working to change. Lastly, a key aspect to AR is the cyclical pattern of problem identification, planning, taking action, and reflecting. Due to AR happening in real time, the

ART was able to adjust as we realize something was not working. Use of reflection and inquiry allowed the team to evaluate and try something different each cycle of the AR project.

The ART operationalized AR as a methodology at Border University by researching the problem with the division, identifying needs, learning about potential interventions, planned and implemented interventions, reflection and adjustments as needed. Action Research was the best fit for this study as this is a practical problem that can best be solved with a team approach. Utilizing AR allowed for the problem within this division to be studied while creating new knowledge that can be impactful for the larger profession of student affairs across campuses nationally.

Data Collection Methods & Sample

There were four participant groups in this study. The first group of participants was the *Action Research Team (ART)* to better understand the learning and team dynamics that effect change. The second set of participants was *New Full-Time Employees* within the division of Enrollment and Student Affairs. New Employees were defined as individuals entering a full-time position from outside the division of student affairs whether an internal university hire or outside university hire still within their first six months of employment. The New Full-Time Employee participant group was used to study how implementation of onboarding practices effected first year support and employee engagement within the first year. The third set of participants were *Supervisors* those who directly managed new full-time employees. The Supervisor participant group also helped to learn more about the role of onboarding programs on first year supports and employee engagement. The final participant group, *All Full-Time Divisional Employees*, included division of enrollment and student affairs employees who identified as full-time. The All Full-Time Divisional Employee participant group considered changes to the culture,

environment, and experiences of employees because of onboarding programs. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods were utilized to answer the research question. The methods and participants are introduced and explored in detail in this section.

Methods

Due to the pragmatic problems of first year support and employee engagement a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools were sought to understand the research problem. Action Research (AR), while not a traditional mixed method approach, does require using the best method to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014). AR encourages the use of a variety of methods to reach targeted levels of change. In this case the research question required a combination of methods such as interviews, surveys, and document review. The research design can best be understood by considering each method separately (Table 2.2). The study was submitted for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and approved for research to commence on August 12, 2020 (Appendix B). The study was determined to be exempt under the Exempt Flex 7 category which many Action Research studies typically fall. IRB requested that additions be made as needed and that the research concludes or progress report be given by August 12, 2025. An addition was submitted to IRB to include the use of the Employee Engagement Survey.

Table 2.2

Research Plan

Method	Data Collected	Sample	Timeline	Onboarding Metric
Interviews	Experiences & Stories	New Full-Time Employees, Supervisors, AR Team	Post-Intervention	Culture, Sense of Belonging (Qual)

Method	Data Collected	Sample	Timeline	Onboarding Metric
Surveys	Divisional Survey, Employee Engagement Survey	All Full-Time Divisional Employees, New Full-Time Employees	Pre & Post Intervention	Program Goals, Satisfaction (Quant & Qual)
Document Review	Annual Reports, Modern Think Survey, Attendance Numbers, Retention Numbers	All Divisional Employees	Ongoing	Culture, Sense of Belonging (Qual) Employee Turnover, Participation (Quant)

Interviews

Critical incident technique is a qualitative exploratory method that is both reliable and valid in collecting detailed information around an experience or content area (Woolsey, 1986). Critical incident interviews have been used to better understand topics such as performance, behavior, and emotions (Woolsey, 1986). In this study critical incident interviews were used to delve deeper into the suspected problem and learn about it from multiple perspectives. Interview questions were designed to illicit a story from the participant that would allow the researcher to better understand the experience of onboarding and employee engagement at Border University. Interviews were conducted with four members of the ART, five New Full-Time Employees, and five Supervisors. The interview protocol (Appendix D) outlines how interviews were conducted. Following the interview protocol help to ensure one construct of trustworthiness, dependability, indicating replicability of the study. All interviews took place on WebEx, a web-based video conference platformed and were transcribed using features within the host site. A recording of all interviews along with copies of the transcripts were saved in a secure cloud storage and on a

backup hard drive to satisfy confirmability. After interviews were transcribed the transcriptions along with a brief summery with key findings were sent to interviewee for review using member checking techniques. Member checking assisted with maintaining credibility as the interviewee was able to confirm the essence of the conversation was captured and understood correctly. Interviewees had the opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings. After transcription and member checking the interviews were loaded into Atlas.TI for coding and organized into themes. The coding process and data analysis process is reviewed in detail along with findings in chapter four.

Surveys

Within student affairs surveying is considered a cost effective and efficient method to collect data to aid decision making on a college campus (Schuh, 2009). Colton and Covert (2007) assert that surveys can be used to explore relationships and obtain sensitive information as well as be used in combination with other data collection methods. Surveys are also utilized to measure variables with multiple response categories; understanding attitudes and opinions that cannot be observed; describing characteristics of a large group; as well as studying sensitive or embarrassing behaviors that are difficult to talk about face to face (Nardi, 2003). Because of the multiple uses of surveys this was a highly utilized method in this study. When using surveys as a method it is important that the survey instrument be credible meaning it is both reliable and valid (Schuh, 2009). Validity in the simplest of definitions asks if the instrument is actually measuring what it claims to be measuring (Borden & Zak Owens, 2001; Schuh, 2009). While Reliability refers to the margin of error found in participant scoring; or easier put — how likely are we to get the same scores when administering the test to the same group (McMillan, 2008; Schuh 2009).

Employee engagement was measured through the Employee Engagement Scale (Shuck, Adelson, & Reio, 2017) which is a 12-item instrument focused on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement factors (Appendix E).

Document Analysis

A variety of documentation was also utilized to better track and understand the process of change as it relates to employee onboarding and engagement. "Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material" (p. 27, Bowen, 2009). Examples of documents to analyze include agendas, outlines, survey data, institutional files, diaries, journals and more (Bowen, 2009). For the purposes of this study most documentation focused on institutional files, survey data, agendas, and journals. Border University administered a survey by Modern Think to assess employee engagement. This survey is part of the Great Colleges to Work for program which uses the ModernThink Higher Education Insight Survey which was designed specifically for higher education institution. The Higher Education Insight Survey was completed by both faculty and staff; it included sixty statements answerable on a five-point agreement scale, demographic questions, eighteen-item benefits satisfaction section, and two open-ended questions (ModernThink, 2019). As the survey was designed specifically for higher education the questions provided insight in fifteen areas deemed crucial to higher education as identified by a blue-ribbon panel of professionals (ModernThink, 2019). The fifteen survey dimensions included: job satisfaction/support; teaching environment; professional development; compensation, benefits, & work/life balance; facilities; policies, resources, & efficiency; shared governance; pride; supervisors/department chairs; senior leadership; faculty, administration, & staff relations; communication; collaboration; fairness; and respect & appreciation

(ModernThink, 2019). The areas that Border University identified as areas of opportunity were fairness; communication; policies, resources & efficiency; and respect & appreciation which are drivers in the proposed model to improve employee engagement within the division. Action Research Team (ART) members were asked to reflect via journaling at various times and their reflections were also analyzed. These pieces of document were also analyzed utilizing features from ATLAS.ti and categorized into themes.

Overall, the main data, which included interviews and surveys, along with the secondary data from the document analysis was all valid, reliable, and trustworthy data; discussed later in this section.

Participants

This study relied on the participation of everyone within the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs. Participants were categorized into four different groups: the Action Research Team, New Full-Time Employees, Supervisors, and All Full-Time Divisional Employees (Table 2.3)

Table 2.3

Broad Overview of Participant Group Make-Up

Participant Group	Total Number in the Division	Number of Participants Invited to Study	Number of Study Participants Interviewed/Survey Completed
Action Research Team	6	4	4
New Full-Time Employees	28	10	5
Supervisors	33	10	4
All Full-Time Divisional Employees	118	118	66

Action Research Team

The Action Research Team (ART) was selected to be a cross representation of the division. Members of ART represented a variety of the departments within the division and were employed for various lengths of time as shown in Table 2.4. ART members were selected based on their interests in improving the new employee experience and their ability to dedicate time (offer a commitment) to the project. To be included in the ART participant group individuals must be full-time employees of the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs at Border University; serving on the onboarding committee; and not considered temporary, part-time, or student employees. The ART was comprised of five consistent members; there were two who had to exit due to taking on new jobs.

Table 2.4

Action Research Team Participants

Name	Divisional Role/Title	Length of Time in Division	Left the Division During the Study	Interviewed
Lyndsey (Me)	Director – New Student & Family Transitions	4	No	No
Mark	Director – Multicultural Student Engagement	5	No	Yes
Ashley	Coordinator – Housing & Residence Life	2	No	Yes
Mary	Assistant Director – Financial Aid	10	Maternity Leave	Yes
Kate	Coordinator – VP Office	2	Yes	Yes
Jasmine	Coordinator - Admissions	1	Yes	No

New Full-Time Employees

New Full-Time Employees were individuals entering a full-time position from outside the division of student affairs whether an internal university hire or outside university hire still within their first six months of employment at the start of the intervention plan. New Employees were included in the study if they were with the Division of Enrollment & Student Affairs for not more than six months at the start of the study and are full-time employees. New Employees were excluded if they were at seven months or more, temporary, clerical, part-time, or student employees. In some organizations the onboarding process begins at the time of application, through the collection of paperwork and concludes after the first day (Bailey, 2016). Pierce (2017) stated that a successful onboarding process should include leadership development, working with an executive coach, and being paired with a mentor to extend through the first year. The Action Research team considered the research and the cycle of when new employees join the division and made a decision to start by creating a 6-month onboarding program and eventually grow to 1 year as resources allow. Thus, the New Full-Time Employee criteria was set at those with not more than 6 months.

Supervisors

Supervisors are those who have direct report line(s) and/or supervise one or more full time employees. Within the division there were 38 supervisors. Supervisors participated in various aspects of the project. All Supervisors were invited to the supervisor training while select supervisors were invited to an interview if they had a New Full-Time Divisional Employee. Some participants were both Supervisors and New Full-Time Employees.

All Full-Time Divisional Employees

Division wide refers to all full-time employees of the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs. Division wide employees included all full-time non-clerical positions which amounted to 118 people. Any division wide employee who was part-time, in a clerical, temporary, or student employee position was excluded from the study. All 118 full-time employees were invited to participate in the Employee Engagement Survey; 66 participated.

Informed consent was obtained in a variety of ways depending on the participant group. For example, when doing interviews participants were read a statement explaining the purpose, how information was going to be used, and any potential risk/negative effects they could face. They also had the opportunity to opt out at any time. Similar strategies were implemented with the delivery of the Employee Engagement Survey where participants received a consent letter to review all information.

Data Analysis Procedures

This study gathered both qualitative and quantitative data. As such, data analysis relied on both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods. A review of the analysis procedures is provided according to each method type.

Qualitative Analysis

After interviews took places the interviews were transcribed and reviewed by the researcher first to make sure the transcription was accurate. This was done while reading the transcript while simultaneously listening to the recording. Once the transcriptions were verified for accuracy they were then uploaded to ATLAS.ti 9 for more in depth coding. ATLAS.ti 9 is a powerful software used to organize and code data. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) define codes as overarching labels that give meaning or describe information of various sizes from the

data. The coding process was the primary analysis strategy for the qualitative data. The process

of coding is an opportunity to engage in deep reflection and interpretation of the meaning of the

data (Miles et al., 2014). Three different coding methods were utilized to interpret the data;

concept coding, provisional coding, and attribute coding. Thirteen individuals across participant

groups were interviewed throughout the study. Due to the number of participants attribute coding

was useful in keeping track of basic descriptive information that could be easily managed (Miles

et al., 2014). The framework of Inform-Welcome-Guide (Klein & Heuser, 2008; Klein, Polin, &

Sutton, 2015) became the codes that were used to start the process. Provisional coding allows the

researcher to begin with a starting list of researcher-generated codes based on what is believe to

appear in the data (Miles et al., 2014). Concept coding was also utilized to help identify the

bigger ideas the data presents across larger phrases (Miles et al., 2014). Once the data was coded

a short summary of each interview was provided back to the participant for member checking.

The participant was asked if the summary provided an accurate essence of the conversation about

their experience with onboarding.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data was collected via the employee engagement survey which measured

three aspects of engagement: 1) Emotional Engagement (EE); 2.) Cognitive Engagement (CE);

3.) Behavioral Engagement. Additional information collected included role (new employee,

supervisor, or employee); length of time in position; and attendance at various interventions. All

related data were transformed to a number so the data could be easily worked with in SPSS

which is a powerful statistical software that allows for analysis of various data sets.

Within each factor of engagement there were four questions asked. Descriptive analysis

was run to ensure the means for each question fell within the bell curve. Having similar means

within a factor was important to be able to utilize the average for the reminder of the analysis.

For example, instead of analyzing CE1, CE2, CE3, CE4 separately against each intervention I

looked at the average of CE1-CE4 creating a new variable Cognitive Engagement Average (CE)

and repeated the process for each additional engagement factor. Once all averages were obtained

the Independent Sample T-Test process was run where the Engagement factors were the

dependent variables, and the interventions (New Employee Workshop, Supervisor Training, and

Departmental Discoveries) were the Independent Variables. ANOVA was utilized to compare

Role as the independent variable and the Engagement factors as the Dependent variables.

Various levels of significance were found between all variables which will be discussed at length

in chapter 3.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Within any research study validity and trustworthiness are important constructs to keep in

check. Validity and reliability are ways to understand how sound the methodology is for

collecting quantitative data and trustworthiness does the same for qualitative data (Creswell,

2018). Trustworthiness includes four elements: (a) Credibility- considers the accuracy of the data

through strategies like member checking (b) Transferability- asks if the research has applicability

to other areas (c) Confirmability- is a way of backing up data through creation of audit trails (d)

Dependability- looks at the ability to replicate the study.

Trustworthiness

Validity or trustworthiness for the qualitative data comes in multiple forms. Triangulation

using different data sources of information (Creswell, 2018) was one way of to build justification

for themes found in data. Creswell (2018) lists member-checking as a way to determine the

accuracy of qualitative findings. Additional practices of validity presented by Creswell (2003)

include using rick, thick descriptions to convey the findings, clarifying researcher bias, and spending prolonged times in the field; all of these strategies were used to maintain trustworthiness. Credibility was ensured by having participants review their interview transcripts and summary statement to verify the summary captured the overall essence of the participants thoughts as member-checking suggests. Participants were given the opportunity to elaborate or clarify anything from their interview summary. This study has many transferable ideologies as onboarding and employee engagement are both concepts that are important across various fields. Confirmability was maintained through storage of all data in a password protected cloud storage. In addition, a list of participants names and pseudonyms was created to link participant to interview data; This information was also stored in a password protected cloud storage. Lastly, dependability was achieved through consistent and proper use of interview protocols. Interview protocols (Appendix D) were developed to ensure the replicability of the study for future use. Lastly long term length of the study allowed for regular and repeated observations of interventions over the 2.5 year study.

Validity and Reliability

Selecting tools such as the Employee Engagement Scale and the Higher Education Insight Survey provide a high level of validity and reliability. ModernThink's Higher Education Insight Survey is well known, widely used, and an accepted form of measurement within student affairs and higher education. The Employee Engagement Scale (EES) is a newer tool that was validated by recent research (Shuck et. al, 2017). Over the course of four studies the EES was examined for reliability and validity across the three subscales for emotional engagement, behavioral engagement, and cognitive engagement. The EES is the first measure designed to measure employee engagement and as a newer measure there are certainly limitations. While the

initial studies of the EES do establish a level of validity compared to other scales designed to measure emotional engagement, behavioral engagement, and cognitive engagement Shuck et. all recommend using the EES alongside other tools. The purpose of this study was not to test the validity of the EES tool therefore inn this study EES was used as an additional measure alongside qualitative data collection. To test reliability within data set I considered the Internal consistency of results across multiple items within the EES tool for my pool. Reviewing the descriptive statistics of the means and standard deviations helped to establish a level of reliability within my data set.

Subjectivity Statement

Throughout the study I served as a director in the division at Border University. This gave me certain positionality to have access to various levels of employees within the division. This positionality also had its privileges as I was able to access information and people within the division with ease. With these privileges I must also acknowledge that this may have caused some participants to feel marginalized by participating in a study done by someone who is of higher-ranking status than them. In the consent process I further explained that participation in the study was to have no effect on employment or future employee evaluations.

As a Black cisgender heterosexual woman with a middle-class background in my early thirties I show up in spaces in a variety of ways. On the divisional leadership team comprised of 20 people we fluctuated between two and four Black women including myself, a coordinator, business manager, and associate vice-president. At the conclusion of the study, I was the only Black woman director along with our association vice-president. Looking across the divisional leadership, the majority are in their 40s or older while myself and two others are in our early thirties. Because of my age, race, and positionality I had various levels of insider and outsider

privilege. I found that within the same group of colleagues my status quickly shifted between insider and outsider. Members of the action research team experienced me as an insider having once been an Assistant Director within the division, I knew each member of the action research team before I stepped into the Director role. I also experienced insider privilege with other members of the Black community within the division with that being a smaller community we are able to offer each other support by way of verbal affirmation but also a heads up on information. Participants who were in the new full-time divisional employee group experienced me as an outsider given my position in leadership as a supervisor. Other places I had competing status as both outsider and insider were with people who previously worked with me and viewed me as a peer. Given the 3 years I worked for the institution prior to starting the study, I was able to build foundational relationships. However, moving into a new role with elevated leadership responsibilities caused relationships to shift. As an insider to the organization there were assumptions and biases I had to address while conducting research such as other staffers assuming I was getting preferential treatment or additional support. I had to be careful of not getting in my own way and willing to acknowledge and work on my own biases. First, I had a bias that the onboarding process at Border University is very poor because I did not have a good onboarding process. This could have caused me to want to be overly involved in the implementation of methods for onboarding. All members of the ART also voiced poor experiences with the onboarding process within the division. As a collective we had to lean on each other to make sure we are remaining neutral and considering all ideas fairly. While this may seem like a negative bias it also gave each of us a drive and purpose to remain passionate about seeing this change come to fruition within the division. Harnessing these biases help prove for positive outcomes for Border University and the change project.

CHAPTER 3

THE ACTION RESEARCH STORY

As a research process, Action Research, is filled with plot twists that make movie magic. The action research team (ART) is much like the band of characters in the Marvel cult classic Guardians of the Galaxy. Navigating through outer space is much like being thrown into a swimming pool with no prior swimming lessons and no lifeguard on duty. Lifeguards responsibility to safe guard the pool and the enjoyment of all pool goers can be likened to the Guardians responsibility to uphold the safety of all inhabitants of the galaxy. Together, a rag tag group from varying backgrounds works to create a new program that breathes new life into the division of student affairs environment making it more fitting for high levels of employee engagement. This is a story of how the group came to be, a journey through unchartered territory filled with twists and turns, and what was learned along the way. From this story future guardians will unlock the power to onboard and engage members of their teams into their student affairs divisions.

The Galaxy

Border University is located in a mid-size southern state where the major industries are technology, medicine, security, and military services. Border University is a multi-campus institution that employs over 10,000 employees. The Divisions of Enrollment and Student Affairs (ESA) is one out of the thirteen operational areas that report to the president. At the start of the study there were 116 full time employees across 14 departments. Employees included 88 women, 28 men. These employees ranged in expertise levels ranging from Directors (10), Assistant Vice Presidents (3), Assistant & Associate Directors (14), Coordinators (27),

Administrative Assistants (10), and Business Managers (4). Over the last two years over 20 new

staff have joined the division while over 30 have left. Out of those who left ten of them left

within one to one and a half years of starting in their position. In the midst of all of this the

"galaxy" gained new leadership. In the spring of 2018 Border University welcomed a new Vice

President of Enrollment and Student Affairs (VP of ESA). With positions ranging from associate

vice presidents to office assistants vacant the VP of ESA knew they had to do something

innovative to welcome and retain staff.

      The VP of ESA, spent their first few months, meeting with staff individually to learn

about needs and concerns within the division. In addition, the university participates in the Great

Colleges to Work for Survey. Between the survey results and the VP of ESA's individual

meetings they identified a need to improve collaboration, communication, and engagement. The

VP of ESA believes that improving these areas will allow the division to better serve the

students. In Fall of 2018 the VP of ESA created several committees that are charged with various

tasks such as a strategic planning, fostering inter-culturalism, and professional development as a

way of improving aforementioned areas. The charge of the Professional Development

Committee (PDC) is outlined as follows:

      The Professional Development Committee (PDC) plays an integral role in developing our

      staff's knowledge, skills, and abilities to best serve students at Border University. The

      mission of this committee is to enhance divisional effectiveness by organizing activities

      that provide staff development opportunities, build community and improve employee

      retention and morale. This group will work to plan professional workshops or trainings,

      new employee (Divisional) orientations and other essential initiatives for staff members

      within the Division of Enrollment & Student Affairs. The workshops and trainings are to

be focused on topics or areas that are concerns and what the committee feels will be most

beneficial for the overall division. (Personal Communication, 2018)

At the onset of the journey, the PDC was set to make up the core action research team.

