Evaluation of "Change Management Readiness Survey"
Edward J. O'Brien, Ph.D., Professor, Psychology and Counseling Department
November 12, 2015

The current consulting effort being undertaken by Larry Goldstein, President of Campus Strategies, LLC, takes place at a time in which there is considerable unrest on the part of faculty and staff at Marywood concerning the fiscal leadership of the administration. This unrest is reflected in the past two years by a Faculty Senate letter sent to the president, faculty survey evaluations of poor morale and a perceived lack of shared governance, and more recently, very strong votes of no confidence in the president and vice president of business affairs. The purpose of the present note is to evaluate a survey that was recently conducted as part of the Goldstein consulting process in which this survey attempted to determine the level of 'readiness to change' and successfully participate in the consulting efforts that Mr. Goldstein has initiated at Marywood.

In presentations to the Marywood faculty and in various written materials, Mr. Goldstein and colleagues with whom he has worked have argued that this approach will only work if there is a climate where faculty and staff have trust in the senior administration. This issue is reflected in the following quote:

> "THE ISSUE OF TRUST
>
> The degree of trust in the process—but also particularly in the senior leadership and in those championing the process—will make or break the prioritization effort. Consider assessing the level of trust in your institutional culture prior to beginning the effort, and then making specific plans for communication and trust-building from the outset." [1]

In order to evaluate the current campus climate, a link to an online survey was sent out to all faculty on November 2, 2015 by Alan Levine (no information was provided as to who else received the survey other than faculty). The purpose of this survey was stated to be an evaluation of "Readiness to Change" and presumably the survey is intended to determine, among other things, whether the climate at Marywood is conducive for a successful "Prioritization" effort. It is the contention in the current note that the survey used is severely lacking in reliability and validity and that it is biased in such a way as to yield unrealistically positive findings regarding 'readiness'. I will argue that this survey should not be used to evaluate whether the campus climate has a sufficient level of trust in administrative leadership to support the current Goldstein consultation effort. In the present note I will outline seven major concerns about the survey and will report the evaluations of two outside professionals who reviewed this survey. My comments are not intended to be offensive, but I believe it is essential that we have a *valid* assessment of current climate issues if any change efforts are to succeed. I am also concerned that the poor quality of such an important readiness survey suggests that there is a need for caution about the Goldstein model more generally; if he does such a poor job of

---

[1]   Academic Impressions | Monthly Diagnostic May 2015,
   www.academicimpressions.com/PDF/PrioritizationMD-Print-0413.pdf

evaluating the foundational 'trust' issue (and he says that trust is essential for success in his consultancy) in his recent survey, what else may be wrong with his overall approach?

Concern # 1. Opinion surveys virtually always must deal with diversity of opinions and this is particularly true in an environment where there are serious trust problems present, such as at Marywood today. In any undergraduate research methods course students are taught to write surveys that allow respondents to openly express both positive and negative opinions. Also, as a society we are used to competent surveys of a multitude of opinions such as those done by organizations such as Gallup where such things as attitudes toward educational quality are evaluated on multipoint response scales that typically range from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" (e.g., Rifkin, 2014).[2] In contrast, the recent "Readiness Survey" involved an extremely odd scaling approach where respondents only had the option of "Mostly Agree" to a set of 50 statements that all expressed positive opinions about the climate and leadership at Marywood (along with three questions at the end that allowed a more discerning evaluation of positive versus negative evaluations of the current climate). Respondents who did not agree with these statements were told to not respond. Of course, it is impossible using such a response scale to know what a non-response might mean. For example, a non-response might mean that the person didn't have sufficient information to answer the question. Or a non-response might mean that the person strongly disagreed with the statement. Including only positively worded statements and not allowing the direct expression of concerns is likely to bias responses to the survey and by confounding the meaning of non-response, the survey is unable to determine the strength or presence of concerns about the current university climate.

Concern # 2. Directions for the survey were biased and were likely to suppress any expression of concerns about the campus leadership or climate. Those completing the survey were told that if they found themselves "challenging a lot of the questions" that they should "STOP TAKING THE SURVEY!" [emphasis taken from the original survey]. These directions would have the effect of suppressing any responses of faculty who had concerns about the current leadership or climate. Whether this led to respondents dropping out of the survey and not getting to the final three more dimensional evaluation ratings might be inferred from the percentage of responses to the first ten items versus the percentage of responses to the final three more fairly worded evaluation items. However, the percentage of response to the 50 primary climate items of the survey is confounded by the lack of ability to respond with any concerns (if you don't agree with the item, don't respond) and so it is not possible to evaluate the meaning of non-responses.

