

Cultivating a Culture of Innovation

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Masters of Professional Practice in Leadership

September 2014

Cultivating a Culture of Innovation in Higher Education

1.0 Introduction

The author of this paper has been in leadership roles in the public sector for 12 years; the last seven of which have been in a senior administrative capacity in higher education with a great deal of success leading and executing my division's mandate for fundraising, communications and brand promotion, government, media, alumni and public relations, special event planning and execution, and leadership over intercollegiate varsity athletics. I have learned by doing, trial and error, gleaning pieces from supervisors and mentors over the years, learning from those I've led, snippets of professional development training in conference, seminar and short certificate environments over the past 20 years since my last formal education through my undergraduate Bachelor of Arts degree.

I chose as my Masters of Professional Practice in Leadership focal point, how to create a culture of innovation in higher education. I was essentially after the formula to continue leading by leveraging the talents of the led by a deliberate harnessing of a culture of shared leadership. I began with the concept of how to "create" or "engineer" such a workplace, but I quickly had my perspective changed in my literature review and as I began talking to people, including our President, through my qualitative interviews that "creating" was the wrong word. One cannot over-engineer or create the optimal culture for high performing sustained leadership in our post-secondary learning environment.

I changed the word *creating* to *cultivating*, the latter having connotations of some deliberate effort, but from a place of being nurtured of environment and "growing conditions". That the term cultivating has some nice double entendre meanings to my current professional practice at Olds College, with the college's steeped core of agriculture, was also convenient and appropriate.

As I went deeper into the literature, discussion and reflection, I began to think that cultivating might not even be the best descriptor, that the term *unleashing* was superior.

This was at a point in my journey of reflection and discovery where I was so taken by the concept that, if a leader could embrace a workplace environment of open communication, shared decision-making, a relationship with employees that eschewed traditional notions of command and control in favour of trust, freedom to experiment and therefore fail from time to time, employee autonomy - that this is all that was needed to unleash the power of the many minds and wells of creativity to take a culture of innovation to great heights.

But then I began to grapple with the notion that the true recipe wasn't just 100% cultural - that there is a role for "a bit" of structure for the capture and evaluations of the ideas that will naturally come spewing out of the optimal culture on a frequent basis. It does require some nurturing of deliberateness; some intentional cultivation.

This research project and paper is not just one of pure theory. It is a Masters of Professional Practice, and the practice that grounds and edifies this inquiry, is my current leadership role and organizational context at Olds College. This college is a very successful organization, and our stakeholders from industry, alumni, students, government have routinely and frequently given Olds College the label of "innovative". I wanted to get a deeper sense of why that is, where it comes from, whether the label is fully or partially deserved.

Yet I had to start somewhere in terms of a hypothesis, and this is what that hypothesis was at the beginning of my work:

to the extent that innovation exists at Olds College, it is mostly driven by a highly creative, highly persuasive and charismatic President and senior leaders around him. When this President leaves, there is a strong chance that much of the innovation will dry up or cease.

2.0 Aims, Objectives and Project Methodology

I set out with my inquiry and research to identify factors for building or creating, and then sustaining, a culture of innovation in higher education. I sought to examine and analyze what drives innovation so that it can be supported, nurtured and encouraged throughout an organization.

I was keen to evaluate whether the innovation, entrepreneurial spirit and risk-taking is likely to cease at Olds College when a highly innovative President walks out the door for the last time. Does the innovation at Olds College rest with one/a few strong personalities or is it disseminated throughout the organization? Do the faculty, rank and file staff and middle management feel like they play a role in the innovative problem solving and solution finding at Olds College, or do they feel as though they are doing the bidding of direction from above, from senior management?

The body of literature on innovation in the workplace suggests that it is easier to identify and solve complex problems if more sets of eyes are deputized to identify and solve those problems. The literature recommends a rethink of top-down, command and control leadership structures as a prerequisite to unleashing innovation. Innovation is not a phenomenon that is driven exclusively by leaders, but rather in creating an environment for creativity and more democratic solution-finding, innovation is unleashed, unlocked, or allowed to emerge. Hence the “cultivating” metaphor or descriptor in the title of my research project and paper.