Originally, this team was comprised of 11 staff who represented areas across the division at

various levels ranging from director level to business managers. With there being a very clear

charge to the PDC, our first task was to get a better understanding of the needs of professionals

within the division. I facilitated a reflection activity with the PDC where we discussed our own

experiences and the direction we would like to see the division move for onboarding staff and

offering professional development. As a result, we decided that creating a needs assessment

would give us the information to better understand the problem and possible interventions. This

initial needs assessment consisted of 12 questions including both multiple choice and open-ended

responses (Appendix C). The assessment was sent out to 116 full time staff. After reviewing the

results of the assessment the PDC realized there were various competing priorities, making the

decision to create a subcommittee to focus specifically on onboarding an obvious choice. The

onboarding subcommittee officially took on the role of the Action Research Team in the Spring

of 2019. This team served as the group to guide the division into embracing employee

onboarding.

The Guardians

Individuals on the Action Research Team (ART) have been at the university and in the

division for as little as 1 year all the way to 10 years. I was honored to be able to lead the ART in

creating a change in the division targeted at improving communication, engagement, and

employee retention. With my expertise in new student onboarding and our collective experiences

in student affairs the ART focused on learning about employee onboarding from a human

resources and organizational development framework. Outside of the university wide employee onboarding there was no consistent onboarding for new employees within the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs at Border College. The ART utilized action research to create onboarding initiatives within the division that led to needed and hopefully lasting change. Through this process much was learned about onboarding that will impact the field of student affairs practitioners.

Back Seat Driving

Creating a program that will be long lasting meant leading from the back seat at times. In other words, it takes inspiring a shared vision and championing the team forward. I was purposeful in using distributive leadership techniques such as adaptive leadership as a way to share the responsibility and create buy-in. Adaptive leadership requires us to get on the balcony to view the problem from a different lens; identify if it's a technical or adaptive challenge; be able to regulate distress by remain calm and confident in difficult situations; maintain disciplined attention by getting others to lean into the challenge at hand; give the work back by empowering the group to think for themselves to solve problems; as well as protect leadership voices from below by elevating ideas and concerns of people from lower status (Western, 2019). I have been employed at Border University for four years within ESA. After four years I am an award winning staff member, respected among colleagues and peers, and promoted into a formal leadership role. I have positionality that allows me to interact with individuals at various levels in the division and across the university enterprise. This positionality gave me the necessary access to help lead effective and potentially lasting change within the division.

The Dream Team

While I may have had the positionality, the divisional change would not have happened without a team of dedicated individuals. This was not your typical committee. These individuals were strategically selected based on relationships. Wagner and Harter (2006) articulate the tenth element of great managing is having a "best friend" at work. This tenth element has been shown to be a predictor of productivity. Through their research in various companies they found that when given tasks, groups that were comprised of friends produced more than groups who did not have friend pairings (Wagner and Harter, 2006). In addition to productivity, overall job satisfaction can also be predicted based on the level of social connections available to workers; researchers go on to say that good supervisors provide such opportunities to make connections from the beginning (Wagner and Harter, 2006). Although this action research is not solely focused on friendship in the workplace it is important to note that two facets of our onboarding framework include social connections; welcome and guide. An early insight that developed was the unique role an onboarding program has in creating lasting social connections.

When I set out to create this team, I purposefully found my friends in the division. I started with my work best friend. Then the two of us identified others who we believed would be fun to work with and would be passionate about the project. Each individual was approached with the question "do you remember your first few months on the job?" to which most replied "YES, they sucked I had to figure most things out on my own" or "I felt like I was thrown into the deep end of the pool and forced to learn how to swim". A simple pitch of "how would you like to make a difference in the experience of new employees, so they have a better introduction?" got people excited and engaged with the work. With that a team (Table 3.1) was put together that consisted of five people including myself (pseudonyms are used for everyone

except for me). Throughout the project team membership shifted with team members entering
and exiting. The initial ART included Mark, Ashley, Mary, Jasmine, and me. The core ART
consisted of myself, Mark, and Ashley as we were actively working in the division and on the
project throughout its entirety. Whereas Jasmine, Kate, and Mary all had circumstances that
caused them to leave, join late, or return after an absence. Mary took maternity leave for three
months; while away she stayed abreast of ART work and excitedly returned to the team once she
came back to work full time. Prior to Mary's maternity leave we saw Jasmine exit and Kate
enter. Jasmine's partner took a new job out of town which cause her to leave the university.

Table 3.1

Action Research Team

Name	Divisional Role/Title	Length of Time in Division	Left the Division During the Study
Lyndsey	Director – New Student & Family Transitions	4	No
Mark	Director – Multicultural Student Engagement	5	No
Ashley	Coordinator – Housing & Residence Life	2	No
Mary	Assistant Director – Financial Aid	10	Maternity Leave
Kate	Coordinator – VP Office	2	Yes
Jasmine	Coordinator - Admissions	1	Yes

The ART felt it was important to have at least 5 individuals on the team. We felt that Kate's position in the VP office gave a unique positionality that could be beneficial to the group to push initiatives forward. We were right about having Kate on the ART and the benefit of her position. Kate was also in a doctoral program at another state institution and was working on an action research project. Kate's understanding of action research and position in the division made her an easy choice to invite to the team. Six months after Mary returned from maternity leave Kate was offered and accepted a new position at the university outside of the division towards the end of the project.

Even with team members entering and exiting the overall dynamic of the team stayed in tack. I believe this is largely due to the aforementioned tenth element of working with your best friend. As team members ebbed and flowed there was always a sense of comradery that was established. Bi-weekly team meetings were filled with jokes and laughter that made the work seem less like work and more like play. In addition, the ART genuinely cared about creating an experience for their future colleagues. As the ART saw members coming and going this made apparent the need to create a purposeful transition process for strategically rotating members on and off. The ART also considered the overall status and composition of the then subcommittee. This review of the subcommittee status, makeup, and transition made up third cycle of the action research project. The subcommittee was elevated to an official standing committee and a committee charge was created and approved by the VP. The official committee membership guidelines were established to include the following: a.) Committee to be chaired by a director; b.) Committee to have at least one but not more than two members from each of the four units within the division; c.) Members have been with the division for at least one year. Elevation of

the subcommittee to a standing committee was an initial signal the team had made it from

Knowhere to Somewhere.

Knowhere to Somewhere

The crux of the issue of why onboarding for employees in student affairs is haphazard

boils down to time and responsibility. For years new employees and their supervisors had been

saying they wished there was a streamlined process in the division to welcome and teach new

employees. Although people weren't using the word "onboarding" they were indeed talking

about onboarding. Phrases such as "new employees need to learn the same things" or "wouldn't

it be great if we had a process to welcome our new people" were said often at the beginning of

this action research process. Various onboarding frameworks were vetted and the Inform-

Welcome-Guide framework was selected to study further and implement in the division.

What follows is a story of moving from "Knowhere" to Somewhere. Knowhere is a

reference to a fictional place in the Marvel universe which is actually the severed head of a

celestial being. The head has been taken over and created into a world of debauchery where

anything goes. At the beginning of the action research project the division was operating in a

"Knowhere" state, where anything went when it came to onboarding. Units, departments within

those units, and even supervisors within the same department were using different tactics and

delivering conflicting messaging to their new employees. The goal was to get to Somewhere; a

streamlined onboarding process for all new employees across the division of Enrollment and

Student Affairs. In laymen's terms this could be the difference of sinking or swimming.

Problem Framing

The initial issues identified at Border University were the lack of collaboration, divisional

knowledge, communication between staff, engagement, and retention within the division of

Enrollment and Student Affairs. Considering the multiple issues at play within the division, the Action Research Team (ART) was tasked to learn more about these problems and consider potential solutions. Collectively, the group set out to learn about onboarding as a way to create and implement interventions that may be successful in offering solutions to these workplace problems.

Prior to the creation of the ART the Professional Development Committee (PDC) spent time better understanding the issues by sending out a needs assessment to members of the division. The initial needs assessment consisted of 12 questions including both multiple choice and open-ended responses (Appendix C). The needs assessment was sent out to 116 full time staff; 45 responded to the survey including members of the PDC.

The needs assessment had two primary foci. First, questions centered on experiences staff were having in the division around communication, divisional knowledge, and collaboration. These questions helped to confirm if this was a problem that staff also recognized within the organization or if it was just something the VP saw as a problem. The second area of questions focused on skills that staff would like develop and the types of trainings they would be interested in. As the primary consultant I found the second area of questions to be a bit premature, however the PDC was also trying to meet the demands of the VP by offering some training opportunities while also building a long term plan for change. Looking at questions that explored issues facing staff at Border University around collaboration, knowledge, and communication we saw that staff was pretty split on their experience within the division (Table 3.2). There are very split responses around communication, receiving training, and being valued in the division.

Table 3.2

Issues Facing Staff at Border University

Question	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I received training within my first 30 days in my current role to do my job effectively.	31.11% (14)	22.22% (10)	22.22% (10)	15.56% (7)	8.89% (4)
My area collaborates in meaningful ways with other departments at the university.	37.78% (17)	31.11% (14)	15.56% (7)	11.11% (5)	4.44% (2)
I receive communication about new information within my department in a timely manner.	33.33% (15)	31.11% (14)	11.11% (5)	20.00% (9)	4.44% (2)
I receive communication about new information within the division in a timely manner.	17.78% (8)	44.44% (20)	13.33% (6)	22.22% (10)	2.22% (1)
Within my current position I have been given the opportunity to grow and/or improve my current skill set.	28.89% (13)	31.11% (14)	13.33% (6)	15.56% (7)	11.11% (5)
Within my current position I have been given the opportunity to learn a new skill set.	26.67% (12)	37.78% (17)	8.89% (4)	15.56% (7)	11.11% (5)
My skills are being used to their fullest potential in my current position	15.56% (7)	37.78% (17)	13.33% (6)	13.33% (6)	20.00% (9)
I believe that I am a valued member of this division	37.78% (17)	22.22% (10)	13.33% (6)	8.89% (4)	17.78% (8)

From this needs assessment we learned that 46.67% of respondents did not receive

training within their first 30 days. Issues with communication at the department and divisional

level were also noted by 35% and 37% of respondents respectively. This information was useful

as it helped to inform the direction ART eventually took in considering the design of an

onboarding program for new employees that would address concerns around training and communication. A limitation of this needs assessment was not collecting specific demographic information for respondents. The PDC wanted to ensure that staff participated in the survey so we made the decision to not ask identifying information. It could have been possible that upper level staff believed communication is fine while lower level staff see a problem or vice versa. With this basic level of assessment, the ART set off on a multi-cycle action research journey to design and implement an onboarding program. The journey of the ART, their learning, and how they implement change is at the core of the action research project. What was learned in the core supports the thesis question of the overall research; what is learned at the individual, group, and system levels when a division of student affairs embraces employee onboarding for new employee development?

The ART followed Coghlan and Brannick (2014) Action Research (AR) Cycle, Figure 3.1. The AR cycle as described by Coghlan and Brannick is an iterative process that may go through multiple cycles. One full cycle includes a constructing period, planning action, taking action, evaluating action, and then repeats as needed. The constructing period was an opportunity for the ART to develop relationships that will allow the team to best work together to create change. The constructing period was also the time to best understand what the problem is and why the team wanted to implement a change. While Figure 3.1 shows a clean cycle of action research flowing from one state to another the reality is there were many twists and turns shown in Figure 3.2 and discussed throughout the rest of the narrative.

Figure 3.1

Action Research Cycle

Figure 3.2

Actual Action Research Cycle

The story that is depicted in Figure 3.2 is explained through the intervention creation and implementation story that follows. Figure 3.2 took place over the course of 2.5 years and during a global pandemic. Insights learned at the individual, group, and system levels that have the potential to influence future onboarding practices within the profession of student affairs will also be explored.

Interventions and Implementation Plans

The action research team (ART) worked to identify multiple possible solutions to the problems the division was facing. When first discussed the thought was to implement all of the solutions in Table 3.3 to intervene on the division to lead to lasting change. However due to the pandemic and the site sponsor wanting to focus more on the workshop and supervisor training the Buddy Program and Professional Development Plans were tabled. In March of 2020 the world came to a standstill due the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, Border University went on a remote work from home status from March to July 2020. When the university reopened in July 2020 in person events were limited to 50 people with a requirement to maintain a social distance of 6 feet.

Table 3.3

Intervention Plan Incorporating Inform-Welcome-Guide and Work Based Higher Education

Frameworks

Proposed Intervention	Inform-Welcome-Guide	5 tenets of WBHE	AR Team Activities	Proposed Timeline (start)	Data to be collected to evaluate intervention
New Emp. Checklist	Inform	K, P, B	Develop & Pilot	Summer 2020	Survey & Interview
New Emp. Handbook	Inform	K, P, B	Develop & Pilot	Fall 2020	Survey & Interview

Proposed Intervention	Inform-Welcome-Guide	5 tenets of WBHE	AR Team Activities	Proposed Timeline (start)	Data to be collected to evaluate intervention
New Emp. Workshop	Welcome	K, P, R, B	Develop, Identify Speakers, Lead Sessions	Spring 2021	Survey & Interview
Supervisor Training	Welcome	K, P, R, L, B	Develop, Identify Speakers, Lead Sessions	Fall 2020	Survey & Interview
Buddy Program	Guide	K, R, B	Develop, Train, & Match Participants	Spring 2021	Survey & Interview
ProDevo Plan	Guide	K, L, R	Implement	Spring 2021	Professional Competency Rubric

Note: K= Knowledge transformation and integration; P= Problem solving; R= Reflection; L=Learning from errors; B= Boundary crossing

The period of quarantine, where the world was closed, caused a shift in how work was done; moving to a completely virtual environment with limited face to face interaction. This had a serious impact on the planning and taking action phases of action research. A nearly completed New Employee Workshop had to be restructured to fit our new virtual work environment. The COVID-19 pandemic started in March of 2020 and continued over a year later causing a need for continued creative strategies to onboard new employees.

Each intervention built upon the next and fit nicely with the Inform-Welcome Guide Framework (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015) and Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen's (2018) tenets

to develop expertise through work Based Higher Education (WBHE). The rest of the action research story will be told in the three cycles where the process of implementing interventions will be briefly discussed giving insight on why the intervention was selected, timeline for implementation, important milestones, resources needed, the role of the action research team, as well as what was learned through the process.

The process of selecting and implementing interventions with the ART is where much individual and group learning occurred. From interviews with supervisors, we found that many had never learned about onboarding and their only understanding of the concept was simply based on their previous experience whether good or bad. This was supported by Zora:

> In early days for me, it was definitely trial by error because we didn't have a lot of training opportunities going on. Like we do now. And we didn't have much onboarding information available to use for people either in early days. Not much at all. So, it really, for me was a lot of trial by error.

To start the learning process and moving the ART and supervisors from novice to experts on the topic of onboarding the five tenets of Work Based Higher Education were implemented. According to Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen (2018) there are five tenets of Work Based Higher Education that led to expertise development. These tenets include: 1). Knowledge transformation and integration; 2). Problem solving; 3.) Reflection; 4.) Learning from errors; 5.) Boundary crossing (Walling, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018). An activity that falls under problem solving is "challenging to solve problems collaboratively" while "structuring workplace learning opportunities and relating formal & informal learning" relates to knowledge transformation and integration. Both activities were crucial to the intervention selection process.

Interventions were then assessed at the conclusion of each action research cycle. Concluding the

3rd action research cycle the Employee Engagement Scale was administered to measure the effect

of the newly created onboarding program on employee engagement. The survey focused on three

engagement constructs of cognitive engagement, emotion engagement, and behavioral

engagement. Quantitative and qualitative data is presented throughout the story of each

intervention where applicable. Providing the data gives a full picture of intervention

implementation and impact from start to finish. There was a total of 54 usable responses to the

survey; participants who were not full-time were excluded. Participant membership by role (new

employee, employee, or supervisor) along with number of years served in role are shown in

Figures 3.3-3.4. Out of the participants almost 26% of them were new employees. For the

purposes of consistent group membership participants were not double counted; they were given

a priority group. For example, if a participant was both a supervisor and a new employee they

were counted as a new employee first.

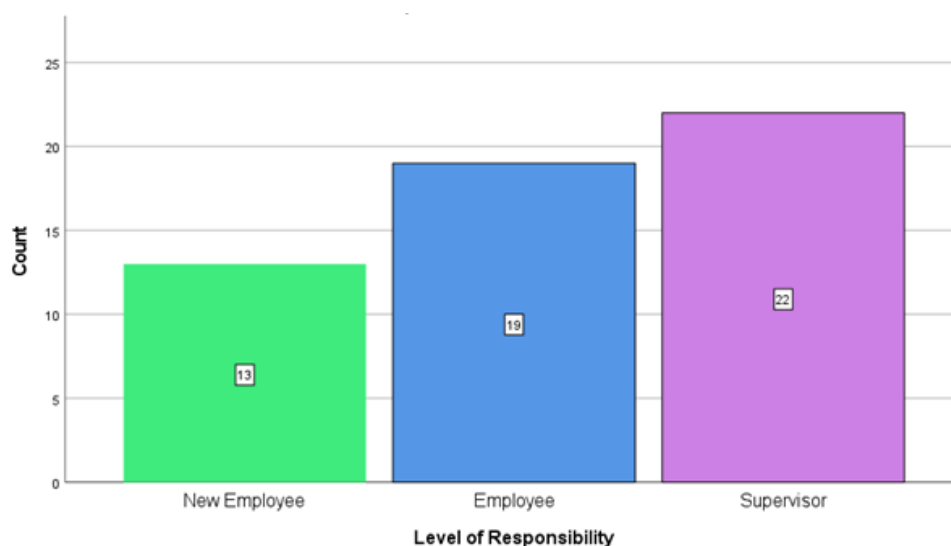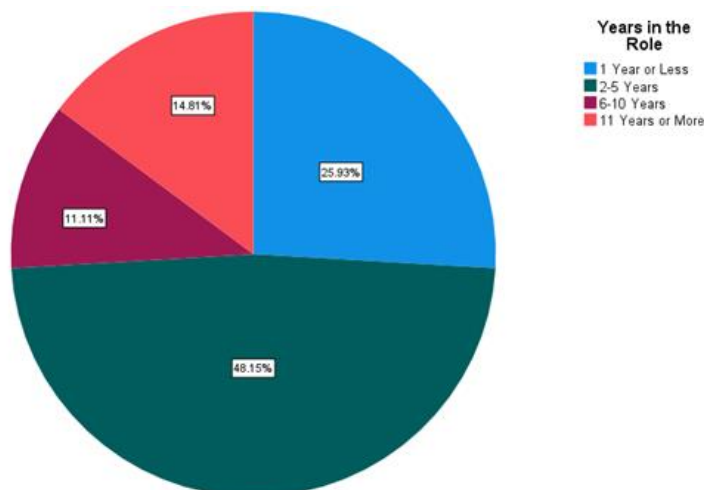**Figure 3.3**

Simple Bar Count of Role

Figure 3.4

Pie Chart Count of Years in the Role

The longevity in roles at Border University ranged from a few months to over 20 years. For ease, four main groupings were created of 1 year or less, 2-5 years, 6-10 years, and 11 years or more. Roughly 26% of the participants had 1 year or less in their role with the majority of participants (48%) having anywhere from 2-5 years. The fact that the majority of participants had been in their position for 2-5 years is consistent with previous research of Tull (2006) stating that student affairs professions leave withing 2-5 years.

In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative data by way of interviews also helps to tell the action research story. The primary forms of qualitative data included interviews from new employees and their supervisors as well journal entries and interviews from the AR team. Twelve individuals across 3 different participant groups were interviewed throughout the study (Table 3.4). Due to the number of participants, attribute coding was useful in keeping track of basic descriptive information that could be easily managed (Miles et al., 2014).