Concern # 3. Many, and perhaps most, of the first set of 50 items are ambiguously worded. For example, item # 1 states that "Our leadership supports collaboration throughout the organization". In earlier Faculty Senate surveys it was found that opinions vary greatly depending on what level of leadership is being examined. There is general positivity of opinion at the departmental level (leadership in the department supports collaboration), and at the Dean level (in most cases), but there is serious concern about whether leaders at the vice president and president levels support collaboration. Other items such as item # 8 are so ambiguous as to be

---

[2]   Riffkin, R. (August 28, 2014). Americans' Satisfaction with Education System Increases. http://www.gallup.com/home.aspx.

difficult to evaluate at all: "We have the discipline to successfully accomplish tasks on a daily basis". Does this item refer to whether faculty have the discipline to teach their classes, or whether chairs, or deans, or vice presidents have the discipline to do their jobs? Or is this item attempting a vague and generalized evaluation of 'discipline' on the campus as a whole? A final example from the first page of items will suffice to make this point related to the ambiguity of items in the survey: Item 10 states that "The change process goals are in clear alignment with the organization's strategy". It is highly unlikely that any two respondents will interpret "change process goals" and "alignment with the organization's strategy" in the same manner. Other examples of ambiguous and odd language populate the entire 50 primary items of the survey with terms such as "natural boundaries", "brutal facts and realities", "champions", and "we avoid excessive process".

Concern # 4. The final three items are the only ones that meet any psychometric standard for evaluating a range of different opinions and these items do not address key issues such as how trust issues interact with an evaluation of the causes of current organizational problems. For example, are our current financial concerns as a university due to having many under-performing academic and support programs, and if so, do we trust that university leadership can craft and implement an effective and fair plan of action to identify and address this problem? An alternative causal model for our current financial concerns might relate these concerns to excessive spending and borrowing in recent years that have led to downgrading of our bond rating, and if this is perceived to be the underlying cause of our financial concerns, do faculty trust senior administration to effectively deal with curbing our excessive spending and over-reliance on borrowing? These are rather separate issues related to trust and may not be highly correlated with one another. The Goldstein process as a whole seems skewed toward the former causal model of our financial problems and doesn't seem focused at all on the latter causal model (which is the model that is, I suspect, most commonly accepted by faculty).

Concern # 5. How were items selected for this survey and what, if any, involvement did Marywood faculty have in generating items that address local concerns (e.g., trust issues related to perceived excessive spending and borrowing patterns noted above)? This survey appears to involve rather generic items that may not have relevance to the current situation at Marywood. Involving faculty and administrators in the design of this survey might have made it more meaningful and specific to our local concerns and might have been a way to build trust and 'buy-in'. No references are provided for this survey to allow evaluation of its reliability and validity. It appears that the survey may be related to an out of print document that at one point was available on Amazon.com (Sanaghan & Goldstein, & Roy, 2004)[3]. Was this survey vetted by and approved by any of the "Prioritization" committees at Marywood?

Concern # 6. Relying on a survey with such questionable reliability and validity is problematic in the context of this survey being used to evaluate whether the climate at Marywood has a sufficient level of trust to proceed with the Goldstein consultancy. This is particularly problematic, given the pre-conditions established by Goldstein and his collaborators such as Robert Dickeson[4] that emphasize trust and effective communication across all levels of the university as being essential for the success of any 'prioritization' effort. Many faculty have

---

[3] Sanaghan, P., Goldstein, L., & Roy, A. (2004). *The change management readiness survey (5 pack).* Listed on Amazon.com as "Out of Print--Limited Availability" on November 9, 2015.

[4] Dickeson, R. C. (2010). *Prioritizing academic programs and services : reallocating resources to achieve strategic balance.* Revised and updated. The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series).

reacted to this "Readiness Survey" with serious concern, and with some even believing that a survey with such obvious poor quality was intended as a joke. As such, and given the importance of engendering trust, it is my opinion that a *serious* effort be undertaken to evaluate whether conditions exist to allow for a successful implementation of Goldstein's Prioritization Process. If these conditions do not exist, we need to determine what should be done to move forward in a way to insure that the Goldstein consultancy does not lead to further conflict and dysfunction. Already we have a large number of our most successful and promising faculty making plans to leave Marywood, and further negative publicity may lead to students also leaving Marywood (or choosing to not attend). There are a number of universities that have been sanctioned by AAUP following implementation of prioritization processes (including the school where Dickeson was president) and I don't think there is anyone on campus who would want to end up on an AAUP censure list. Positive steps are needed and it would appear that the current "Readiness Survey" is part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

Concern # 7. While I have talked with many faculty and some administrators at Marywood about my concerns about this recent "Readiness Survey" I am mindful that I could be biased in ways that I may not be able to discern and this led me to send a copy of the announcement of this survey and a copy of the survey itself to two colleagues at other universities. I provided these colleagues with no guidance other than asking them to review the email announcing the survey (from Dr. Levine) and the quality of the survey itself. The verbatim comments of these colleagues are presented as Appendices to this note. Appendix A represents the views of a colleague who is an expert in survey construction and evaluation, having developed and evaluated hundreds of applied surveys in many different organizations. Appendix B represents the views of a second colleague who is not only an expert in survey construction but who also has extensive experience as a Middle States accreditation team member. This person's views not only address methodological problems with the "Readiness Survey" but also represent how relying on such a seriously flawed survey may have negative effects with regard to our upcoming Middle States review. Appendix C [5] contains the email message from Dr. Levine announcing the survey and screen shots of the survey itself.