This research project of my “professional practice” at the institution of higher education that is Olds College set out to understand participants’ viewpoints on what it means to be innovative in the workplace, whether people feel that their existing workplace at Olds College is one of innovation, how people view cultures or attitudinal environments; and that culture or environment’s connection to innovation. The project is being undertaken by a senior administrator (Vice President) who seeks to better himself in that existing role and prepare himself for future roles. As a senior administrator, the leadership style and

actions of this researcher have an impact on his organization and to the extent he can be more attuned to culture and environments, the more productive that workplace is for its employees and customers – which are most often, the students.

Dr. Tom Thompson, the President of Olds College and my supervisor, has indicated a retirement date in 2016. Tom has driven a high degree of innovation and creative partnerships with external participants that have enabled this innovation during his thirteen years at the College. A far from comprehensive list of examples of innovative ventures in support of learning at Olds College includes:

1. Shared facilities and shared governance of a Community Learning Campus in concert with a primary joint venture partner in the K-12 Chinook's Edge School Division. Other initiative partners included municipal governments, the University of Alberta and the government of Alberta. This cohabitation of high school and college, with a myriad of health and wellness supports and government social services functions, has created new opportunities for learner pathways via dual credit programming: high school students taking college level course for credit against both their high school diploma and a post-secondary credential. The facilities themselves, being best in class, particularly in a rural environment, served as critical mass for attendance, participation and other investment throughout the campus.
2. A hotel and convention centre structured in a Limited Partnership with a private sector hotelier. This project sees Olds College as a leaseholder and 40% equity partner, but with no responsibility for the design, construction or operation of the hotel's commercial enterprise. Student access for learning has been built into the agreement, and eventually a teaching brewery was added to the contiguous physical plant. This partnership was undertaken to produce a set of conferencing facilities and upscale hotel that was absent in the community and done through the lens of the College's claimed role in rural economic development. The initiative was undertaken to complement the learner pathways available on campus in terms of hospitality, tourism, eventing and brewing; and

finally, the Limited Partnership will be a significant and long term source of alternative revenue in an era of reducing funding support from the government that has no end in sight.

3. Structures and frameworks are in place that commit our small college to pursuing innovations and initiatives in partnership. Concepts like black-tie, showcasing gala events – essentially unheard of in a rural setting- where an annual “Partner of the Year” is revealed and feted. Structures to pull people close in volunteerism and governance as revealed through the College Centennial year that actually spanned three plus years in the planning, making and governance, while showcasing the college and its history over 12 events paid for with external sponsors’ money with over \$1 Million left over in a legacy fund. Frameworks for honouring external stakeholders with Honorary degrees, and internal stakeholders and staff with long service awards and “unsung hero” recognition. Olds College has a culture that recognizes a small college needs to proactively aggregate with like-minded partners to drive the critical mass for success.

The preceding largely came from a creative executive supported by the generative and bold thinking of a high- performance governance Board. Examples of innovations at Olds College from the grassroots staff of the organization include:

1. “Hort Week”: Olds College blends continuing education with a summer camp model each summer whereby registrants join us for workshops and courses all about gardening, growing and creating beautiful things. Everyone from beginner to expert can learn something valuable, enjoy the company of fellow enthusiasts and experience the fun of summer camp all over again.
2. Olds College had a Centennial Innovation Fund where a campus-wide call for proposals (three pages maximum length until three were shortlisted for my fully developed proposals) was issued, with \$100,000 earmarked for the implementation of the chosen concept. Great ideas came from support divisions and faculty alike. The Senior

Administration of the College performed the short-listing, presented the winners in a fun, celebratory event with snacks and beverages in the evening, and the top three were chosen for business case refinement. The winner within the shortlisted project was determined by a “vote” of faculty, students, alumni and friends of the College. The winner was the Canadian Centre for Rural High Performance Sport in the department of Athletics, Fitness and Recreation. The concept is in early-mid implementation to this point, and an unrelated physical space of the centre is in construction, slated for an August 2014 completion.

3. A new mobile learning strategy – branded “Connect Your Passion”, based on the College’s recruitment tagline of “Employ Your Passion” - has been developed recently. The initiative required a massive broadband upgrade on the campus at Olds College and resulted in what we believe will be a revolution in teaching and learning. You will now find at Olds College, students and instructors engaged in collaborative projects using iPads, in the classroom and in the out-of-doors. You will be on the campus with the highest bandwidth per student in Canada. You will see students learning about and “feeling” what it is like to be an entrepreneur by using an iPad application that is a gamified course. Olds is the first college in Canada to have a mobile strategy, a 1-to-1 iPad initiative, and to offer gamified curriculum delivered as an app. Faculty purchased their iPads early, attended training sessions and even created social learning opportunities called “Appy Hour” where they did peer to peer sharing on the best Apps they are using. Although we are less than one year into implementation, Olds College faculty have exceeded our expectations in the way they engage our learners and our students really appreciate these changes.