Table 3.4

Interviewee Demographics

Name (Pseudonym)	Participant Group	Length of Time in Position	Gender	Functional Area
Suze	New Employee	4 months	Female	Admissions
Jacob	New Employee	6 months	Male	Admissions
Macey	New Employee	2 months	Female	Military & Veterans
Rowling	New Employee	1 month	Female	Military & Veterans
Leo	New Employee	8 months	Male	Student Life & Engagement
Zora	Supervisor	15 years	Female	Disability
Britney	Supervisor	7 years	Female	Counseling
Rob	Supervisor	5 years	Male	Student Life & Engagement
Kate	Action Research Team	2 years	Female	VP's Office
Mary	Action Research Team	10 years	Female	Financial Aid
Mark	Action Research Team	5 years	Male	Multicultural Student Engagement
Ashley	Action Research Team	2 years	Female	Housing

After interviews were completed, the interviews were transcribed and reviewed by the researcher first to make sure the transcription was accurate. This was done while reading the transcript and simultaneously listening to the recording. Once the transcriptions were verified for accuracy, they were then uploaded to ATLAS.ti for more in depth coding. ATLAS.ti is a powerful software used to organize and code data. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) defined codes as overarching labels that give meaning or describe information of various sizes from the data. The process of coding is the analysis of the qualitative data. The process of coding is an opportunity to engage in deep reflection and interpretation of the meaning of the data (Miles et al., 2014). Three different coding methods were utilized to interpret the data; concept coding,

provisional coding, and attribute coding. The framework of Inform-Welcome-Guide (Klein &

Heuser, 2008; Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015) along with behavioral, cognitive, and emotional

engagement styles (Shuck et al., 2017) became the codes that were used to start the process.

Provisional coding allows the researcher to begin with a starting list of researcher-generated

codes based on what is believed to appear in the data (Miles et al., 2014). Concept coding was

also utilized to help identify the bigger ideas the data presents across larger phrases (Miles et al.,

2014). Once the data were coded a short summary of each interview was provided back to the

participant for member checking. The participant was asked if the summary provided an accurate

essence of the conversation about their experience with onboarding.

Coding Scheme

A variety of themes emerged from the coded data that revealed what individuals, groups,

and systems learn from onboarding being implemented within the division of Enrollment &

Student Affairs. The following codes were used throughout the analysis process: inform,

welcome, guide, onboarding experience, timing & responsibility, process, individual, group,

system, new employee, supervisor, learning to onboard, emotional engagement, behavioral

engagement, and cognitive engagement. These codes were developed from the onboarding

framework used in the implementation process (provisional codes); big ideas that spoke to the

individual, group, or system learning as well as various forms of engagement like behavioral,

emotional, or cognitive (concept codes); as well as participant codes to keep things organized

(attribute codes). An overview of codes can be found in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5

Code Groupings

Code	Attribute Code	Provisional Code	Concept Code
Inform		X	
Welcome		X	
Guide		X	
Supervisor	X		
New Employee	X		
Individual			X
Group			X
System			X
Timing & Responsibility			X
Onboarding Experience			X
Process			X
COVID Pandemic			X
Engagement			X
Relationship			X
Learning to Onboard			X
Emotional Engagement			X
Cognitive Engagement			X
Behavioral Engagement			X

A code frequency table (Table 3.6) is provided to show the magnitude of the codes to help create

a hierarchy (Miles et al., 2014). A summary table details which participants discussed similar

topics or used similar phrasing (Table 3.7). As I continued to code participant interviews, I

began the method of second cycle coding where new codes emerged. Second cycle coding was

my method to start to uncover patterns and cross-case analysis (Miles et al., 2014). A Sankey

diagram (Figure 3.5) shows the cross-case relationship or co-occurrence between codes and

document groups. Document groups were created by participant type. The similarities and

consistencies between the qualitative and quantitative analysis provides the bases of my insights.

Table 3.6

Summary of Important Themes Usage

Code	Groundedness	Code Groups
System	5	
Group	7	
Inform	7	Onboarding Framework
Individual	7	
COVID-19 Pandemic	9	
New Employee	9	
Welcome	10	Onboarding Framework
Guide	13	Onboarding Framework
Learning to Onboard	13	
Cognitive Engagement	14	Engagement
Expectations	14	
Timing & Responsibility	18	
Supervisor	21	
Planning	22	
Emotional Engagement	23	Engagement
Relationships	25	
Behavioral Engagement	27	Engagement
Process	28	
Onboarding Experience	41	

Initial codes were created based on roles, key words, roles, the onboarding framework ideas, and the engagement constructs. From the initial codes I then began to think larger to create code groups for the onboarding framework which included the codes Inform, welcome, and guide. Then a separate code group, Engagement, was created for cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement codes. I utilized the groundedness to determine how often codes were being used and to track patterns.

Table 3.7

Summary of Themes Based on Individuals Experience with Onboarding

Code	Participant
System	Ashley, Mary, Mark
Group	Ashley, Mary, Mark, Kate
Inform	Jacob, Leo, Macey, Zora, Britney, Ashley, Kate
Individual	Jacob, Rowling, Ashley, Kate
COVID-19 Pandemic	Jacob, Rowling, Leo, Zora, Britney, Ashley, Mary, Kate
New Employee	Jacob, Rowling, Leo, Macey, Rob, Mark
Welcome	Jacob, Suze, Leo, Macey, Ashley, Kate
Guide	Jacob, Suze, Rowling, Leo, Macey, Zora, Britney, Rob, Ashley, Mary
Learning to Onboard	Zora, Britney, Rob, Ashely, Mary, Mark, Kate
Cognitive Engagement	Jacob, Suze, Rowling, Macey, Britney, Rob, Ashley, Mary, Mark, Kate
Expectations	Jacob, Suze, Rowling, Leo, Britney, Rob, Ashley, Kate
Timing & Responsibility	Jacob, Rowling, Leo, Macey, Britney, Rob, Ashley, Kate
Supervisor	Jacob, Suze, Rowling, Leo, Macey, Zora, Britney, Rob, Kate
Planning	Ashley, Mary, Mark, Kate
Emotional Engagement	Jacob, Rowling, Macey, Britney, Ashley, Mary, Mark, Kate
Relationships	Jacob, Leo, Macey, Zora, Britney, Rob, Ashley, Mark, Kate
Behavioral Engagement	All Participants

Code	Participant
Process	All Participants
Onboarding Experience	All Participants

I then was interested in understanding who was talking about each concept. Understanding the participant then allowed me to think more broadly about if certain roles were discussing topics more or less. For example, in Table 3.7 it can be inferred that all participants regardless of role had concerns about the process of onboarding and made at least one statement regarding how their behavioral engagement was impacted. Whereas planning was mainly brought up by action research team members. A Sankey diagram (Figure 3.5) which considers all interview transcripts in groups based on their role is provided as a visual. The right side of Figure 3.5 lists the participant role and connects to the left side showing how many times certain codes were discussed by each participant group. This visual of co-occurrence shows that the action research team and new employees tended to evenly discuss all aspects of the onboarding framework and engagement. However, supervisors tended to focus on inform, guide, and the engagement constructs. This brings to mind the question if supervisors are missing the low hanging fruit of simply being a welcoming presence and focusing too narrowly on the task related items of sharing information and serving as a guide to new employees.

Figure 3.5

Sankey Diagram of Co-Occurrence
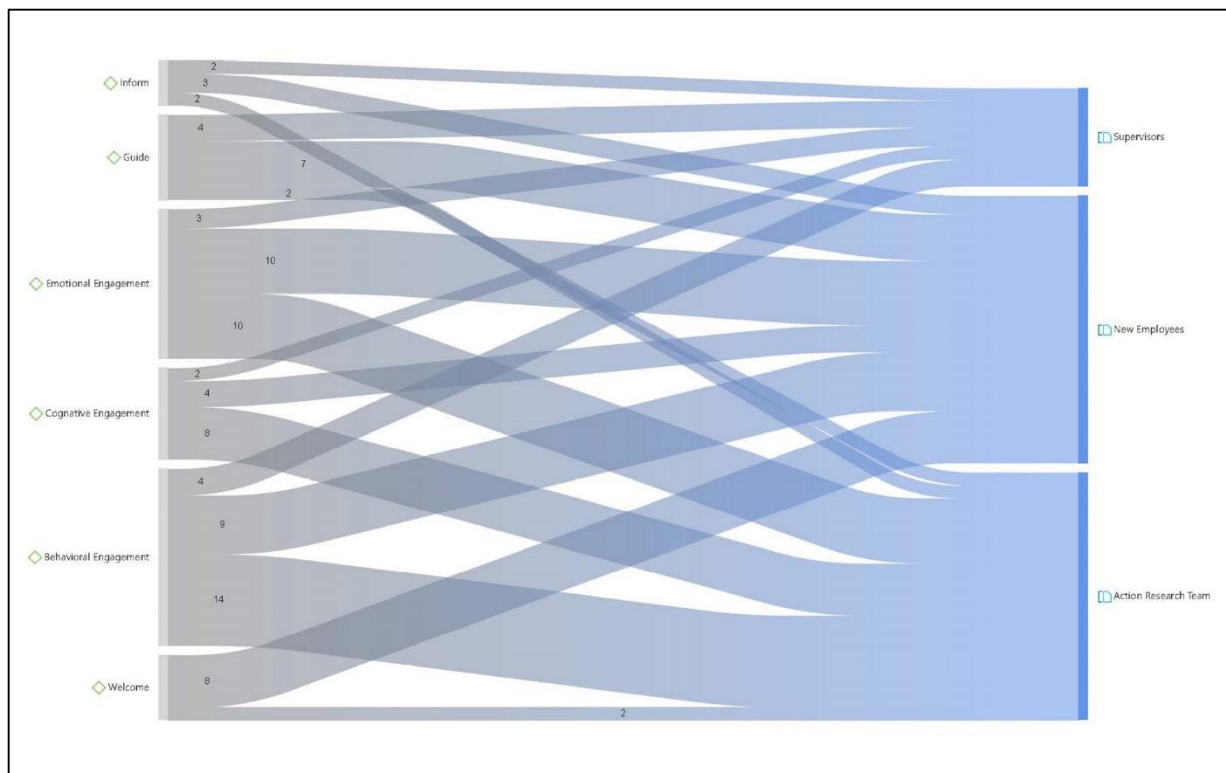
These codes and coding schemes provide a starting place to understand what the data is telling us about onboarding. The section that follows expands more on each intervention and highlights initial insights gleaned from the data.

Inform-Welcome-Guide Framework

There are a variety of approaches organizations can take to onboard their new employees. The ART wanted an approach that was multi-faceted and adaptable. The Inform-Welcome-Guide framework utilized many practices to onboard new people (Klein & Heuser, 2008; Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015). Using the Inform-Welcome-Guide framework we were able to create a variety of interventions that saw various levels of impact on engagement. Notably participation in the

New Employee Workshop had a significant effect on emotional engagement was participation in the departmental discoveries had a significant effect on behavioral engagement.

Inform

The inform practice may look different from organization to organization. The practice of informing is to provide relevant and timely information that aids in the successful onboarding of a newcomer (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015). Various examples of informing include but are not limited to new employee handbooks or websites dedicated to new employees and their experiences.

New Employee Checklist. The new employee checklist is a tool that can be used to *inform* new employees about the steps they need to take towards socialization within the division. After a review of other student affairs divisions across the nation we found four other universities that had robust new employee checklist designed specifically for employees starting within student affairs. The ART worked to create and implement a checklist, Appendix F, that supervisors can use with their new employees and that the new employee can follow to track their onboarding. The creation of the new employee checklist started at the beginning of Summer 2020. The sponsor for the project offered to pilot the checklist and its usability with a new direct report who started at the end of summer 2020. As the ART prepared to roll out the checklist they were surprised by many supervisors not understanding how to use the checklist. This need created an opportunity to develop a supervisor training.

New Employee Handbook. As with the new employee checklist, a benchmark search was completed and findings were similar; the same institutions that had a checklist also had a handbook that was either available via print, electronic, or both. The new employee handbook outlines expectations, contact information, introduction to the division, a review of mission,

vision, and strategic plans, as well as information about the town where the institution is located. The ART decided that creating a handbook would be another important tool in informing new employees during the onboarding process. The ART worked collaboratively to gather content for the handbook in summer 2020 and one ART team member had the skill set to use InDesign to create a visually appealing handbook using the content gathered. The handbook was made available digitally on the VPs website so it could be viewed by anyone at any time. The ART also created a process to disseminate the document to team members as they start once they are invited to a New Employee Workshop (NEW) Event.

Welcome

The next piece of the framework is welcome which refers to creating a sense of belonging for the newcomer to the institution (Klein, Polin, Sutton, 2015). The welcome phase may be accomplished by way of a dedicated welcome committee or welcome basket.

New Employee Workshop. The idea of a welcome committee was appealing to the ART as we believe that was already the role the onboarding subcommittee was playing. We decided that a standing workshop created by the ART and facilitated by individuals within the division and community partners would provide a consistent form of welcome that every new employee would receive. Mark reiterates the importance of buy-in to create any process:

> It took some time for us to get everybody's buy in and support for us to really have the content be when it needs to be. But I'm glad that it took that long because it really allowed us to kind of fine tune the process and make sure we got support from all the different levels needed, for it to have really taken off like it has.

Figure 3.6 shows an early brainstorm of the content outline prior to the pandemic which considers who from the ART would be responsible for coordinating that section (purple writing)

and then the length of time each section should take along with the order things should happen (red writing).

Figure 3.6

New Employee Workshop Draft Schedule
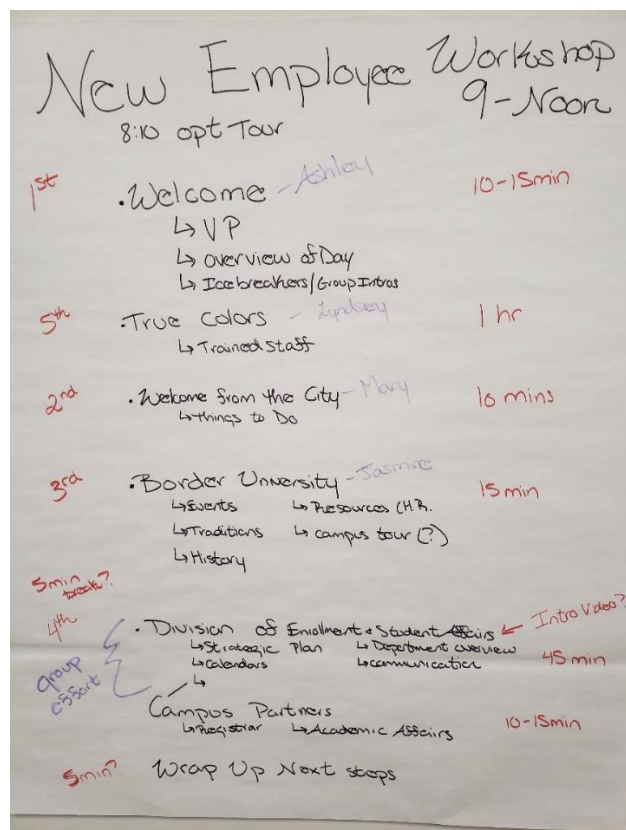
At the beginning of the planning process, we were looking at a half day experience when we could meet in person. The pandemic quickly made us reconsider to a 2-hour experience that could happen virtually. Appendix G shows the workshop schedule that was implemented in Cycle 1. After evaluating the experience, the ART found opportunities to improve the workshop in Cycles 2 and 3. Appendix H shows the final workshop schedule that continues to be offered in the division. Examples of guest facilitators include representatives from the city visitors' bureau, staff council president, divisional committee chairs, and the VP.

Throughout the research process 3 new Employee workshops were held. Out of the participants who completed the Employee Engagement Survey 28 of them participated in at least one of the New Employee Workshops (Figure 3.7). Overall, 34 new employees went through the onboarding process throughout the year. New Employee Workshop participation also included both current employees and supervisors who served as facilitators and guest speakers. As data will reflect further the new employee workshop was found to be a significant predictor of emotional engagement. Considering the timing of when the new employee workshops are offer, within the first 3 months, it is likely an exciting time for any new employee. While time in role did not have any significant effect on emotional engagement it could be said that no matter how long or short you are in a position you are more likely to be emotionally engaged at higher levels as a result of and informative onboarding activity.

Figure 3.7

Simple Bar Count of New Employee Workshop Attendance
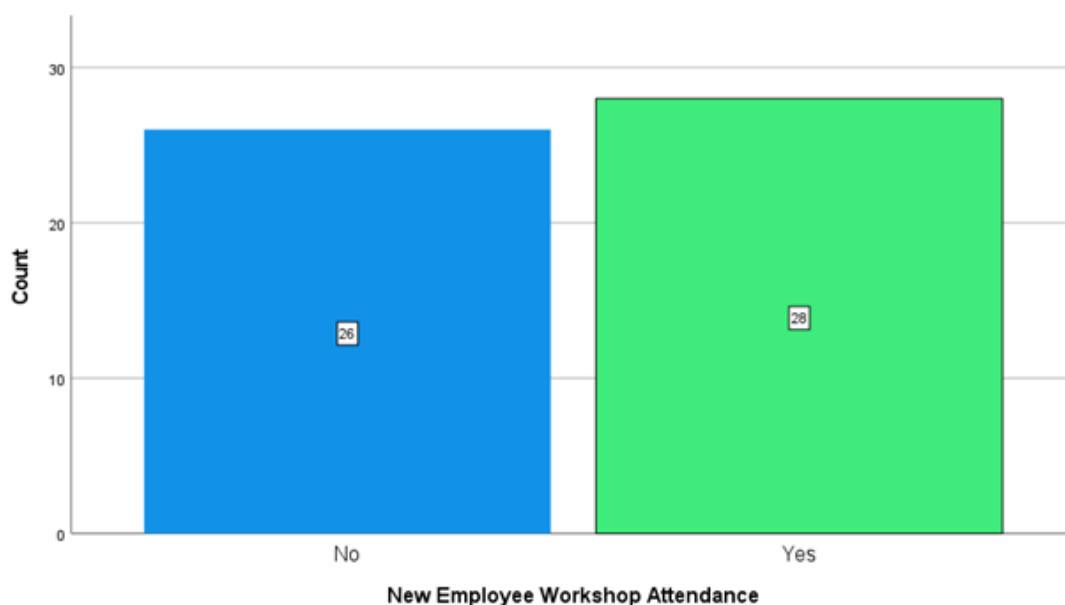
For divisions wanting to implement a similar program, suggested resources needed for this intervention to be successful include finances, venue, and individuals willing to be facilitators. A major milestone attached with this intervention was identifying a timeline for workshops to be held, getting the timeline approved by the sponsor (VP), and then working towards first workshop. The following timeline has been identified and approved: having 1 work shop each semester (fall, spring, semester) the last Thursday in September to capture new hires from June – September; Last Thursday in February to capture new hires from October – February; Last Thursday in May to capture new hires from March – May.

Supervisor Training. The first major welcome a new employee will receive is from their supervisor. The Supervisor can be considered the chair of the new employee's welcome committee. After rolling out the checklist and realizing the supervisors weren't confident in their own abilities the ART thought that creating a supervisor training to inform all individuals who may supervise of the new onboarding process and the role they play would be crucial in the success of the new onboarding program. Out of the participants who completed the Employee Engagement Survey 22 of them attended the Supervisor Training Workshop (Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8

Simple Bar Count of Supervisor Training Workshop Attendance

During supervisor training one of the first activities the ART had supervisors participate in was a reflection on onboarding. Supervisors where asked why they believed a focus on onboarding was needed. Answers, as depicted in the virtual Microsoft Teams chat, where the training was held, (Figures 3.9 and 3.10) had a focus on building communities of support. Through these types of activities, during training, the supervisors help to solidify that the choice to focus on helping supervisors learn about onboarding was best for the overall health of the division. Supervisors gave examples of what they viewed as benefits (Figure 3.11) and overall appreciation for the opportunity to learn (Figure 3.12).