Summary. Based on my own observations and my reading of the comments of these two outside evaluators I must conclude that the "Change Management Readiness Survey" is transparently biased and that the reliability and validity flaws identified in my seven concerns are readily observable by well-trained experts. I presume that Middle States reviewers will be no less critical of such a survey. If we were to move forward based on such a flawed survey of 'trust' and 'climate' I believe that such a move would be highly problematic. I would argue that some group on campus needs to find a more appropriate way to evaluate whether the current climate at Marywood is conducive for a successful 'Prioritization' change effort. I am sending this note to the Faculty Senate leadership team and will also send it to the Retrenchment Committee for their consideration of any action steps that may be warranted with regard to the "Change Management Readiness Survey". Finally, I am sending these comments to Dr. Levine since it is under his signature that this survey was distributed.

---

[5] I also had students in my graduate testing class review this survey with reference to the psychometric issues that we have covered in class this semester and will be adding in their comments in an updated draft of this document that should appear in the next few days. Based on observing their reactions to this survey I can say that their opinions are highly consistent with those of the outside consultants and with my own views (though I introduced the task to these students in such a manner as to ask them to evaluate this survey without suggesting my own views prior to their group process evaluations).

Sorry it took me a little to get to look at this.

I am sure what I have to say will not be a big shock, but this thing as a survey is a joke and not a very funny one. Obviously done to demonstrate support for whatever the process is that they want to move forward regardless of whether it actually exists overall or not. Right from the directions, telling possible respondents that "if you find yourself challenging a lot of the questions STOP TAKING THE SURVEY! ..." if followed, this could effectively eliminate almost anyone who finds them self becoming angry while reading the items.

Not sure exactly how one would "If you are uncertain about a particular statement, answer it as best you can and move on to the next statement." Since answering as best you can means checking "Mostly Agree."

What does not checking an item mean? It obviously could be argued that maybe someone who didn't check an item completely agreed, when they really completely disagree. It is mind boggling that they would do a survey like this without giving a real response scale, especially when collecting the data via an online system, it would not have involved any additional work to put these questions on a five point scale, Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, except that would open up the possibility that the results could be embarrassing.

In terms of the item content:

#19, probably should have been a comma on the 6th line between cooperate and inequities.

Many items presumably would be comprehensible based on having knowledge of the specifics of the change process that is being pursued, but, e.g., #41, who would not be effected by major organizational change?

Anyway, this "survey" is clearly biased to yield positive information or no information at all.

Obviously, if the actual goal, as stated in the cover message was: "to assess your perception of Marywood's readiness for change," the questions could have easily been asked in a way that would yield actual perceptions, rather than simply seeming to be a tool to collect data to legitimize whatever course of action is planned for implementation.

Again, sorry this took me a little while to get to, and I am probably not telling you much of anything that you didn't already know.

Appendix B

Verbatim Comments of Off-Campus Expert # 2 on the "Change Management Readiness Survey"

Reliable and valid assessment practices need to serve as the basis for efficient and effective strategies for strategic planning and resource allocation (Middle States Standards 2-4). Biased assessments are unlikely to lead to effective administrative decisions which will affect the entire university (Standard 7). It is unclear who approved the administration of this survey before it was distributed (Standard 4). In my judgment this survey may pose problems for Middle States in terms of flawed design, poor reliability, and poor validity (as described below).

As to the content of the survey itself, this survey is an embarrassment that would appear to be designed only to collect data that supports the decision that Marywood has effective leadership and is ready for change. Participants are even encouraged in the instructions to not think seriously or deeply about the content of items that have important content. Furthermore, participants who actually do find themselves questioning the meaning of the contents are encouraged to stop taking the survey. This probably ensures that only people who think everything is great, or who otherwise feel obligated to respond, will take the entire survey. The instructions also state that if you don't stop taking the survey your frustration will lead you to doubt the validity of the results. However, there are other reasons to doubt the validity of the results.

The response format is flawed as participants can only "mostly agree" or not answer the item. Clearly, there needs to be a range of options including strongly agree to strongly disagree using a 5- or 7-point scale to capture the nuances of opinions. The final three questions of the survey indicate a knowledge of the issue by using 10-point scales. These final three questions would seem to be the only usable items in the survey, but of course, it is possible that many participants would not get to these final items if they followed the directions of the survey to stop if they found themselves questioning the validity of the survey.

There is no counterbalancing of items to capture response bias of answering all questions in the same direction.

Are respondents to the survey even in a position to know the answer to some of the questions posed? For some examples consider questions 34-38, "Overall, we are a pretty flexible and adaptive organization," "People throughout the organization understand the goals for this change effort," "Internal politics rarely impede our ability to get things done in our organization," "There is a clear identification of the individuals responsible for leading this change effort (e. g. champions, sponsors)," "We have effective ways to monitor and assess the progress of a change effort."

There is no opportunity for participants to offer comments, concerns, or clarification of responses to help understand the ratings. This is a very poorly designed survey that is likely to provide results that are either uninterpretable or that are biased in a way that favors the administration. What a serious mistake if this survey has been implemented as part of a strategic change process.