Benefits

Higher education in Alberta, Canada and internationally can most likely expect a sustained reduction in operating funding from public treasuries. Learning organizations can also expect a very demanding consumer in its future prospective students. Innovation and adaptability will be key to surviving and thriving in that duality of environment.

When this project is complete, we will know more about the key drivers of innovation and how it can be instrumental in sustaining Old College's future - or any college or polytechnic's future in an increasingly globally competitive education market. Olds College currently has a strong track record in terms of differentiation, adaptability and innovative solution finding, but will need to remain in a leadership position in that regard. No coasting.

Innovative ways to drive ancillary revenue to augment government operating grants and government "capped" tuition can provide huge advantages to institutional financial sustainability. As well, innovations in solution finding can find superior ways of maximizing the utility of existing revenue sources. High learning institutions will have to be more creative than ever to survive and thrive.

Benefits of this exploration are not just financial. There is a quality element that will naturally be passed on to students/customers of institutions that instill a high degree of creativity and resourcefulness. Creative faculty and staff are likely to turn out creative, problem-solving graduates; that is even more valuable than a culture of innovation driving an efficiently functioning "College as corporate entity" model. If the attitudinal approach to creativity and innovation can be infused into our students during the time they are with us, that is of greatest value for the society and population we served as a public post-secondary institution.

As a Masters of Professional Practice and my current practice being as a Vice President at Olds College, my workplace, my reporting teams and my colleagues will benefit from learnings of this structured inquiry. A leader more attuned to performing his role not just incrementally better, but with a lens towards substantive, disruptive change in the ways of solving problems and finding solutions will drive clear benefit. This will apply not just to my reporting teams, but my peers and the whole organization who have been participating in the dialogue, my project survey, deeper conversations both ad hoc and in semi-structured interviews. The people around me at Olds College will be affected by the

questions I am posing, and likely, the ideas and approaches I am contemplating as this project stretches my thinking.

This project could also reveal findings that are applicable for consideration and implementation elsewhere in higher education, the public sector and perhaps even the private sphere. Innovative ways to drive ancillary revenue, better servicing the student customer with existing sources of funds – these will be of interest to other leaders in higher education if I have had some measure of success in developing a framework for cultivating a culture of innovation.

Project Risks

In the process of interviewing and engaging staff and faculty at Olds College, expectations may be created which may not come to fruition, in whole, or in part. Given the broad participation of the campus community in the survey and then a smaller subset in the semi-structured interview process, expectations will have been naturally created and there is risk of discouragement if my project findings are not implemented in a substantive way.

Another risk is that staff and faculty feel compromised by sharing forthrightly their views on the existing culture at Olds College. They may have chosen, in a calculated measure of self-preservation to “pull their punches”, answer half truthfully or share a little, but spend much time replying with what they perceive senior management want to hear. I do not have a sense that this occurred at all, but one never knows for sure. Steps were taken to mitigate the possibility of less than forthright participation and feedback by being clear and repetitive as to my commitment to the ethical guidelines that have guided the framing of this project.

A further risk is that the conclusions drawn from my research project “get it wrong”; are incorrect, un-implementable or mis-implemented, and that I emerge from these efforts

misunderstanding the drivers for success and innovation in our operating context. In many ways, Olds College is currently quite successful in the innovation space, and it might be argued that I am seeking to fix that which is not broken. The counter-argument to that notion, is that we seek to go from good or very good to great; and that there must be some risk of necessity if an individual, unit or entirety of an organization is earnestly pursuing innovation.

A risk to this student/researcher personally is that my findings about the current culture at Olds College are a surprise or are disagreeable to the current president who is:

- a). Privy to this project and it's mentors, stewards, evaluators; and
- b) Will be in the audience at PIN 2014 in Korea when my findings are presented.