Figure 3.9

Supervisors Sharing Why Onboarding is Needed
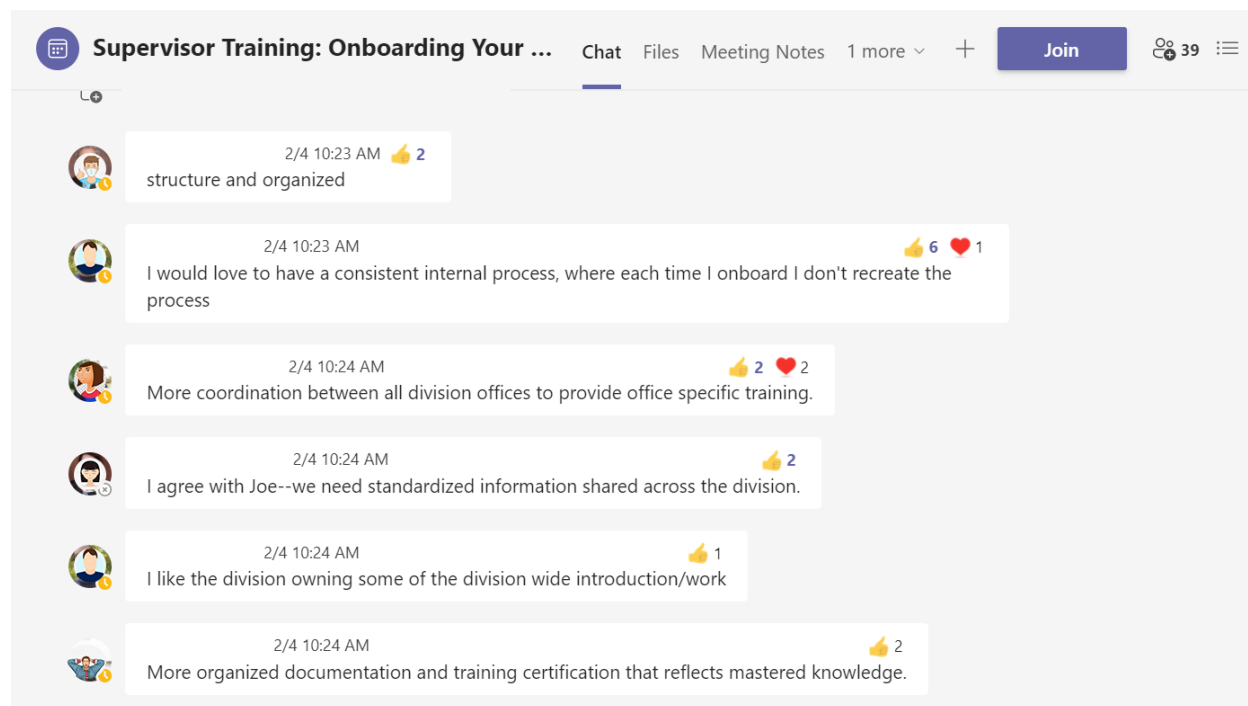
The division quickly realized that conversations about onboarding were mainly happening at the director level although there are many supervisors at the associate and assistant director level. In addition, with over 10 departments across the division each department was doing something different. Supervisors recognized the need for a coordinated effort across the division to onboard new employees. Many shared they need a clear and structed process that they could simply implement with their new staff. This included considering strategies for impacting onboarding such as creating an engaging experience; an opportunity for staff to meet others and grow their network; as well as being challenged and supported by their supervisor (Figure 3.10). Supervisors were excited to consider the long-lasting benefits (Figure 3.11) of onboarding such mentor relationships being built and overall engagement within the division being higher.

Figure 3.10

Supervisors Response to Topics and Strategies for Onboarding
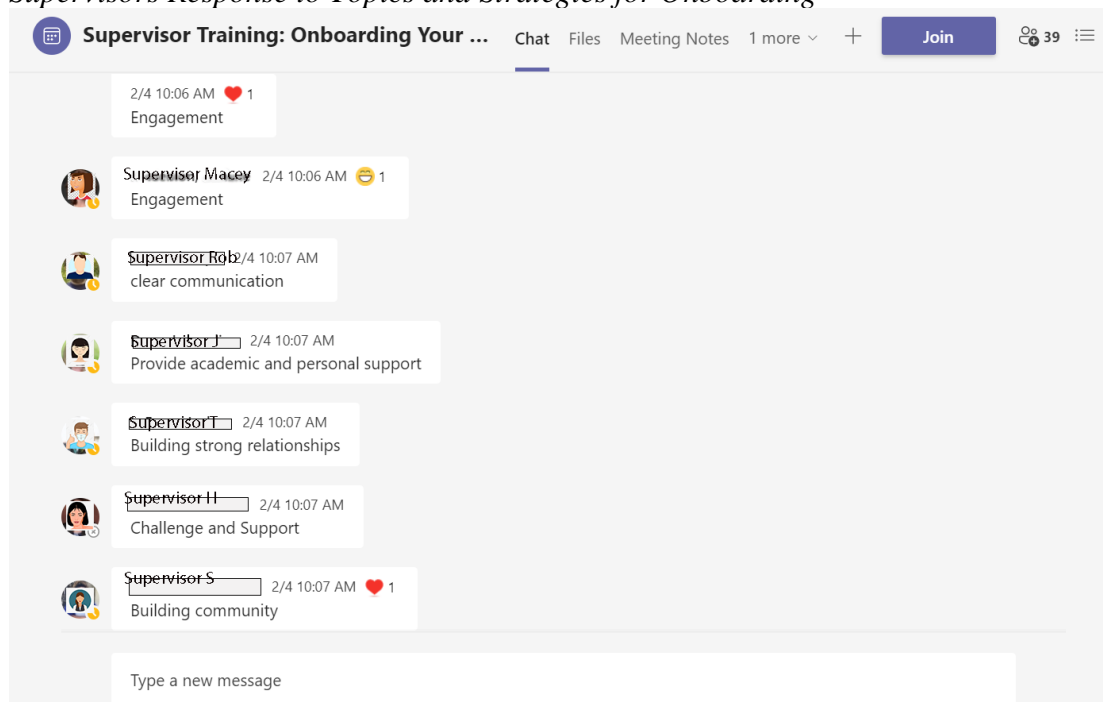
Figure 3.11

Supervisor Thoughts on Benefits of Onboarding
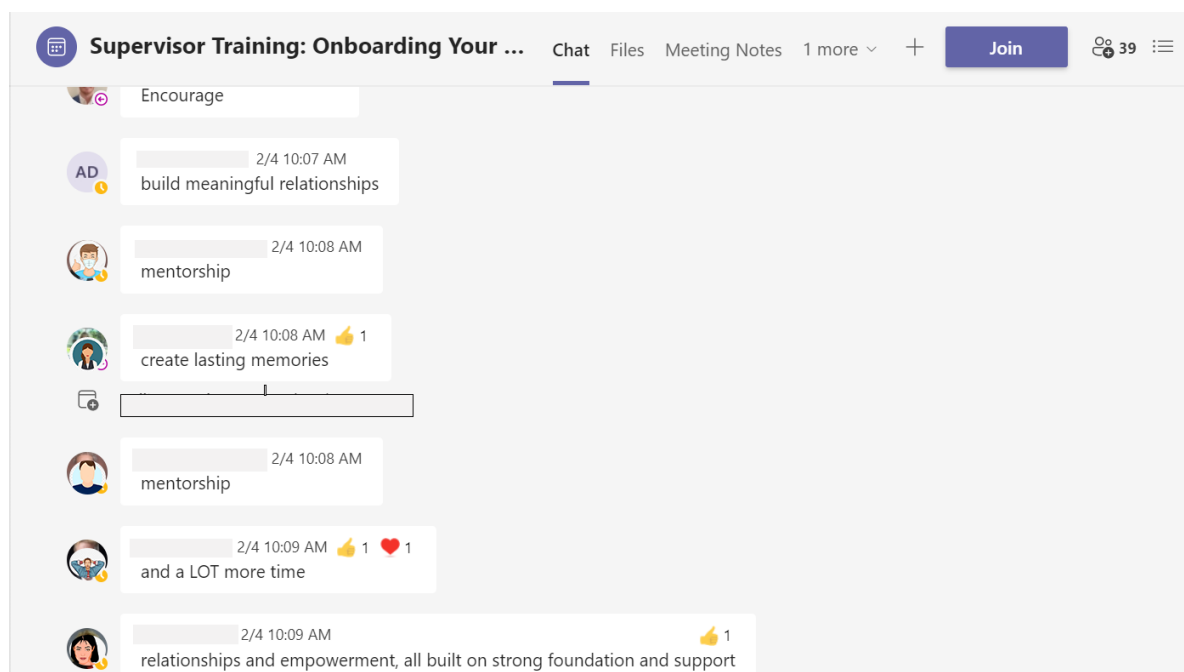
The action research team got an early win with the supervisors by seeing the appreciation and excitement from supervisors as a result of the training (Figure 3.12). The hour-long training introduced the concept of onboarding and the inform-welcome-guide framework. Supervisors had an opportunity to test their knowledge of current statistics in the division regarding turn over rate and the number of new employees. Finally, the action research team went through each step of the onboarding process using the checklist and supervisor toolkit to thoroughly review the roles and responsibilities of the supervisors. The session was recorded for supervisors who were not able to attend. Future supervisor trainings will continue to be offered for reinforcement purposes and introduction of new strategies.

Figure 3.12

Supervisors Appreciating Learning Onboarding Techniques
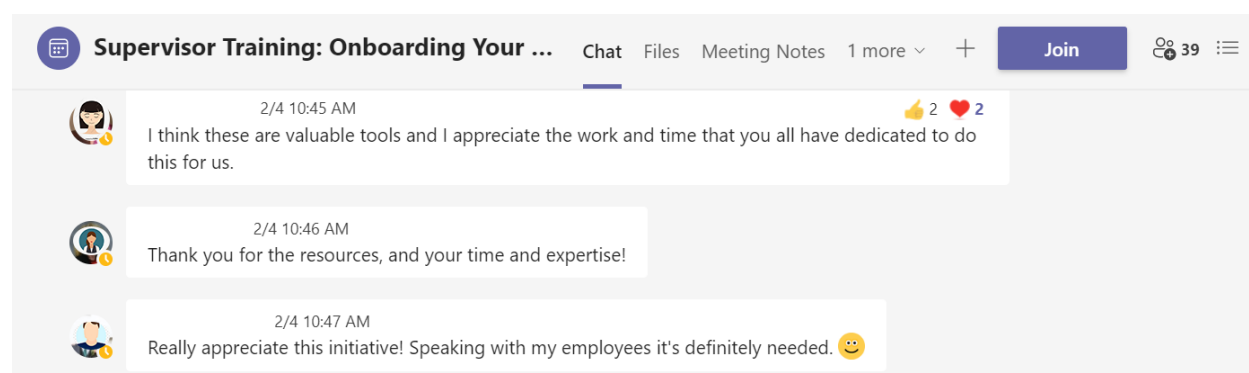
Supervisor training produced a second early insight; the need for training those who are responsible for onboarding new employees. Most supervisors are never formerly trained on how to onboard a new employee. This early insight came to us by way of unsolicited feedback from a colleague who was unable to attend the training but watched the play back. After they viewed the recorded training, they provided unsolicited feedback via email:

I just got an opportunity to watch it today. It was a great session. Of course, you know

me, I also have something to say! Without this list, I know that in our department we

often forget to accomplish this in a timely manner (Personal Communication, 2021).

Guide

The final component of the framework is guide which is the process or approach taken

during the onboarding process (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015). Organizations use multiple

approaches to guide their newcomers throughout the onboarding process. Some may have a

primary point of contact to act as a support system while others create a plan for the new

employee to follow to ensure success.

Buddy Program. Research indicates that mentoring has many positive outcomes for new

professionals (Bolton, 2005). Mentors may be able to provide guidance to new professionals as

well as offer challenge and support throughout the development process (Long, 2018). Pierce

(2017) also asserts that a success onboarding process should include leadership development,

working with an executive coach, and being paired with a mentor throughout the first year. With

this in mind the ART wanted to work towards the development of a Buddy Program matching

either new employees with other new employees or new employees with other colleagues on

campus. However, needs of the supervisors and the Pandemic caused this not to be implemented.

The hope is that this initiative will still be taken up by the subcommittee that is transitioned in

Cycle 3. A little pre-work was completed which should assist in future implementation of the

buddy program which included defining the program, creating a curriculum, and an

implementation needs timeline. Items on this timeline include creating any training if needed for

mentors, planning intro meetings, and launching first cohort of buddies. The interventions that

fell under *inform* and *welcome* were of most importance to the sponsor (VP) whereas the *guide* options were a "nice to have" in the eyes of the sponsor.

   Professional Development Plans. Lastly, we wanted to make sure that new employees had a plan to guide their development throughout their first year. The human resources department at Border University currently includes goal setting and training opportunities in the yearly evaluation but it is not part of the onboarding conversation that occurs within the division. Researchers argued that a focus on self-directed learning as well as the social context of learning will help shed light on how expertise is developed meaning that employees should have the opportunity to direct their own learning and development (Knight, 2002; Tynjala, 2008; Wallin, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018). With the focus shifted to the new employee workshop and supervisor training the ART and the site sponsor felt that the professional development plans should no longer be a focus of this project. Removing this from the intervention implementation plan was approved by the ART and they were excited to be able to truly focus on other aspects of the Inform-Welcome-Guide framework. Although official programming was not implemented under Guide the ART felt that the overall onboarding subcommittee and the supervisor would still serve as Guides to new employees. Thus, the focus on supervisor training was imperative as supervisors are one of the guardians to the new galaxy where a new employee may find themselves.

Uncharted Territory

   As the ART hosted its second New Employee Workshop (NEW) Event and supervisor training they realized a key piece was still missing. Between the pandemic and placing the development of the buddy program on pause many new employees hadn't made friends or seen all of campus in person. The group felt there had to be a potential solution.

Departmental Discovery

That solution was introducing departmental discoveries. These discovery sessions would

be a unique way for new employees to learn about the history and function of every department

within the division. With 12 departments we felt that it would be important to break up this

learning so it doesn't become a fire hose effect. The fire hose effect refers to receiving an

overload of information too fast and too forceful to retain anything. The departments were

divided into the three units that make up the division which meant three to four departments

would share once a month. With this rotation it would take a new employee three months to

"discover" all the units. This timeline worked with the other onboarding initiatives and would

still allow the completion of the activity within the 6-month onboarding period. In the first

iteration of departmental discoveries housed outside of the New Employee Workshop there were

23 staffers who participated in the departmental discoveries (Figure 3.13).

Figure 3.13

Simple Bar Count of Departmental Discovery Participation
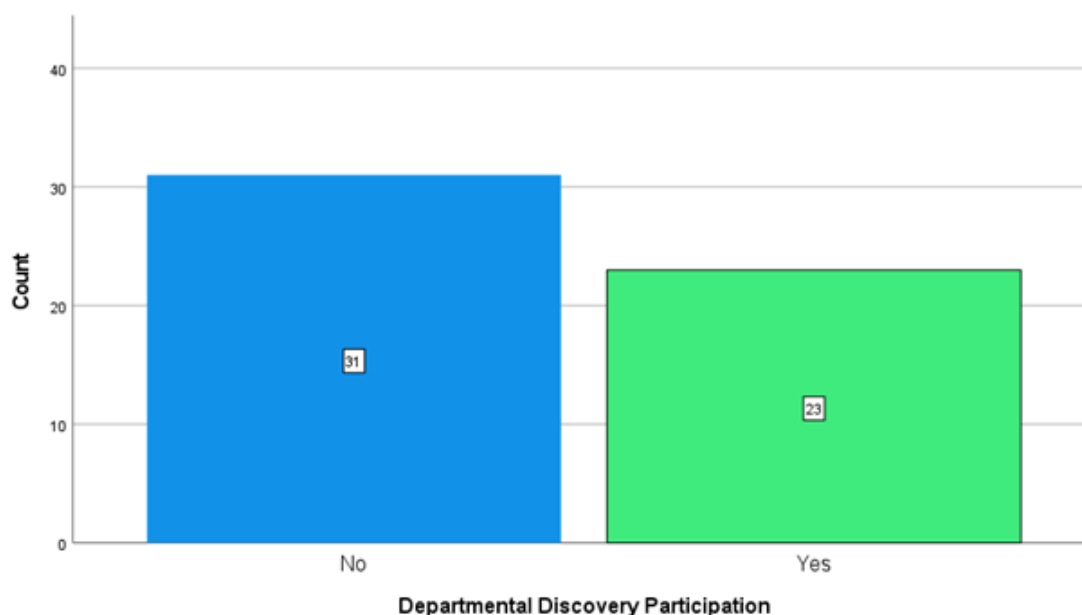
The departmental discovery sessions were a great way to foster professional development of current employees as the directors of each department were encouraged to ask their team members to present. Making this activity a shared form of leadership across the department. The ART created a template that each department was asked to use to ensure every department was sharing the same foundational information about their area at minimum. The template made the process easier for speakers to decide what they were going to share about their department and provided consistency. New employees benefited because they were able to get an in depth look into the responsibilities of each department within the division and a better understanding of how their work complements one another. Due to the pandemic these departmental discoveries took place virtually. Photos were shown of the buildings and spaces each department occupies. In the future, the onboarding subcommittee plans to incorporate an in-person tour of each department.

Overall, the intervention and implementation plan was a mixture of learning new onboarding techniques, general professional development, and networking opportunities for all participants. The action research process was ever changing. The ART reflected and evaluated each intervention along the way which caused the project to alter its course along the journey. The ART and the interventions were flexible and not set in stone which allowed for the best solution to be implemented at the right time. But the question remains, so what was learned and how does the new knowledge inform future practice.

Data as a Map to Somewhere

During the journey from "Knowhere" to Somewhere qualitative and quantitative data produced early insights and the ART collectively learned about onboarding in the process. The work of the guardians to uncover needs, craft, and implement an onboarding process for the division provided several working insights into the Inform-Welcome-Guide framework, the

tenets of work based higher education, and overall onboarding educational needs for student affairs. To consider future practice we needed to be able to evaluate if onboarding had any significant impact on employees and the division. This was accomplished using Shuck's Employee Engagement Scale. Results of the Employee Engagement Scale are explored in the section that follows to conclude the action research story.

All participants were asked to respond to 12 questions which measured engagement across cognition, emotion, and behavior Table 3.8. Cognitive engagement (CE) refers to the "intensity of mental energy expressed toward positive organization outcome" (p. 955, Shuck et al., 2017). Cognitive engagement can be depicted as be a staff member giving a task all of their attention or focus. Emotional engagement (EE) refers to the "intensity and willingness to invest emotionality toward positive organization outcome" (p. 955, Shuck et al., 2017). An example of EE might be the relationship developed that causes a staff member to feel like they belong on the team. Behavioral engagement (BE) refers to the "psychological state of intention to behave in a manner that positively affects performance and/or positive organizational outcome" (p.955, Shuck et al., 207). Examples of BE include employees staying late to accomplish a task without being asked.

Table 3.8

Descriptive Statistics

Question [a]	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
CE1.I am really focused when I am working	3	5	4.43	.633
CE2.I concentrate on my job when I am at work	3	5	4.50	.607
CE3.I give my job responsibility a lot of attention	3	5	4.70	.537
CE4.At work I am focused on my job	3	5	4.39	.596

Question [a]	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
EE1.Working in the division has a great deal of personal meaning to me	3	5	4.15	.737
EE2.I feel a strong sense of belonging to my job	2	5	4.15	.960
EE3.I believe in the mission and purpose of the division	3	5	4.33	.777
EE4.I care about the future of the division	3	5	4.52	.720
BE1.I really push myself to work beyond what is expected of me	2	5	4.52	.771
BE2.I am willing to put in extra effort without being asked	2	5	4.46	.794
BE3.I often go about what is expected of me to help my team be successful	3	5	4.63	.560
BE4.I work harder than expected to help the division be successful	3	5	4.43	.690

[a] N= 54 participants answered for each question

Several ANOVAs were run to compare dependent variables Cognitive Engagement, Emotional

Engagement, and Behavioral Engagement to the independent variables of "role" and "time on

job"; See Tables 3.9 – 3.10. Role reflects the participant types of new employees, supervisors,

and employees who were neither new nor a supervisor. Time on job was calculated by years. No

significant differences were found between Emotional Engagement and Time on Job as well as

Cognitive Engagement & Behavioral Engagement compared to Role type. These results were

surprising as I initially anticipated there to be a significant difference in emotional engagement

based on time on the job. However, considering that student affairs is already a helping field and

consider high in emotional work. In this definition emotional engagement consider the intensity

and willingness of employees to invest emotionality towards positive organization outcome

(Shuck et. al, 2017). Considering current issues facing higher education such as burn out, low

wages, and high turnover it can be better explained that time on job does not have any significant

effect on emotional engagement. Similarly, no significant differences were found between Role, Cognitive & Behavioral Engagement; this could be explained in a positive way that regardless of role most student affairs employees are either engaged or disengaged at the same level. What someone's job responsibilities or title are play less of a factor in how someone gives energy towards their work or exhibits positive behaviors and more to do with the environment in which they are working. For example, a coordinator of student activities and a dean of students have very different roles and could still exhibit the same level of cognitive and/or behavioral engagement (positively or negatively) therefore it can be explained that role does not play a significant effect on cognitive or behavioral engagement. Significant differences were found between Cognitive Engagement & Time on Job; Behavioral Engagement & Time on job; and Emotional Engagement and Role. Through these outcomes I have developed an understanding that onboarding programing should potentially be participated in early and be developed with role considerations to have the largest impact on engagement.

Table 3.9

ANOVA by Time on Job

Variable	Sum of Squares	d*f*	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Cognitive Engagement					
Between Groups	6.250	13	.481	2.502	.013
Within Groups	7.686	40	.192		
Total	13.936	53			
Emotional Engagement					
Between Groups	7.050	13	.542	1.388	.207
Within Groups	15.626	40	.391		
Total	22.676	53			
Behavioral Engagement					
Between Groups	7.444	13	.573	1.807	.076
Within Groups	12.676	40	.317		
Total	20.120	53			

Table 3.9 compares dependent variables to time spent on the job. From the data I conclude that

the length of time in a role has a significant effect on both an employee's cognitive and

behavioral engagement. It is important to note that this could also be a negative effect meaning

that the longer someone is in a role the less they are engaged cognitively. Table 3.10 compares

dependent variables to the type of role they have; either new employee, supervisor, or employee.

From the data I conclude that the role type has a significant effect on an employee's emotional

engagement but not their cognitive of behavioral engagement.

Table 3.10

ANOVA by Role

Variable	Sum of Squares	d*f*	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Cognitive Engagement					
Between Groups	.550	2	.275	1.048	.358
Within Groups	13.386	51	.262		
Total	13.936	53			
Emotional Engagement					
Between Groups	2.573	2	1.287	3.264	.046
Within Groups	20.102	51	.394		
Total	22.676	53			
Behavioral Engagement					
Between Groups	.424	2	.212	.549	.581
Within Groups	19.696	51	.386		
Total	20.120	53			

Based on the ANOVAs it could be inferred that length of time in a role can positively or negative impact engagement at both the cognitive and behavioral levels. It is prudent that activities regarding onboard set employees up for meaningful long-term engagement. Engagement should encompass opportunities to engage in ways that target both behavioral engagement and cognitive engagement. Ways to improve behavioral engagement in physical activities that have staff physically or virtually in a space and interacting with other staff. Opportunities to engage physically provide a culture of expectation for appropriate behavioral engagement and influences cognitive engagement – what people think of their work environment. We also see differences in emotional engagement according to roles. Emotional engagement considers how employees feel about their work environment and their tasks.

Further analysis of the interventions using independent sample t-tests looked for significant differences between Cognitive Engagement, Emotional Engagement, and Behavioral Engagement as a result of participation. Several independent t-tests were run to compare dependent variables Cognitive Engagement, Emotional Engagement, and Behavioral Engagement to the independent intervention variables; See Tables 3.11-3.13. Attendance at the New Employee Workshop had a slight significant difference on emotional engagement; however, no significant difference on cognitive and behavioral engagement. There were no significant differences between engagement variables based on attendance at the Supervisor Training Workshop. There was a significant difference found between behavioral engagement and participation in Departmental Discoveries, but no other significant differences between the other dependent variables and Departmental Discoveries participation.

Table 3.11

Independent Samples Test of New Employee Workshop Attendance

	Levene's Test of Equality of Variances					t-test of Equality of Means		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Dif	Std. Err Diff	Lower	Upper
Cognitive Engagement									
Equal variances assumed	.685	.412	-.063	52	.950	-.00893	.14099	-.29184	.27399
Equal variances not assumed			-.064	51.495	.949	-.00893	.14007	-.29006	.27221
Emotional Engagement									
Equal variances assumed	3.135	.082	-1.133	52	.263	-.20124	.17767	-.55776	.15529
Equal variances not assumed			-1.141	51.329	.259	-.20124	.17641	-.55534	.15287
Behavioral Engagement									
Equal variances assumed	.002	.963	-.435	52	.666	-.07349	.16911	-.41283	.26585
Equal variances not assumed			-.436	51.974	.665	-.07349	.16849	-.41158	.26461

The data outlined in Table 3.11 indicates that participation in the New Employee Workshop had

a significant effect on emotional engagement. Those who attended were more likely to be

emotionally engaged and connected to their work. Alternatively, there was no significant impact

across any of the engagement constructs as a result of participating in the Supervisor Training

Workshop (Table 3.12).

Table 3.12

Independent Samples Test of Supervisor Training Workshop Attendance

	Levene's Test of Equality of Variances					t-test of Equality of Means		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Dif	Std. Err Diff	Lower	Upper
Cognitive Engagement									
Equal variances assumed	.081	.777	-1.445	52	.154	-.20312	.14058	-.48523	.07898
Equal variances not assumed			-1.475	48.353	.147	-.20312	.13771	-.47995	.07370
Emotional Engagement									
Equal variances assumed	.229	.634	-1.470	52	.147	-.26349	.17920	-.62309	.09610
Equal variances not assumed			-1.462	44.367	.151	-.26349	.18025	-.62667	.09968
Behavioral Engagement									
Equal variances assumed	.401	.529	-1.618	52	.112	-.27202	.16810	-.60933	.06529
Equal variances not assumed			-1.629	46.300	.110	-.27202	.16702	-.60815	.06411

Finally, the data reveals that participation in the Departmental Discoveries had a significant

effect on behavioral engagement.

Table 3.13

Independent Samples Test of Departmental Discovery Participation

	Levene's Test of Equality of Variances					t-test of Equality of Means		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Dif	Std. Err Diff	Lower	Upper
Cognitive Engagement									
Equal variances assumed	1.974	.166	-3.125	52	.003	-.40849	.13072	-.67080	-.14617
Equal variances not assumed			-3.295	51.812	.002	-.40849	.12399	-.65731	-.15966
Emotional Engagement									
Equal variances assumed	.473	.495	-1.555	52	.126	-.27630	.17765	-.65277	.08018
Equal variances not assumed			-1.597	51.158	.116	-.27630	.17303	-.62364	.07105
Behavioral Engagement									
Equal variances assumed	5.289	.026	-2.090	52	.042	-.34362	.16442	-.67355	-.01369
Equal variances not assumed			-2.189	51.993	.033	-.34362	.15700	-.65867	-.02857

Although levels of significance varied, it can be said that the interventions did have an impact on

the perceived support and engagement of employees. The quantitative data indicates creating

onboarding programs focusing on those who are newer to their roles that offer opportunities to

focus on learning about responsibilities and organizational culture may influence the overall

long-term effort an employee engages in with in their role. Linkages between the quantitative data and the literature will be made in the insights section that follows.

Action Research Story Findings Summary

Journeying through the action research story we learn that a.) Connections are made from a result of onboarding that lead to better experiences for employees (new and supervisors); b.) It takes a dedicated village to onboard new employees; c.) More training is needed on what onboarding is and how to do; d.) The inform-Welcome-Guide framework provides a structure for student affairs to create a divisional new employee onboarding process.

Inter Galaxy Connections

In various evaluations and reflections from the ART, supervisors, and new employees they all identified that onboarding allowed for opportunities to build communities of support. The ART was largely successful due to the level of connection or friendship felt within the team. Supervisors exhibited a want to be able to connect their employees with other staff outside of their department and to serve as a supporter. During the New Employee Workshop our new employees vocalized they were most excited to attend because of the prospect of making friends with other new employees. I offer that a goal of any onboarding program should be to create an environment or experience where new employees are able to make at least one friend within their first month.

Identifying the Village Guardians

When this project first started we thought that the work was going to fall solely on the ART. However, we quickly realized that the true guardians were the supervisors. The ART helped to create a streamlined process however the supervisors needed to be incorporated into the overall onboarding team. Without the supervisors the onboarding process would not be as

successful. In the steps to work with the supervisors it came to our attention that there wasn't an easily accessible list of all supervisors within the division. Creating a contact list for all the supervisors was the first step in opening doors of communication and engagement across the division. Student Affairs professionals should strategically form an onboarding committee dedicated to the implementation and advancement of onboarding practices within their divisions.

Guardian Training

Once the ART had an understanding of who truly needed to be involved in the onboarding process and the responsibilities of each, developing a training process was an important goal. The five tenets of work based higher education 1). Knowledge transformation and integration; 2). Problem solving; 3.) Reflection; 4.) Learning from errors; 5.) Boundary crossing (Walling, Nokelainen, & Mikkonen, 2018) were utilized to help facilitate training and grow individuals' knowledge of onboarding. Learning from errors is what allowed the ART to evaluate and reassess before moving into a new phase. Problem solving allowed the ART and supervisors to look for creative solutions to the pressing problem of how to effectively and efficiently onboard new staff. Most importantly, boundary crossing encouraged staff to step out of their regular role and interact with various colleagues across the division. While some said, "onboarding isn't my responsibility we have Human Resources for that," staff who embraced boundary crossing grew in their ability to onboard their staff. As student affairs professionals are looking to grow expertise in any given area the use of the five tenets of work based higher education make a good option to develop in-house professional development and training.

Finally, Knowledge transformation and integration was evident as both members of the ART and supervisors provided reflections that they felt more prepared and capable of onboarding their new employees. Both Mark and Mary stated that due to their service on the

ART they found themselves using strategies we were discussing more frequently. During the action research project Mark gained a new employee. Mark said that he was integrating what he was learning about onboarding into his practice and making a point to hold himself accountable for the onboarding experience he was giving his new employee.

Inform-Welcome-Guide Framework

Based on the success of the new employee checklist, new employee handbook, and new employee workshop the inform-welcome-guide framework is a promising option for student affairs to look toward for developing new employee onboarding programs. Although the ART was not able to fully implement every facet of the framework as originally planned, the groundwork was laid for the third facet of Guide by way of the buddy system. In addition, the supervisors took on the role of guides. As student affairs divisions are looking to develop onboarding programs it will be important that they structure their programs using an onboarding framework. The Inform-Welcome-Guide framework is a flexible framework that offers space for creativity. Many of the supervisors who participated expressed their frustration with the lack of structure. Theories such as Inform-Welcome-Guide provide that sought after structure.

From the action research story, we see the iterative process of action research come to life. The ART worked over the course of 2.5 years to learn about action research and onboarding. Through their learning the team was able to implement an onboarding program which encompassed various levels of supervisor training and support. Initiatives for new employees to participate in such as the new employee checklist, handbook, and new employee workshop were also developed. The insights gleaned from the action research project allow for a more in-depth review of what was learned at the individual, group, and system levels when a division embraces

employee onboarding. These insights are explored in more detailed based on the findings and

analysis presented in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

INSIGHTS AND ACTIONABLE KNOWLEDGE

The purpose of the action research project was to discover and implement methods to increase support in the first year of employment to enhance employee onboarding among staff in the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs. The research attempted to answer the question of *what was learned at the individual, group, and system levels in a higher education work setting using action research when a division embraces onboarding for new employee development?* To answer this question an Action Research (AR) team formed to create an onboarding process for the division of Enrollment and Student Affairs. Based on analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data at the individual, group, and system levels I have learned that a.) Community is built and connections are made from a result of onboarding that lead to better experiences for employees (new and supervisors); b.) It takes a dedicated village or core team of individual which includes supervisors to onboard new employees; c.) Training for Supervisors is needed on what onboarding is and how to do it effectively; and d.) The Inform-Welcome-Guide framework provides a structure for student affairs to create a divisional new employee onboarding process.

All four points have a critical role in creating an environment where the lasting impact of support within the first year of employment leads to full and purposeful engagement at the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive levels within the work environment. Analysis of interviews from participants who experienced the newly created onboarding process indicate structured processes and relationships may be key attributes to onboarding. Analysis of quantitative data from the employee engagement survey show differences in engagement styles for employees who participated in onboarding interventions compared to those who didn't. This chapter deeply

explores what was learned as a result of the key insights from both quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, learned actionable knowledge is shared to further the practice of onboarding within the field of student affairs.

Insights

At the beginning of the project a theoretical model for new employee development was introduced using the five tenets of Work Bashed Higher Education and the Inform-Welcome-Guide framework to influence the selection of onboarding interventions (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

*Theoretical Model for New Employee Development*
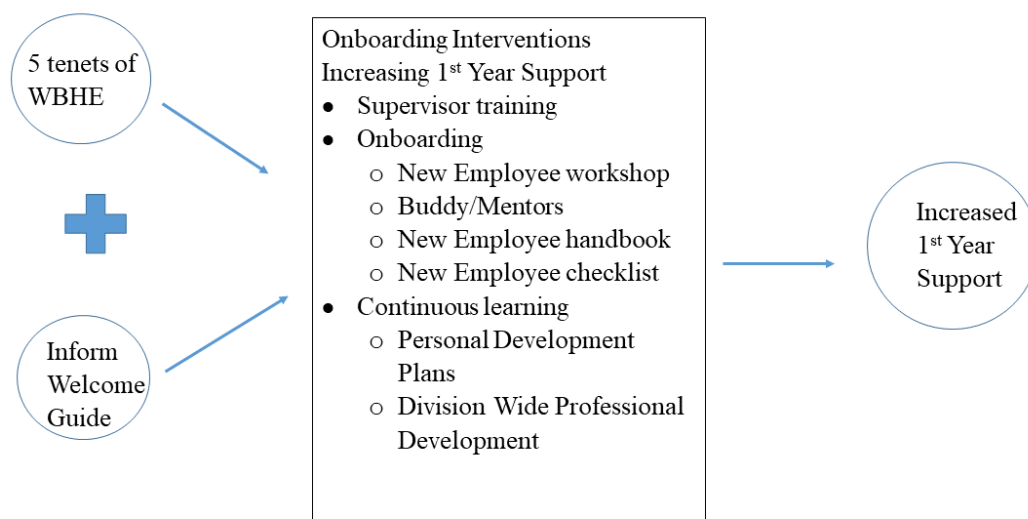
This theoretical model outlined that the final measurable outcome would be an increase in perceived first year support. However, with each new action research cycle the five tenets became less of the focal point for onboarding intervention development. In addition, we realized that by increasing 1st year support there was more that could be measured which led to measuring engagement constructs through the employee engagement scale. However, the five tenets of

Work Based Higher Education still had a place in the study and was repurposed to better

understand the learning that took place. To best understand and provide opportunities for both

the Action Research Team and supervisors to learn and embrace onboarding, the five tenets of

Work Based Higher Education were leveraged to build expertise in the subject of onboarding

new employees. Specifically, during the action research process learning took place as a result of

reflection and learning from errors which are two tenets of Work Based Higher Education.

Figure 4.1 laid a foundation for our movement towards Figure 4.2. As a result of utilizing a

framework to design onboarding programs that supported employees in their 1st year we were

able to consider the impact on engagement as an outcome of onboarding. Figure 4.2 represents

the hypothesized model for of the constructs addressing the research question. It was

hypothesized that onboarding would influence three forms of engagement; 1.) Cognitive

Engagement; 2.) Emotional Engagement; 3.) Behavioral Engagement. Collectively the

quantitative and qualitative data tell a joint story that give insights in the importance of

onboarding and potential next steps for the field of student affairs.

Figure 4.2

Hypothesized Model for Onboarding's Influence on Engagement
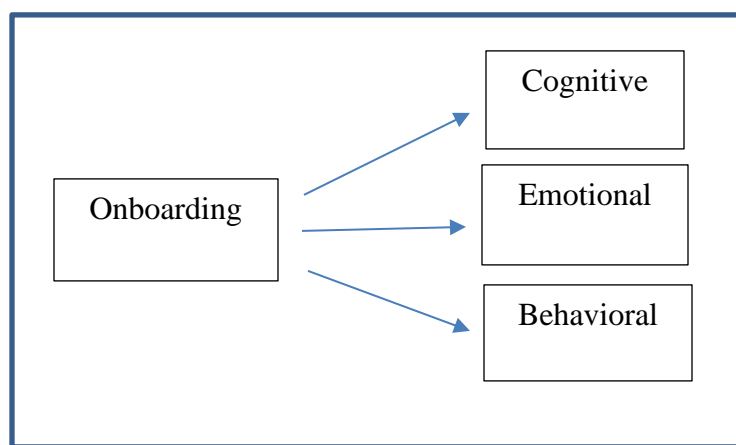
A discussion that considers the implications of both quantitative and qualitative data will be presented in three sections to answer the research question of what was learned at the individual, group, and system levels. Each section will explore onboarding from each perspective. Phrases and key words from interviews will be referenced to provide additional linkages to what was learned about the importance of providing a structured and timely onboarding process to cultivate relationships that lead to productive and engaged employees. In turn, the action research story and data presented in chapter 3 will be further highlighted to expand on our knowledge base and improve onboarding in the field of Student Affairs/Higher Education.

Learning Through Insights

The research attempted to uncover what was learned once onboarding was implemented in a division of Enrollment and Student Affairs work setting at the individual, group, and system levels. Each level has various types of subjects that make up the target area and data that helps uncover the layers of the story to learn more about the relationship between onboarding and engagement.

Individual

Data from interviews provided unique insights at the individual level. One of the interview questions asked participants to consider experiences from their onboarding process that would inform their ability to onboard a new employee in the future. Participants were also asked about prior onboarding experiences and how they compared to their most recent onboarding experience. Finally, participants were asked what they were taught about onboarding in graduate school or through other positions as a way to learn more about what is learned about onboarding at the individual level.

Relationships, timing, responsibility, and process were themes found within individual learning. Participants indicated various concepts about onboarding that helped them to feel welcomed, informed, and guided within their new roles. All participants felt that their onboarding experiences or lack thereof both past and present will significantly influence their onboarding strategies in the future. Participant "Macey," a new employee of 4 months shed light on how certain people and processes within the onboarding process made her feel like she was going to be set up for success in her new position:

> Coming in as a new employee, and it was a lot of communication even before I came to campus and I appreciated that. I felt in a way that I was already up on the clock or on the payroll and that I think it put me at ease I felt like, even though I was not physically here that I was already making decisions about my department and things like that, too. I felt that transition was very smooth that even before I got here that my decisions were going to be trusted and supported.

Participant "Rowling," new employee of 1 month bragged on how she is already feeling comfortable to get engaged within the division: "I've already gotten on committees, you know, a part of committees already. I'm like, let me have it. Let me let's see what's happening. I need to know." Rowling went on to share the importance of there being an actual process for new employees so they aren't just left to figure it out on their own.

> Whenever some new employee is brought in, you know, is onboarded at an institution there should be a process involved. I don't think there should be a moment where the employee is just [able to] starts and you, you are let, you left that person to figure out how to maneuver within that environment [on their own]. I've worked at a previous institution where that happened. Where I started the day I started they were like, okay,

have it. It was no, there was no introduction to HR and no introductions to personnel. No

introduction to new unit. I mean, other employees nothing it was like, oh, there it is. You

already have banner training. You can just go ahead. And you're like. Okay. Um, so, uh,

definitely a learning experience. I've learned a lot. Um, it was self-taught whether right or

wrong. And so I felt like that was definitely a situation where institutions and higher

management upper management should avoid.

Individually, we each bring a unique perspective to onboarding. Whether you've been new at

school, a friend group, or a job there has been some form of onboarding. Participants agree that

they want a structured onboarding experience as a way to learn about their role and make

connections. Klein, Polin, & Sutton (2015) found that all successful onboarding programs had

aspects of information, welcoming, and guiding infused in the process. My findings align with

supporting the use of the onboarding framework of Inform-Welcome-Guide (Klein, Polin, &

Sutton, 2015) that was used in the development of the onboarding program the participants

completed.

Further at the individual level I anticipated finding differences in the effects of

onboarding on engagement factors based on the types of roles individuals had. Research from

Mather et al. (2009) suggested the onboarding needs of mid-level professionals needed to be

different than new professionals. From my research I found there was no significant difference in

the type of role (administrative assistant, coordinator, director, etc.) on how engaged

(emotionally or behaviorally) one might be. However, these findings to closely align with

previous research that onboarding has positive correlations to employee satisfaction and

productivity (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015; Selden & Sowa, 2015; Thrasher & Walker, 2018).

All participants, at the individual level, had the similar experience of being thrown into the deep end of the pool and expected to rescue themselves and realizing that was not the experience they wanted for others. Yet with the forementioned in mind there was no clear path to avoid this. From participant reflections there is no way that onboarding can be implemented successfully alone at the individual level. However, individuals do need to take accountability for their learning and participation in the process. Utilizing reflective practices in the workplace to consider each onboarding experience can allow onboarding practices to be refined in the future. In addition, reflective practices allow for learning to be shared and passing knowledge on to benefit the group and system.

Group

Everyone interviewed was included in a participant group which created the overarching "group" level of learning within the research construct. From the interviews I found that group level learning occurred within supervisors and the action research team. The qualitative data uncovers a pattern of needs, wants, and expectations that new employees have of the onboarding process. Understanding what new employees want and need is pivotal in designing onboarding programs broadly designed for student affairs. Participants mentioned structure and building relationships as keys to what would make their onboarding successful. Participant "Jacob" outlined their expectations of onboarding:

> I think I was expecting to come in and I mean, just have I kind of expected 8 to 5 to be booked for a good week or 2. For the most part. I was lucky enough that, like, I had my offer. At the end of August, and I didn't start until October 1st, so I was kind of expecting A lot of stuff to already kind of be done since there is over a month in between, but I really expected that onboarding process to be a week's worth of meetings. A week's worth

of nonstop Just like information and relationships and things like that. Um, I kind of

expected. Some scheduled 1 on 1 time with both my supervisor and their supervisor that I

also work very closely with. But, yeah, just a lot more organized and scheduled in

advance kind of things for me.

Participant "Suze", a new employee of 3 months, had expectations about the role their supervisor

would play and the types of information they would learn.

I expected to be shepherded by a supervisor through an awareness of the spaces and

places in our office along with introductions to all of our colleagues and an outline kind

of, the plans for the 1st week, the remainder of the 1st month. Some targets for the 1st

quarter, and some sense of where we want to be in 6 months. You know, which is, there's

that 6-month, probationary period. So that's kind of the point at which we decide. Is this

really working when my providing value or are you getting the value that you're looking

for? Am I good [in this] culture, that kind of thing? And so I would say that those were

my expectations was that I would arrive and be introduced to the basic things.

Participant "Rowling," a new employee of 1 month reflected about how it takes a village to

welcome a new employee and get them up to speed.

I'm always on the website reading and I'm reading and, um. You just will never ever

capture it all yourself. So, it's good to have people. Coming from multiple perspectives

and from diverse backgrounds to bring you the information that they've learned. So, it

can mesh together and be one cohesive piece.

Collectively, New Employees, offer tremendous insight into how we can shape onboarding

programs to not only meet the assumed expectations of new employees before they begin, but

also what we know they will need to be successful in their role and in our offices, units, and

divisions of enrollment and student affairs. Finally, from the Employee Engagement Survey data I found that new employees who attended the new employee workshop scored higher on emotional engagement and those who attended the departmental discoveries had higher behavioral engagement. I would infer that practices that aim to Inform and Welcome new employees do have an impact on engagement; again, supporting the Inform-Welcome-Guide framework. As a result, the idea that it takes a village to welcome and guide new employees is reinforced.

Through the conversations with supervisors, it is clear that little is known or taught about onboarding, sparking a need for trainings to be developed for supervisors. Both Zora and Rob mention that they received no formalized training for onboarding. "In early days for me, it was definitely trial by error because we didn't have a lot of training opportunities going on" (Zora, Personal Communication). "It's all just been by experience. I don't I don't think anybody ever. Uh, sat me down and said this is how you onboard someone" (Rob, Personal Communication). Participants communicated that they made decisions about how to onboard new staff members based on how their previous onboarding experience went or simply what they would have wanted. As evidenced by a quote from Britney (Supervisor Participant):

> I think my personal experience as an employee and observing, sort of what it was that I got as an employee, what I didn't get that I wish I did. I think have maybe helped me to be more mindful about that process [onboarding] itself.

Through interviews I also uncovered more about the expected role of the supervisor in the onboarding process. The gap that remains is the intersection of expectations placed on supervisors to play a critical role in the onboarding process, yet supervisors are not receiving adequate training. For example, new employee Suze was surprised by not having a concrete plan:

I expected to be shepherded by a supervisor through an awareness of the spaces and

places in our office along with introductions to all of our colleagues and an outline kind

of the plans for the 1st week, the remainder of the 1st month. Some targets for the 1st

quarter, and some sense of where we want to be in 6 months.

Action research team member Kate also acknowledged the important role of the supervisor on

relationship building for the new employee:

There is a responsibility on supervisors when it comes to onboarding that for them, it's

just not another person coming on the team. But for that new person, you know, there's a

lot of anxiety there, there's a lot of other things, and while we provided that kind of fun,

safe space, when they 1st started, that supervisor has a responsibility to continue that and

to kind of like nurture that early relationship.

Thorough and ongoing training needs to be created and made available to supervisors of all

levels due to the expectation and responsibility on supervisors to provide an informative and

welcoming onboarding experience for their new employees. These findings further supported

previous studies which found student affairs professionals have a desire to learn expectations

from supervisor and have opportunities to meet mentors and colleagues early in their onboarding

process (Dean et al., 2011; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Saunders & Cooper, 2003). As a researcher I

have learned one potential method to accomplish this level of group learning is to create a

learning container. Creating a learning container means providing the time and space for

reflection, review, and sharing. Turning the team into a learning container provides built in

opportunities to share successes and challenges that can lead to long term success in onboarding

and engagement. As a group it will be imperative to strive to be an organization that champions

and embraces learning as that is a way to grow competency in onboarding practices. As research

by Brandt (2010) notes that onboarding plays a significant role in the overall health of the organization.

Committee work needs to be retooled to best accomplish group learning and implementation of new initiative such as creating an onboarding program. This idea is supported by the various quotes from interviews and builds on the seminal work of Winkler and Jager (1998) who found that effective orientation programs must have supervisor involvement, a mentor aspect, and trained staff involved in the process. Higher Education, Student affairs divisions in particular, complete a bulk of their work via committee. There is an old adage that tough topics go to committee to die, meaning that if someone doesn't want a new initiative to come into fruition the best way to stifle it is to suggest a committee work on the project. Utilizing concepts from action research leaning heavily into the evaluation step allows organizations to learn along the way and regroup as needed. Projects such as creating an onboarding program can't happen in silos; meaning it take a village of staff members being involved to onboard and engage employees. Villages are synonymous with learning containers and committee members should be willing to take on villager status and embark on a learning journey. As the villagers grow and learn so does the village. Long term a culture of learning is established creating a larger system where similar strategies can be used to solve larger or more complicated patterns.

System

In this study it is important to understand there are two systems at play. First, there is the overall university or institution. Then there is the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs (DESA). In the hierarchy of systems, the university comes first and DESA falls under followed by several units, departments, and offices. Pending the context, it could be argued that the

subunits of DESA are also their own systems. As interviews were not done with every single person in the system, it is harder to infer what was learned at the system level solely through qualitative data. There were a handful of times where participants mentioned the system and the role the system should play in onboarding. One participant "Jacob," a new employee of less than 6 months summarized the role of each of these systems as:

> I think specifically in higher ed, I look at University responsibility divisional responsibility and then on office responsibility, and they all 3 have different reasons like different things to accomplish. So, like, I look at we being the university in that, you're kind of responsible for getting for the education that buy in for, like, University wide mission and goals and who we are. Division wide, especially for our division I think that it's the responsibility of teaching you who all is a part of this, what the structure looks like what we do, what our main focuses are and, like, what sets our division apart and how we serve students and guests [differently] from other divisions, and then, like, specifically for my office … is all of the details of the day to day, what is it that I need to know to do my job but also, like, what is it that I need to know about the school because of what my job is so a lot of the detailed kind of stuff that. I wouldn't expect the division level or like the University too sit there and put too much effort into because it's my unique role in my unique office.

Members of the action research team revealed various hopes for the future of DESA as a result of onboarding. Tull (2006) shared that more research needed to be done on how support for recent graduates might improve turn-over and those sentiments are echo in the interviews. Mary believes that DESA will eventually see positive long-term effects as a result of efficient and effective onboarding:

Folks staying around or being happy. Hopefully more unified, you know, because I kind

of feel like there's still kind of that divide, you know, downtown versus uptown, so,

hopefully over time. This will help kind of blend us better, you know. Cause they're

coming in new and learning about the whole division that is like, okay, you know, they'll

start kind of branching out and, um. You know, really make us feel like 1 division

Ashley went on to explain:

I feel like with onboarding and what we're doing is, we're kind of starting them off out

the gate like, hey, you know, you are supported, you are cared for. Here's how you make

some genuine connections. Here are some things that you can do. Here's some things that

we can put together. So I think that is something that I hope continues to be a thing and it

kind of helps with just the overall turnover rate of this division and in the university as a

whole, because I feel like as long as I've been here, I've seen so many people come in and

out and I just would prefer like, you know how it is when you have, like, a stable

environment.

We also learned that the system doesn't get to this place on its own. It takes time and dedication

for these practices to be developed and implemented. However, once this is done it has to be

continued. Action research team member Mark emphasized that leadership has to make a

commiment to dedicating time and resources to creating meaningful onboarding experiences:

I'm really hoping that, you know, we will start to see a trend of student affairs divisions

nationwide really start devoting the time and the resource to be able to create a process.

Like we had. So that's, you know, giving your current and experienced employees the

time to be able to, to create something like this. You know, giving them their resources to

be able to do so, giving them the platform and the institutional support. I think that in

student affairs, we had so many folks that do similar things as onboarding. Like, with

working with new students through orientation. That is easy to for us to be able to use our

skill sets and our competencies with this to get it going. I just think it takes leadership,

giving us the time and space to be able to do.

With this in mind it, takes a village to be able to do onboarding effectively and more needs to be

done collectively to teach onboarding as a skill to future student affairs practitioners. My

findings and insights at the system level build upon the findings of previous research that speaks

to the overall impact effective onboarding might have on the field of student affairs (Dean et al.,

2011; Mather et al., 2009; Tull, 2006). The onboarding program at Border University is still

running and new pieces are being developed to continue to expand the experience. Members of

the system are excited to share suggestions and take pride in being involved in the onboarding of

new team members. New team members are also being added to take up the mantle of

onboarding new members into the division. The system may have just learned that onboarding

does have its benefits. From the insights gained through the data there are several next steps to

move the practice of onboarding forward within the field of student affairs.

Actionable Knowledge from the Action Research Intervention Process

The work to uncover needs, craft, and implement an onboarding process for the division

provided several working insights into the Inform-Welcome-Guide framework, the tenets of

work based higher education, and overall onboarding educational needs for student affairs. Five

tenets of Work Based Higher Education were leveraged to build expertise in the subject of

onboarding new employees. From the action research we learned that a.) Community is built and

connections are made from a result of onboarding that lead to better experiences for employees

(new and supervisors); b.) It takes a dedicated village or core team of individual which includes

supervisors to onboard new employees; c.) Training for Supervisors is needed on what onboarding is and how to do it effectively; and d.) The Inform-Welcome-Guide framework provides a structure for student affairs to create a divisional new employee onboarding process. Dean et al. (2011) reminds us that onboarding programs increase organizational commitment and introduce employees to the institutional culture. Policy recommendation and practice considerations outlined in this section may benefit the future of new employee onboarding in student affairs. From these insights there are numerous actionable steps that have the potential to shape future onboarding and engagement practices within the field of student affairs and higher education. In this section I am providing practical ways to take what was learned as a result of the project and continue to build upon the work implementing these strategies across student affairs. Figure 4.3 shows the relationship of the insights with the Inform-Welcome-Guide as the central idea and the bubbles around it as ideas that spring forth as a result; Table 4.1 outlines the intervention that helped bring each insight to light. In addition, recommendations for ways to implement these insights are provided. The sections that follow provide a deeper dive into each insight and next steps.

Similar to the water droplets seen after a big splash into a pool Figure 4.3 shows each insight in the form of "water droplets." While each is its own droplet it is apart of a bigger body of water; all of the insights create the key learning and guidance for practical next steps. As the father of action research put it "nothing is so practical as good theory" (Lewin, 1945), it is only right that what was learned from this action research study be able to be put to practical use within and outside of the field of student affairs.

Figure 4.3

Relationship of Insights
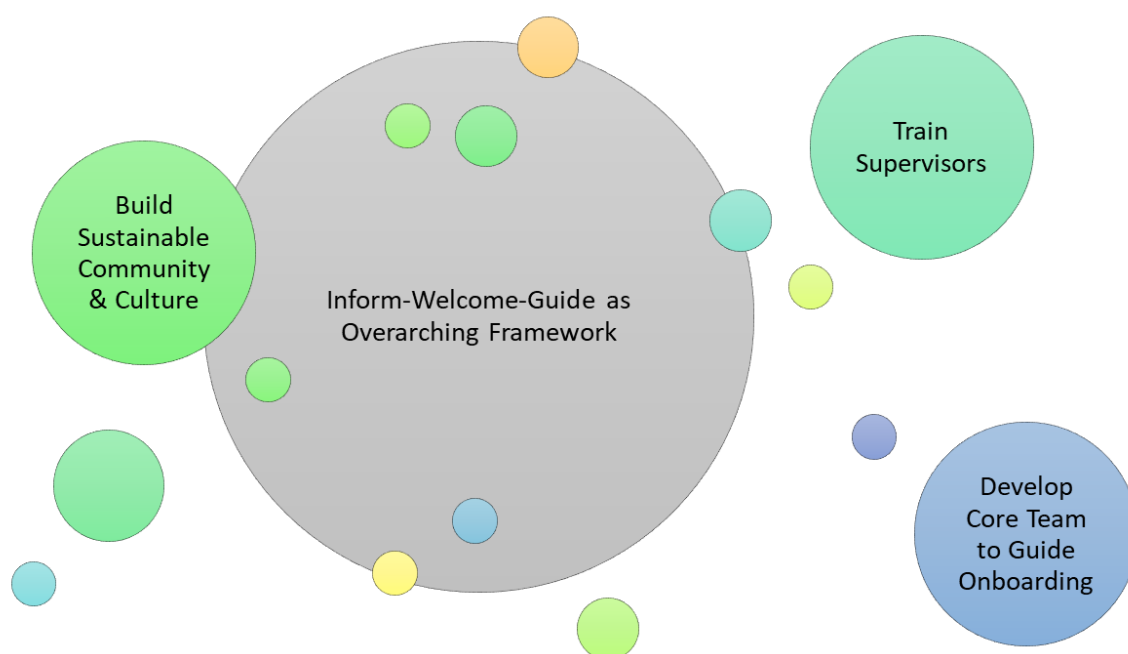
I submit that the recommendations of practice for future implementation can be adopted within

student affairs but also event wider across all aspects of education (K12 through post-secondary).

These recommendations may help inform new practices, may call for the creation of new

policies and/or updating outdated polices; as well as create opportunities for future research.

Table 4.1

Mapping Insights to Interventions and Future Recommendations

Intervention (s)	Insight	Recommendation for Future Implementation
• New Employee Checklist • New Employee Handbook • New Employee Workshop	Emerging Frameworks: The Inform-Welcome-Guide framework provides structure	Utilize the Inform-Welcome-Guide framework when developing onboarding programs in student affairs as it is a flexible framework that offers space for creativity

Intervention (s)	Insight	Recommendation for Future Implementation
• Supervisor Training	Supervisor Training: Training for Supervisors is needed on what onboarding is and how to do it effectively	Use the five tenets of work based higher education to develop required, accessible, and ongoing in-house professional development and training for supervisors to help supervisors feel prepared and capable of onboarding their new employees
• Development of Onboarding Committee	Identify Champions: Takes a dedicated village or core team of individual which includes supervisors to onboard new employees	Strategically form an onboarding committee, including supervisors, that is dedicated to the implementation and advancement of onboarding practices within their divisions
• New Employee Workshop • Departmental Discoveries	Community Connections: Community is built and connections are made from a result of onboarding that lead to better experiences for employees (new and supervisors)	Goal of any onboarding program should be to create an environment or experience where new employees are able to make at least one friend within their first month

Community Connections

In various evaluations and reflections, the Action Research Team (ART), supervisors, and new employees, all identified that onboarding allowed for opportunities to build communities of support. The ART was largely successful due to the level of connection or friendship felt within the team. Mark's statement supports the benefits of connections with the ART: "Our committee a lot of times those good experiences kind of roll over into other opportunities. So, I definitely feel like I have a closer working relationship with those folks, and

it has benefited us all professionally from those experiences." Supervisors noted that they wanted to be able to connect their employees with other staff outside of their department and to serve as supporters. Britney gives an example of this:

> "I feel like my responsibility is to sort of help the employ not feel like they're trying to sort of figure all that out on their own and, like They can always reach out to me with questions as they try to"

During the New Employee Workshop new employees showcased excitement to attend because of the prospect of making friends with other new employees as evidenced by Leo's statement:

> "when you guys did that new employee workshop that was the first time I've ever done something like that. Which I thought was definitely very beneficial, um, of just even as simple as meeting other people. Because you, you kind of stay in your silo of like, Oh, I'm a student life and engagement. I've only working with student life and engagement with people, but honestly, to build better programming and many campus partnerships, you should be expanding your silo to different departments. So be it admissions or be it, new student families transition or housing I was able to make connections with people that I had never met before. So, that was definitely beneficial for me."

This concept is further supported through the employee engagement survey results of emotional and behavioral engagement within the workplace being influenced by activities like new employee workshops and departmental discoveries. I offer that a goal of any onboarding program should be to create an environment or experience where new employees are able to make at least one friend within their first month.

Identifying Champions of Onboarding

When this project first started, it was assumed that the work was going to fall solely on the Action Research Team (ART). However, we quickly realized that the supervisors served as champions of the onboarding work. The ART helped to create a streamlined process; however, the supervisors needed to be incorporated into the overall onboarding team. Without the supervisors the onboarding process would not be as successful. In the steps to work with the supervisors it came to our attention that there was not an easily accessible list of all supervisors within the division. Creating a contact list for all the supervisors was the first step in opening doors of communication and engagement across the division. Student Affairs professionals should strategically form an onboarding committee, including supervisors, that is dedicated to the implementation and advancement of onboarding practices within their divisions.

Supervisor Training

Once the ART understood who truly needed to be involved in the onboarding process and the responsibilities of each, developing a supervisor training process was an important goal. The five tenets of Work Based Higher Education (Walling et al., 2018) were utilized to help facilitate training and grow individuals' knowledge of onboarding. Supervisor training include an overview of the Inform-Welcome-Guide framework, a state of the division, the potential impact of onboarding. It also included an in-depth walk through of the overall onboarding plan to include all worksheets and steps the supervisor would be responsible for getting their new employee through.

Learning from errors during the pilot supervisor training intervention allowed the ART to evaluate and reassess before moving into a new phase. Problem solving gave the ART and supervisors opportunities to look for creative solutions to the pressing problem of how to

effectively and efficiently onboard new staff. Most importantly, boundary crossing encouraged staff to step out of their regular role and interact with various colleagues across the division. While some said, "onboarding isn't my responsibility we have Human Resources for that," staff who embraced boundary crossing grew in their ability to onboard their staff. As student affairs professionals are looking to grow expertise in any given area, the use of the five tenets of work based higher education make a good option to develop in-house professional development and training for supervisors. Accessible and ongoing training and reflection should be required to help supervisors feel prepared and capable of onboarding their new employees.

Emerging Frameworks

Based on the success of the new employee checklist, new employee handbook, and new employee workshop, the inform-welcome-guide framework is a promising option for student affairs to look toward for developing new employee onboarding programs. Although the ART was not able to fully implement every facet of the framework as originally planned, the groundwork was laid for the third facet of Guide by way of the buddy system. In addition, the supervisors took on the role of guides. As student affairs divisions are looking to develop onboarding programs it will be important that they structure their programs using an onboarding framework. The Inform-Welcome-Guide framework is a flexible framework that offers space for creativity. I would take this framework a step further and offer Supporting-Welcoming-Informing-Mentoring (SWIM-ing) as a framework for onboarding. Action Research Team member Mark put it perfectly:

> I think this program that we implemented does a good job of filling those gaps and
> helping, you know, allow directors and our divisional leaders to be able to have a process
> that can really help support our people and help propel our employees from that HR

orientation to being a hands on employee in the division of enrollment student affairs. I

think before that, there wasn't a level of uniformity in that preparation. It was really just

'hey you done with your university, so here you go, get thrown into the pool.' I think this

is a nice way for us to actually train our employees to swim.

Many of the supervisors who participated lamented about their frustration with the lack of

structure. Frameworks such as Inform-Welcome-Guide and Supporting-Welcoming-Informing-

Mentoring provide that sought after structure and makes it an active ongoing process.

"Supporting" speaks to both the resources needed on the side of the supervisor and the general

support that a new employee may need entering a new environment. This support also lends to

the emotional engagement that Shuck (2017) offers as an important construct of engagement.

"Welcoming" provides that initial introduction to the workplace culture and starts to build a

network of peers. Only after strong support and welcome would new employees be ready to

absorb all of the knowledge that would be imparted to them during the "Informing" phase. As

onboarding is a 6 month to year long process ongoing "Mentoring" should be a built-in part of

the process aiming to make the onboarding experience a wraparound supporting process. Future

research should continue to explore the impact of onboarding programs on cognitive engagement

and how to measure long term impact of onboarding past the end of the onboarding period. This

study looked at onboarding for new employees within a division of student affairs in general.

Future research could benefit from strategically considering differences on the effect of

onboarding for recent master's program graduates versus professionals with more than 5 years of

experience. Finally, the competency of Human Resource from the NASPA/ACPA Core

Competencies must be strengthened by way of graduate programs and ongoing professional

development. Student Affairs professionals are our biggest resource and one that must be

cultivated. Supervisors must be equipped with the proper training to effectively and efficiently onboard new staff in a way that is supportive, welcoming, informative, and builds a mentoring relationship.

Limitations and Weaknesses of Study

With any study, no matter how well designed, there are limitations or things that didn't turn out as planned. The study took place over 2.5 years which made for unanticipated issues with data collection. First, tracking participants as they went through the onboarding process became difficult with shifting changes made to the program and varying start dates. For instance, there were some employees who had been on the job 1 week and then attended the new employee workshop where there may have been others who were on the job 5 months before attending their new employee workshop. In these cases, it was likely the employee missed their first workshop due to either being sick or another work obligation they couldn't reschedule. Our clinical staff such as nurses, physicians, and counselors whose schedules are dictated by pre-scheduled student appoints during a time where health care needs are high had more difficulty prioritizing the new employee workshop even when they had a supportive supervisor. Additional research could be done on varying onboarding styles for different functional areas and roles within student affairs. With these different start times and the evolution of the onboarding process due to the cycle of iterative changes it caused a weakness in the data collection timeline for interviews. Most new employees were interviewed at 3 and 6 months. As interviews started to produce high levels of saturation, I began interviewing some at 3 months and others at 6 months. Supervisor interviews also had varying timelines as I simply interviewed supervisors of new employees when they were available. The Employee Engagement Scale was also only administered at the end of the study. It would be interesting to complete a longitudinal pre and

post study using the EES to study differences in engagement before and after. This could be accomplished by having firm time markers for administering the assessment as staff will continue to have varying start dates. For example, the EES should be administered on the employees start date and then administered again exactly 6 months later. This may be difficult if record keeping isn't exact or if supervisors don't communicate new employees start date. A relationship with managers/supervisors would be paramount for such assessments to be administered on a timetable such as this. Additionally, the long-term benefits of onboarding on factors beyond engagement should be studied further. Future research should focus on long term effects of onboarding on employee engagement, job satisfaction and turn over, and expertise development related to student affairs competencies and skills.

Moving Onboarding Forward in Student Affairs

As a scholar-practitioner in the field of Higher Education, specifically in Student Affairs where my focus is on the onboarding practices of new undergraduates to university; I find it fitting to also study the onboarding and engagement practices of new employees. Through this research I have found that much learning still needs to occur to better teach how to onboard new employees. This action research highlights the need to illustrate how to implement onboarding within the work culture of student affairs. Table 4.2 offers a visual of how the Inform-Welcome-Guide framework is embedded in the process. Finally, an implementation guide is provided to give a timeline and "how-to" on implementing onboarding strategically in a Student Affairs Higher Education setting. My hope is that student affairs as a profession embraces onboarding as a practice. It is time to begin implementing programs aimed at effectively welcoming new employees with the purpose of retaining and growing student affairs professionals.

Table 4.2

Future Intervention Planning Guide

Proposed Intervention	Inform-Welcome-Guide	Action Research Phase	AR Team Activities & Tuckman Group Phases	Proposed Timeline (Start on 1st of Month)	Cost & Other Considerations
AR Team Identified	n/a	Constructing	Group forming	August	$0
Onboarding Benchmarking	n/a	Planning Action	Group storming & norming	October	$0
New Emp. Tools (Checklist & Handbook)	Inform	Taking Action	Group preforming Develop & pilot	December	$0 – Use in house team
Workshops: Supervisor Training & New Emp. Wrkshp	Welcome	Taking Action	Group preforming Develop, Identify Speakers, Lead Sessions	February	$0-$200 if lunch or giveaways are provided
Buddy Program & Prodevo plan	Guide	Taking Action	Group preforming Develop, Train, & Match Participants	April	$0
Socializing the experience (make it long lasting)	n/a	Evaluating Action	Group adjourning Training new committee members	February - June	$0

Implementation Guide

To implement new employee onboarding within student affairs successfully I am proposing a moderately aggressive timeline of 8-10 months; please keep in mind this could happen faster or slower. The key to creating a lasting change involves changing culture which takes time. The section that follows provides a *plan summary* of implementation. This plan assumes biweekly team meetings are taking place along with regular follow up between the team lead and the VP. Should meetings and follow ups happen less frequently or items are not approved the implementation timeline can be severely delayed.

Months 1-2

Convene an Action Research (AR) team of 3-5 people committed to researching and creating a program that fits your current needs. In these first 2 months there should be strategic selection, training, and a charge of the AR team. Action research is a methodology to solve practical and pressing problems in society by studying issues in places where we work (Coghlan, 2007; Dickens & Watkins, 1999; Reason & McArdle 2008). Action research is suggested for teams wishing to implement change because as each cycle happens in real time reflection and evaluation allows for adjustments to be made if something is not working without feeling as if time was wasted. For change in any student affairs division to be effective and long lasting it needs to be a group effort informing and shaping the direction; thus, the suggestion to convene an Action Research (AR) Team. Equal representation and participation of departmental units should be invited to serve on the team. These should be individuals who have been with the division longer than 1 year and represent a variety of levels and position types.

Months 3-4

  After the Action Research (AR) team is selected they should begin internal and external research to learn more about the current needs of the division and how other student affairs divisions are handling onboarding. This might look like AR team members visiting a Directors' or leadership meeting to ask questions or deploying a divisional survey to better understand staffs' onboarding experience so far. Simultaneously, the AR team would also be reaching out to other universities to gather examples of current trends and practices that we might consider.

Months 5-6

  The AR team can then design an onboarding program that focuses on an onboarding framework such as the Inform-Welcome-Guide framework (Klein et al., 2015) which allows for a variety of activities. Then, dates can be identified to host the first set of onboarding programs. Additional trainings for supervisors should also be developed during this time. Potential content for the onboarding program should include a New Employee Workshop ranging from ½ day to a whole; covering division strategic plan, overview of departments/university, town & gown (bring in your city representatives), expectations, ways to be involved (such as committee work), tours, personality assessments (True Colors and/or Strengths Finder), and leadership development (consider important initiatives that are already happening in your division). Departmental Discovery opportunities where new staff spend a short period of time with each of the departments within the division learning the high level of what they do; visiting all departments should be a requirement. Supervisor training should include an overview of the final onboarding process and the role supervisors play. A checklist and/or talking points should be developed for supervisors to ensure all aspects of the onboarding process are covered. Be creative; you may want to poll staff to learn about information they wish they had known in their first 3 months as

well as supervisors to understand how to best support your supervisors during the onboarding of new employees.

Months 7-8

Prior to launching the onboarding program dedicate time to branding, marketing, and training. This onboarding program will require several new documents such as a new employee handbook be developed for the division as well as training for supervisors in the division. To minimize cost, creation of digital items and utilization of in-house design teams are encouraged to not accrue any addition expense. Digital items also give a longer shelf life, making it easy to edit/update as needed, and make the items accessible from more places such as the divisional website and cloud-based group storage/document sharing accounts.

Months 9, 10, and Beyond

After all components of the training have been developed plan to host your first official New Employee Workshop (NEW) Event. As with any new initiative you would also need an assessment timeline to adequately assess the effectiveness. The assessments would then be used to continue planning, tweaking, and implement future onboarding activities. As the initial pieces of a handbook, supervisor training, and NEW event are implemented and evaluated you may find other aspects such as a mentor/buddy program to be the next phase to work towards implementing. Remember the process is an iterative one that will allow for multiple cycles of evaluating and taking action.

Lifeguarding the Pool: Creating an environment for SWIMMING

Our most important resource is our staff. Just as with students, its easier to retain the ones we have than recruit more should be the same mindset adopted regarding staff. In a society that has been in a global pandemic for two years and recently in 2021 a great resignation where

employees are seeking work that better aligns with their values it is time to cultivate environments that retain employees. These retention efforts must start before day one of work. Before a supervisor can even begin to lay out expectations for a new employee that supervisor must have a full understanding of why onboarding is necessary and possess the tools to do so effectively. This means that their divisional leadership has taken an active interest and made an investment in creating a learning environment where team members can explore best practices for onboarding, supporting, and engaging staff; ultimately keeping them retained in their role. The long-term benefits of onboarding still need to be explored further; however, this study points to significant benefits in three important areas of engagement. Employees who are engaged emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally are more likely to stay in their roles. The days of providing a binder on the first day and calling it training or throwing people into the deep end to sink or swim are long gone. Tools and frameworks are available to create programs that will positively benefit not only the individual but the larger group and system. As student affairs practitioners we have an obligation to grow in our competency of organization and human resource; one way to do this is to take an active interest in learning about and implementing effective onboarding practices.

References

Association of College Personal Administrators [ACPA] & National Association for Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA]. (2015). *ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies Rubrics*. Retrieved from https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/ACPA_NASPA_Professional_Competency _Rubrics_Full.pdf

American College Personal Administrators [ACPA] & National Association for Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA]. (2016). *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators.* Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/ACPA_NASPA_Professional_Competencies_ FINAL.pdf

Bailey, J. (2016). New-hire notifications: Achieving compliance at the state level. *Employment Relations Today (Wiley), 43*(3), 45-54. doi:10.1002/ert.21572

Benner, P. E., Chesla, C. A., & Tanner, C. A. (2009). *Expertise in nursing practice. [electronic resource] : Caring, clinical judgment & ethics* (2nd ed. ed.) Springer Pub. Retrieved from http://proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db= cat06564a&AN=uga.9913745224402931&site=eds-live http://galileo-usg-uga-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/openurl/UGA/UGA_SERVICES?u.ignore_date_coverag e=true&rft.mms_id=9913745224402931

Bierema, L. L. (2018). Adult learning in health professions education. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, (157), 27-40. Retrieved from http://proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=

eric&AN=EJ1170016&site=eds-live

http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ace.20266/full

Bierema, L. L., & Merriam, S. B. (2002). E-mentoring: Using computer mediated

communication to enhance the mentoring process. *Innovative Higher Education, 26*(3),

211-227. doi:10.1023/A:1017921023103

Bock, G.W., Zmud, R.W., Kim, Y.G. & Lee, J.N. (2005). Behavioral intention formation in

knowledge sharing, examining the role of extrinsic motivators, social-psychological

force, and organizational climate. *MIS Quarterly, 29*(1), 87–112.

Bolton, C. (2005). The role of mentors in our personal and professional lives. *College Student*

Affairs Journal, 24(2), 180. Retrieved from http://proxy-

remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=

edb&AN=18890885&site=eds-live

Borden, V.M. H., & Zak Owens, J. L. (2001). *Measuring quality: Choosing among surveys and*

other assessments of college quality. Washington, DC: American Council on Education

and Association for Institutional Research.

Bradt, G. (2010). Onboarding: An act of transformational leadership. *People & Strategy, 33*(2),

4-5. Retrieved from http://proxy-

remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=

bth&AN=60392420&site=ehost-live

Cable, D. M., Gino, F., & Staats, B. R. (2013). Reinventing employee onboarding. *MIT Sloan*

Management Review, 54(3), 23-28. Retrieved from http://proxy-

remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=

bth&AN=86414330&site=ehost-live

Chi , M. T. H. (2006). Two approaches to the study of experts' characteristics. In Ericsson, K.

    A., Charness, N., Feltovich, P., & Hoffman, R. R. (Eds.), *The Cambridge hand-book of*

    expertise and expert performance (pp. 21–30). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University

    Press.

Clifford, M.W. (2009). Exploring Mentoring Experiences in College Student Affairs: A Q

    Methodology Study. UNF Theses and Dissertations. Doctoral dissertation Paper 201.

    Retrieved 12 November 2016 from http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/etd/201

Coghlan, D. (2007). Insider action research doctorates: Generating actionable knowledge. *Higher*

    Education, 54, 293-306. Doi:10.1007/s10734-005-5450-0

Colton, D., & Covert, R. W. (2007). *Designing and constructing instruments for social research*

    and evaluation. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Conley, S. N., Foley, R. W., Gorman, M. E., Denham, J., & Coleman, K. (2017). Acquisition of

    T-shaped expertise: An exploratory study. Social Epistemology, 31(2), 165-183.

    doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1249435

Copper, D. L., & Miller, T. K. (1998). Influence and impact: Professional development in

    student affairs. *New Directions for Student Services, 1998*(84), 55. Retrieved from

    http://proxy-

    remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=s

    lh&AN=9182196&site=eds-live

Cotter, P. (2015). Hiring and development, down to a T. Chief Learning Officer, 14(2), 12.

    Retrieved from http://proxy-

    remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=

    bth&AN=100750553&site=eds-live

Cowley, W. H. (1962). Reflections of a troublesome but hopeful rip van winkle. In J. Eddy (Ed.), *College student personnel development administration and counseling.* Washington, DC: University Press of America.

Creswell, J. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, fifth Ed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Darling, L. A. W. (1985). Mentors and Mentoring. *The Journal of Nursing Administration*, *15*(3), 42-43. Retrieved from http://proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cin20&AN=107585293&site=eds-live

Dean, L. A., Thompson, G. F., Saunders, S. A., & Cooper, D. L. (2011). Efficacy of Orientation for New Student Affairs Professionals. *College Student Affairs Journal, 29*(2), 137–149.

Dickens, L. & Watkins, K. E. (1999). Action research: Rethinking Lewin. *Management Learning, 30*(2), 127-140.

DiGirolamo, J. (2015) Coaching for professional development. *SHRM-SIOP Science of HR White Paper Series.*

Eaton, P. W. (2016). The competency-based movement in student affairs: Implications for curriculum and professional development. *57*(5), 573-589. doi:10.1353/csd.2016.0061

Elvira, Q., Imants, J., Dankbaar, B., & Segers, M. (2017). Designing education for professional expertise development. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 61*(2), 187-204. doi:10.1080/00313831.2015.1119729

Ericsson, K. A. (2009). *Development of professional expertise: Toward measurement of expert performance and design of optimal learning environments*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fenwick, T. J. (2003). *Professional growth plans: Possibilities and limitations of an organization wide employee development strategy*. *14*(1), 59-77. United States: Jossey-Bass Publishers. Retrieved from http://proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbl&AN=RN127902823&site=eds-live

French, R. M. & Cleeremans, A. (2002). *Implicit learning and consciousness an empirical, philosophical, and computational consensus in the making*. New York, New York: Psychology Press.

Guttman, H. M. (2012). Develop staffers via self-coaching. *Student Affairs Today, 15*(4), 7. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=76973602&site=eds-live

Gupta, B. & Singh, A. (2017). Predicting employee engagement, knowledge sharing, & OCB. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, 52*(4), 675-688. Retrieved from http://proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.509893922&site=eds-live

Han, S. (2018). The antecedents and dimensionality of knowledge-sharing intention: An empirical study of R&D engineers in a high-performing IT company. *European Journal of Training and Development*, *42*(1–2), 125–142. https://doi.org/10.1108 /EJTD-09-2017-0073

Harris, P. (2009). Help wanted: 'T-shaped' skills to meet 21st century needs. United States: A.ST.D. Retrieved from http://proxy-

remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=
edsbl&AN=RN257553310&site=eds-live

Herr, K. & Anderson, G.L. (2014). *The action research dissertation* (2ⁿᵈ ed.). Thousand Oaks,
CA: Sage.

Ipe, M. (2003). Knowledge sharing in organizations: A conceptual framework. *Human Resource
Development Review*, *2*(4), 337–359. https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484303257985

Johnson, L. S. (2015). Using sista circles to examine the professional experience of
contemporary black women teachers in schools: A collective story about school culture
and support. 2015. Retrieved from http://proxy-
remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=
cat06564a&AN=uga.9944393013902959&site=eds-live

Kahn, W. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work.
Academy of Management Journal, 33, 692-724.

Kidwell, J. J., Vander-Linde, K. M., & Johnson, S. L. (2000). Applying corporate knowledge
management practices in higher education. *Educause Quarterly, 23*(4), 28-33. Retrieved
from http://er.educause.edu/~/media/files/article-downloads/eqm0044.pdf

Klein, H. J., & Heuser, A. (2008). The learning of socialization content: A framework for
researching orientating practices. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources
Management,* 27, 278–336.

Klein, H. J., Polin, B., & Leigh Sutton, K. (2015). Specific onboarding practices for the
socialization of new employees. *International Journal of Selection & Assessment, 23*(3),
263-283. doi:10.1111/ijsa.12113

Knight, L. (2002). Network learning: Exploring learning by interorganizational

    networks. *Human Relations, 55*(4), 427. doi:10.1177/0018726702055004462

Korte, R., Brunhaver, S., & Sheppard, S. (2015). (Mis)interpretations of organizational

    socialization: The expectations and experiences of newcomers and managers. *Human*

    Resource Development Quarterly, 26(2), 185-208. doi:10.1002/hrdq.21206

Kusdi. (2019). The mediating effect of knowledge management on leadership toward

    organizational performance of state organization for higher education. *Journal of*

    Management Information and Decision Sciences, 22(3), 207-212.

Labarre, C. (1948). *Graduate training for educational personnel work.* Washington, DC:

    American Council on Education.

Lee, J.N. (2001). The impact of knowledge sharing, organizational capability and partnership

    quality on is outsourcing success. *Information and Management, 38*, 323–35.

Lehman, D. W. (2017). Organizational cultural theory and research administration knowledge

    management. *Journal of Research Administration, 48*(2), 52-66.

Lewin, K. (1945). The research center for group dynamics at Massachusetts Institute of

    Technology. *Sociometry, 8*, 126-135.

Lewin, K. (1948). *Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected papers on group dynamics.* New York,

    NY: Harper.

Lin, H.F. (2007). Knowledge sharing and firm innovation capability: An empirical study.

    International Journal of Manpower, 28(3/4), 315-32.

Lockwood, S. L. (2001). Enhancing employee development: Development and testing of a new

    employee orientation protocol. Digital Dissertations, Article AAT 3007089. Retrieved

    from http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/ 3007089.

Long, P. G. (2018). Dear mentor: A reflection on the impact of mentorship in higher education.

Vermont Connection, 39(1), 61-68. Retrieved from http://proxy-

remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=

ehh&AN=129598419&site=eds-live

Macey, W.H., Schneider, B., Barbera, K.M. and Young, S.A. (2009), *Employee Engagement:

Tools for analysis, practice and competitive advantage*. Maiden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Marsick, V. J. & Watkins, K. E. (1990). *Informal and incidental learning in the workplace.* New

York, New York : Routledge

Mather, P. C., Bryan, S. P., & Faulkner, W. O. (2009). Orienting Mid-Level Student Affairs

Professionals. *College Student Affairs Journal, 27*(2), 242–256.

McMillian, J. H. (2008). *Educational research: Fundamentals for the consumer* (5th ed.). Boston,

MA: Pearson.

Miller, T. K. (1991). Using standards in professional preparation. In W. A. Bryan, R. B.

Winston, Jr., & T. K. Miller (Eds.), *Using Professional Standards in Student Affairs: New

direction for student services, 52,* 45-62. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

ModernThink (2019). *ModernThink higher education insight survey.* Great Colleges To Work

For. Retrieved from http://www.modernthink.com/wp-

content/uploads/2018/10/SAMPLE-Higher-Education-Insight-Survey.pdf

Nardi, P. M. (2003). *Doing survey research: A guide to quantitative methods.* Boston, MA:

Pearson.

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (1990). *Standards of Professional

Practice.* Retrieved from

https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Standards_of_Professional_Practice.pdf

O'Brien, J. J. (2018). Exploring intersections among the ACPA/ NASPA professional

competency. *Journal of College Student Development, 59*(3), 274-290.

doi:10.1353/csd.2018.0027

Oxman, S., Wong, W., & Innovations, D. V. X. (2014). White paper: Adaptive learning systems.

Integrated Education Solutions, 6-7. Retrieved from:

http://kenanaonline.com/files/0100/100321/DVx_Adaptive_Learning_White_Paper.pdf

Pierce, D. (2017). Always growing. *Community College Journal, 87*(6), 18-23. Retrieved from

http://proxy-

remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=

ehh&AN=124007047&site=eds-live

Porter, S. R., & Reilly, K. (2014). Competency-based education as a potential strategy to

increase learning and lower costs. Retrieved from

http://hcmstrategists.com/maximizingresources/images /CBE_Paper.pdf

Reason, P. & McArdle, K. L. (2008). Action research and organization development. *T. G.

Cummings Handbook of Organization Development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Renn, K. A., & Hodges, J. P. (2007). The First Year on the Job: Experiences of New

Professionals in Student Affairs. *NASPA Journal (National Association of Student

Personnel Administrators, Inc.), 44*(2), 367–391. https://doi.org/10.2202/0027-6014.1800

Roberts, D. M. (2007). Preferred methods of professional development in student affairs. *NASPA

Journal, 44*(3), 561-577. Retrieved from http://proxy-

remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=

eric&AN=EJ777041&site=eds-live

http://www.naspa.org/membership/mem/login/login.cfm?uri=/membership/mem/index.cf

m&m=3

Roscoe, J. (2002). Continuing professional development in higher education. *Human Resource*

Development International, 5(1), 3-9. doi:10.1080/13678860110076006

Saks, A. M., & Gruman, J. A. (2014). What do we really know about employee engagement?

Human Resource Development Quarterly, 25(2), 155-182. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

doi:10.1002/hrdq.21187

Saunders, S. A., & Cooper, D. L. (2003). Orientation: Building the foundations for success. In S.

M. Janosik, D. G. Creamer, J. B. Hirt, R. B. Winston, Jr., S. A. Saunders, & D. L. Cooper

(Eds.), *Supervising new professionals in student affairs* (pp. 17-42). New York, NY:

Brunner-Routledge

Schmidt, J. A., & Wolfe, J. S. (2009). The mentor partnership: Discovery of professionalism.

NASPA Journal (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Inc.), 46(3),

371-381. Retrieved from http://proxy-

remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=

ehh&AN=45160572&site=eds-live

Schuh, J. H. (2009). *Assessment methods for student affairs* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Schwartz, R. A., & Bryan, W. A. (1998). What is professional development? *New Directions for*

Student Services, 1998(84), 3. Retrieved from http://proxy-

remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=s

lh&AN=9182205&site=eds-live

Seeto, E. (2016). Professional mentoring in student affairs: Evaluation of a global programme.

Journal of Student Affairs in Africa, 4(2), 47-51. Retrieved from http://proxy-

remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=
eric&AN=EJ1132243&site=eds-live

Selden, S. C., & Sowa, J. E. (2015). Voluntary turnover in nonprofit human service
organizations: The impact of high performance work practices. *Human Service
Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 39*(3), 182-207.
doi:10.1080/23303131.2015.1031416

Selingo, J. J. (2013). College (un)bound: The future of American higher education and what it
means for students. Boston, MA: New Harvest Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Shuck, B., Adelson, J. L., & Reio, T. G. (2017). The employee engagement scale: Initial
evidence for construct validity and implications for theory and practice John Wiley &
Sons, Inc. doi:10.1002/hrm.21811

Slotte, V., & Tynjala, P. (2003). Industry-university collaboration for continuing professional
development. *Journal of Education and Work, 16*(4), 445-464. Retrieved
from http://proxy-
remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=
eric&AN=EJ770912&site=eds-live

Stevens, D. D., & Levi, A. J. (2011). Introduction to rubrics: An assessment tool to save grading
time, convey effective feedback, and promote student learning. Stylus Publishing.

Steyn, G. M. (2004). Harnessing the power of knowledge in higher education. *Education, 124*(4),
615-631.

Thrasher, A. B., & Walker, S. E. (2018). Orientation process for newly credentialed athletic
trainers in the transition to practice. *Journal of Athletic Training (Allen Press), 53*(3),
292-302. Retrieved from http://proxy-

remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=s
3h&AN=128943397&site=ehost-live

Trossman, S. (2017). Stepping into a culture of safety: Onboarding programs help retain nurses,
strengthen patient care...reprinted with permission of the American nurse. *New Jersey
Nurse, 47*(4), 8. Retrieved from http://proxy-
remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=
cin20&AN=125851838&site=ehost-live

Tynjala, P. (2008). Perspectives into learning at the workplace. *Educational Research Review,
3*(2), 130-154. doi:10.1016/j.edurev.2007.12.001

Tull, A. (2006). Synergistic supervision, job satisfaction, and intention to turnover of new
professionals in student affairs. (4), 465. doi:10.1353/csd.2006.0053

Wallin, A., Nokelainen, P., & Mikkonen, S. (2019). How experienced professionals develop
their expertise in work-based higher education: A literature review. *Higher Education
(00181560), 77*(2), 359. doi:10.1007/s10734-018-0279-5

Wang, Z. & Wang, N. (2012). Knowledge sharing, innovation and firm performance. *Expert
Systems with Applications, 39*(10), 8899 - 8908.

Waple, J. N. (2006). An assessment of skills and competencies necessary for entry-level student
affairs work. *NASPA Journal (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators,
Inc.), 43*(1), 1-18. doi:10.2202/0027-6014.1568

Winston, R. B., Jr., & Creamer, D. G. (1997). *Improving staffing practices in student affairs*. San
Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Winston, R. B. Jr., Torres, V., Carpenter, D. S., McIntire, D. D., & Petersen, B. (2001). Staffing
in student affairs: A survey of practices. *College Student Affairs Journal, 21*(1), 7-25.

Woolsey, L. K. (1986). The critical incident technique: An innovative qualitative method of

research. *Canadian Journal of Counseling, 20*(4), 242-254.

Appendix A

Table 1

Literature Review Matrix

Author/*Title*	Sample	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications for Future Study
Elvira, Q., Imants, J., Dankbaar B., & Segers, M. - *Designing Education for Professional Expertise Development*	37 articles	Lit Review Method: 1. Inclusion/exclusion criteria 2. Problem identification 3. Literature search 4. Data evaluation 5. Data analysis & presentation	Identification of 10 instructional principles to promote learning environments that direct learning toward expertise	Provides a baseline for studies on expertise development, literature on the subject, and gaps in the literature
O'Brien, J. J. - *Exploring Intersections Among the ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies*	74 self-reported incidents from student affairs professionals at different experience levels	Qualitative analysis	Development of a competency Framework. Multiple Competencies can be observed in one incident (complexity & intersectionality)	Study to establish validity and efficacy as "discrete constructs." Study to determine the most influential factors of professional development that lead to expert level in competencies;

				Education, position, association involvement, etc.
Fenwick, T. J. - *Professional Growth Plans: Possibilities and limitations of an organization wide employee* development strategy	3 schools at different levels within the same school district Part 1: • Elementary school: 16 teachers • Middle: 15 teachers • High school: 57 teachers Part 2: • Senior administrators for five other school jurisdictions	Qualitative, exploratory study; Two part study; In-depth interviews	Professional Growth Plans can be used to facilitate individual and organizational learning	Research can be furthered on how human resource departments use and implement PGPs as a tool in the workplace to foster learning and growth both professionally and personally. Linking PGPs to student affairs core competencies
Eaton, P. W. - *The competency-based movement in student affairs: Implications for curriculum and professional development*	10 Core Competencies	Theory as a framework for critical questioning Theories used: • Complexity theory • Postmodern educational theory	Awareness of limitations around use over application of competencies in graduate curriculum and professional development practices. Relying too heavily on competencies may stunt learning. Need to incorporate threads of	Limitations are a unique area of study and consideration when creating a new study based around competencies. Provides and alternative

			curriculum theory and Pedagogy into the competencies	viewpoint for using or not using competencies as a framework for professional development.
Waple, J. N. - *An Assessment of Skills and Competencies Necessary for Entry-Level student Affairs Work*	1,237 student affairs professionals with less than 5 years of experience	Quantitative; 7 point Likert scale questionnaire; 28 items; Rate degree skill/competency is attained as part of master's work; Rate degree skill/competency was necessary to perform current job	All but three skills were attained at a moderate to high degree. All but three skills were necessary to do work at a moderate to high degree. High degree of congruence between high attainment/high use and low attainment/low use skills. Only four skills were low attainment/high use	How do entry-level professionals acquire skills to become leaders within the profession and their institutions of employment? "Additional research is recommended to analyze the use of skills as they relate to length of employment..." (p. 15)

Appendix B

IRB Confirmation

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Human Research Protection Program

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

August 12, 2020

Dear Laura Bierema:

On 8/12/2020, the Human Subjects Office reviewed the following submission:

Title of Study:	Developing Expertise & Engagement in Student Affairs Professionals
Investigator:	Laura Bierema
Co-Investigator:	Lyndsey Williams Mayweather
IRB ID:	PROJECT00002671
Review Category:	Exempt Flex 7

We have determined that the proposed research is Exempt. The research activities may begin 8/12/2020.

Since this study was determined to be exempt, please be aware that not all future modifications will require review by the IRB. For more information please see Appendix C of the Exempt Research Policy (https://research.uga.edu/docs/policies/compliance/hso/IRB-Exempt-Review.pdf). As noted in Section C.2., you can simply notify us of modifications that will not require review via the "Add Public Comment" activity.

A progress report will be requested prior to 8/12/2025. Before or within 30 days of the progress report due date, please submit a progress report or study closure request. Submit a progress report by navigating to the active study and selecting Progress Report. The study may be closed by selecting Create Version and choosing Close Study as the submission purpose.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).

Appendix C

Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs

Professional Development Committee

<u>Opening statement:</u>

Thank you for taking time to participate in this needs assessment survey. This survey is being administered as part of a research study on employee engagement and expertise development through the University of Georgia by a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Laura Bierema. This survey should take no longer than 20 minutes of your time. Please note that participation is completely optional. Choosing not to participate in this survey will not have a negative impact on you or your ability to participate in future surveys or activities sponsored by the professional development committee. All Responses will be kept confidential; no contact information or personal identifiers will be collected through this survey. Survey data will not be used for future research but may be used for future decision making within the division of Enrollment and Student Affairs at Border University.

Question 1: Please rank order the topics listed below that you would like to learn as part of upcoming Professional Development programs for the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs. Where 1 is the highest rank and 9 is the lowest rank.

- Leadership 101
- Coping with Change
- The Multiplier Effect: How the best Leaders Make Everyone in their Organization Smarter
- Strengths-Finder: What are you top five strengths?
- Myers-Briggs Inventory: What You Don't Know About Yourself May Hurt You
- Understanding Generational Differences and how They impact your Organization

- Professionalism and Ethics: What would you do?
- Improving your communication Skills: Verbal, nonverbal, and virtual
- Other_____

Question 2: Please place topics in the appropriate box.

Items:

- Leadership 101
- Coping with Change
- The Multiplier Effect: How the best Leaders Make Everyone in their Organization Smarter
- Strengths-Finder: What are you top five strengths?
- Myers-Briggs Inventory: What You Don't Know About Yourself May Hurt You
- Understanding Generational Differences and how They impact your Organization
- Professionalism and Ethics: What would you do?
- Improving your communication Skills: Verbal, nonverbal, and virtual
- Other_____

Boxes:

- In the past five years I have received training on the following topics AND am confident in applying my knowledge of this area in the workplace
- In the past five years I have received training on the following topics BUT I would like a refresher
- I have not received training in the following topics

Question 3: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

5 point scale: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree,

strongly disagree

- I received training within my first 30 days in my current role to do my job effectively
- My area collaborates in meaningful ways with other departments at the University
- I receive communication about new information within my department in a timely manner
- I receive communication about new information within the division in a timely manner
- Within my current position I have been given the opportunity to grow and/or improve my CURRENT skill set
- Within my current position I have been given the opportunity to learn a NEW skill set
- My skills are being used to their fullest potential in my current position

- I believe that I am a valued member of this division

Question 4: Please respond to the following open ended questions:

- What challenges have you faced in completing your job?
- How have your experienced being supported to do your job successfully?

Appendix D

Interview Protocols

AR Team Interview Protocol

Interview I

Intro: Thank you for taking the time out to tell me about your experiences at AU so far. Please

don't think of this as a typical interview. I want this to be more conversational and you simply

sharing your experiences through storytelling. Your stories will allow me to learn more about the

experience of starting as a new employee at AU.

Tell me about your experience leading change…

Tell me about your expectations for employee engagement.

Tell me about a time that you had difficulty as a supervisor in the last 6 months with your new
employee that did not go well.
- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- How did this effect you and your new employee?
- How did things turn out/how are they now?

Tell me about your onboarding process at AU.
- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- How did this effect your first 6 months?
- How did things turn out/how are they now?
- How does this influence how you work with your new employees?

Tell me about your expectations of an onboarding process?
Tell me about your level of engagement as an employee in the division

New Employee Interview Protocol

Interview I

Intro: Thank you for taking the time out to tell me about your experiences at AU so far. Please

don't think of this as a typical interview. I want this to be more conversational and you simply

sharing your experiences through storytelling. Your stories will allow me to learn more about the experience of starting as a new employee at AU.

Tell me about your expectations as a New Employee here at AU…

Tell me about your previous experiences starting a new position…

Tell me about your expectations for employee engagement.

Interview II

Intro: Thank you for taking the time out to tell me about your experiences at AU so far. Please don't think of this as a typical interview. I want this to be more conversations and you simply sharing your experiences through storytelling. Your stories will allow me to learn more about the experience of starting as a new employee at AU.

Tell me about a time during your first 6 months that did not go well.
  - What happened?
  - Who was involved?
  - How did this effect your first 6 months?
  - How did things turn out/how are they now?
Tell me about your onboarding process at AU.
  - What happened?
  - Who was involved?
  - How did this effect your first 6 months?
  - How did things turn out/how are they now?
Tell me about your expectations of an onboarding process?
Tell me about your level of engagement as a new employee in the division.

Supervisor Interview Protocol

Interview I

Intro: Thank you for taking the time out to tell me about your experiences at AU so far. Please don't think of this as a typical interview. I want this to be more conversational and you simply sharing your experiences through storytelling. Your stories will allow me to learn more about the experience of starting as a new employee at AU.

Tell me about your expectations supervising New Employees here at AU…

Tell me about your previous experiences supervising a new employee…

Tell me about your expectations for employee engagement.

Interview II

Intro: Thank you for taking the time out to tell me about your experiences at AU so far. Please don't think of this as a typical interview. I want this to be more conversations and you simply sharing your experiences through storytelling. Your stories will allow me to learn more about the experience of starting as a new employee at AU.

Tell me about a time that you had difficulty as a supervisor in the last 6 months with your new employee that did not go well.
- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- How did this effect you and your new employee?
- How did things turn out/how are they now?

Tell me about your onboarding process at AU.
- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- How did this effect your first 6 months?
- How did things turn out/how are they now?
- How does this influence how you work with your new employees?

Tell me about your expectations of an onboarding process?
Tell me about your level of engagement as an employee in the division.

Appendix E

Employee Engagement Survey

I am a full time employee within the Division of Enrollment & Student Affairs

- Yes
- No (if not skip to end of survey)

I identify with the following (select all that apply). New employee is referring to an individual

with less than 1 year of service in the Division of Enrollment & Student Affairs

- New Employee
- Supervisor to New Employee
- Supervisor
- Employee
- Other

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements (Strongly disagree, somewhat

disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree)

- I am really focused when I am working
- I concentrate on my job when I'm at work
- I give my job responsibility a lot of attention
- At work, I am focused on my job
- Working in the division of enrollment & student affairs has a great deal of personal meaning to me
- I feel a strong sense of belonging to my job
- I believe in the mission and purpose of the division of enrollment & student affairs
- I care about the future of the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs
- I really push myself to work beyond what is expected of me
- I am willing to put in extra effort without being asked
- I often go above what is expected of me to help my team be successful.
- I work harder than expected to help the division of enrollment and students be successful

Please create a unique 6 digit identifier using your birth month + last four digits of your cell

phone number (mmxxxx)

As of today how long have you worked for the division of enrollment and student affairs Border

University?

Have you attended the Division of Enrollment & Student Affairs New Employee Workshop?

- Yes
- No

Have you attended the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs Supervisor Training

Workshop?

- Yes
- No

Have you attended the Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs Departmental Discovery

Workshop?

- Yes
- No

Appendix F

Divisional Supervisor Onboarding checklist

Divisional Supervisor Onboarding Checklist

The Augusta University Division of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs Onboarding Checklist is designed to provide all new employees within the division with a common division-level onboarding experience regardless of title or rank. Supervisors are expected to utilize the checklist to support a positive onboarding experience for new employees.

This checklist is not exhaustive. Supervisors should also work with your Human Resources liaison for any institutional onboarding requirements. In addition, consider any departmental level onboarding needs in addition.

Once completed this document must be submitted to your AVP and then placed in the employees file once completed.

New Employee Name: _____   Title: _____

Employee #: _____   Start Date: _____

Supervisor Name: _____   Title: _____

Department: _____

Pre-Arrival

- [ ] Obtain any necessary pre-start paperwork
- [ ] Request employee user ID/email and share as needed
- [ ] Announce new employee hire & start date in monthly newsletter
- [ ] Communicate helpful information about AU & Augusta to employee
- [ ] Obtain appropriate levels of access to facilities and systems
- [ ] Obtain copy of new employee handbook
- [ ] Create personalized welcome pack
- [ ] Prepare employee's work space
- [ ] Prepare schedule for employees first 1-2 weeks of work
- [ ] Communicate first day information to employee

Day 1

- [ ] Give welcome pack and new employee handbook to employee
- [ ] Facilitate tour of workplace
- [ ] Review building emergency action plans
- [ ] Provide helpful campus information and instructions
- [ ] Discuss work particulars
- [ ] Debrief the day and prepare for day two

Day 2

- [ ] Share the annual performance review process and clarify work performance standards
- [ ] Review policies of particular relevance to the department and/or position
- [ ] Discuss workflow functionality
- [ ] Discuss the supervisory relationship and mutual expectations

Day 3

- [ ] Share a brief history of the department and its philosophical foundations
- [ ] Review the department and AU Enrollment and Student Affairs organizational charts
- [ ] Share department/office norms

Day 5

- [ ] Help the new employee connect their role to the missions of the department and the division
- [ ] Establish a list of people for the new employee to meet
- [ ] Debrief the week

The First Six Months

- [ ] Facilitate initial and ongoing training
- [ ] Provide opportunities for mutual reflection
  - [ ] 3-month reflection
  - [ ] 6-month reflection

Once all items have been completed and checked off the list please have both the supervisor and employee sign and date The signed copy should be submitted to the appropriate AVP and placed in the employee's personnel file.

Supervisor signature: _____   Date: _____

Employee signature: _____   Date: _____

Appendix G

New Employee Workshop Version 1

9:00am Welcome – Intro activity & Housekeeping

9:10am Augusta University (20 mins)
- History, Events, Traditions, & University Values
- Resources

9:30am Division of Enrollment & SA (50 mins)
- VP Welcome & Strategic plan
- Who are our students?
- Department overview - Intro Departmental Discovery requirement
- Communication - Newsletters & Social Media
- Working with campus partners
- Ways to be involved/Engaged (Committee chairs)
  - Committees (IC, Prodevo), Staff Council, Divisional Young Professional group

10:20am Involved Around Augusta (15mins)
- Young Professionals of Augusta (Committee Reference)
- City of Augusta (10mins)

10:35am Break

10:40am Leadership: True Colors (30 mins)

11:10am Closing
- Next steps & follow up
- Find a buddy
- Departmental Discovery Requirement
- Evaluation

11:30am Adjourn

Appendix H

New Employee Workshop Version 2

9:00am Welcome & Intro Activity– 10 mins

9:10am Augusta University – 20 mins

- History, Events & Traditions
- University Values
- Resources

9:30am Division of Enrollment & SA (1 hr 45 mins)

- Strategic plan (VP)
- Who are our students?
- Department overview - Intro Departmental Discovery requirement

Options to incorporate Departmental Discovery into N.E.W.

Content to Review:

1. What the department does – mission & big events/responsibilities
2. Org chart with positions & names
3. Fun/Interesting Fact(s)
4. Add locations to slides with images

10:50am -Break

11:00am Communication - Newsletters & Media

11:10 Working with campus partners

11:15 Ways to be involved/Engaged

- Calendars, Committees (IC, Prodevo), Staff Council, Divisional YP group

11:35am Involved Around Augusta (15mins)

- City of Augusta

11:55am Break

12:00pm Leadership: True Colors (30 mins)

12:30 Closing(15 mins)

- Next steps & follow up
- Find a buddy
- Evaluation

12:45 Distribute Lunch