This risk to the strength of the relationship between President and Vice President/researcher has been and will continue to be mitigated by keeping my current supervisor apprised to the nature, themes and concepts of this project on a bi-weekly basis. Olds College's President is also serving in a dual role on this as an additional mentor to my learning.

The Specific Goals

I set out, through this project, to determine:

1. Whether the frontline staff and faculty at Olds College feel that their current workplace is one characterized by innovation.
2. If faculty and staff at Olds College can freely and easily list multiple examples of innovative solutions in their department and elsewhere in the College; but also the drivers of those innovations.

3. How innovation can be cultivated at the departmental, divisional, team level by Vice Presidents, Deans, Directors, Faculty, Managers, Program Coordinators, Supervisors, Instructional Assistants and all staff. I received early caution from project mentors, which was then reinforced in the literature, to be cognizant that too much structural embedding or codification can be counter-productive to the creativity necessary for true innovation.
4. How administration and leaders in general can create tolerance for the associated risks necessary to true innovation while working within a Board Policy Governance framework. This recognizes that Olds College, as a publicly mandated and publicly funded institution with a Board appointed by government, is not fully in control of its own destiny.
5. If there is a recipe or framework that can be transferred and applied in other organizations?

Project Methodology

I conducted a literature review to provide context to this inquiry. I sought to get a baseline but by no means comprehensive understanding of the current thinking and best practices on innovation and cultures that support it.

A quantitative survey was created to be filled out anonymously by a representative sample of the employees of Olds College (approximately 70 or the 350 employees). The web-based tool Survey Monkey was used to capture data based primarily on Likert-style questions. The survey had 30 questions in total, with 25 being a statement asking for agreement, disagreement on a 4 point Likert scale, one question asking respondents to rank innovation relative to others in post-secondary on a scale of 1-10, and four open-ended questions. I ended up getting 73 respondents to the Survey Monkey questionnaire that went out via “All Staff” email, and was open for parts of three calendar weeks.

Upon my review of the survey data, I grouped the responses into 6 thematic “buckets”, from which I devised the questions for a semi-structured interview pro-forma with open-ended questions to be used to gather richer, qualitative data, feedback and opinions from eight staff within Olds College, four leaders from outside Olds College but within higher education, and a mix of leaders and more grass roots employees from the private sector that had a baseline of familiarity with Olds College. Of the 8 participants interviewed from within Olds College, four were teaching staff or faculty, two were middle management and two were front-line support staff. Six were women and two were men.

The questionnaire, ethics consent form and project context were provided to all interviewees in advance of each interview to allow for understanding and prior reflection on the subject and questions.

This research project elicited perspectives from a quantitative survey, as well as three sets of qualitative interviews. In evaluating the perspectives provided, I was looking for common themes, as well as points of disagreement. These findings have been referenced against my research literature, again looking for both convergence and divergence from the literature on the subject of innovation.

VI. Project Plan: Timetable and Milestones

Project Framing	May - October 2013
Literature Review	October - July 2014
Survey	March 2014
Semi-structured interviews	May 2014
Paper #2 – Draft 1 to Mentor, Facilitator	August 2014

Paper #2 Subsequent Final Draft(s)	Early September 2014
Strategy Framework/Recipe Draft 1	July 2014
Strategy Framework/Recipe Subsequent Draft(s)	August 2014
Otago Polytechnic Panel/PIN Korea Power Point	September 2014
Submission of Final Paper to OP Panel	September 18/19, 2014
Final Presentation & Defense to OP	October 3, 2014
Presentation at PIN, Korea	October 6-11, 2014

Ethical

As a senior administrator and Vice President at Olds College, engaging employees of the college in my masters studies into my professional practice, I needed to be very mindful of a power imbalance in surveying, interviewing and otherwise engaging the staff and faculty. I strived to create structures for people to have input free of any fear of reprisals. The value that will be returned to those employees that participate, as well as the employees that do not participate, is that ideally, they will benefit if the findings of my research, reflection and study lead to a more effective college due to my influence on the college through my position on the executive team. Ultimately, the College staff and work environment that is informing this professional practice learning project will benefit if I am successful in developing a strategy(s) for creating/sustaining a culture of innovation at Olds College, and then having some measure of success with implementation.

All participants' insights are presented in aggregate/non-identifying ways, unless express permission is received with an opportunity for the participant to review the written summary attributable to her/him.

Participants who agreed to take part in the semi-structured interview received a survey/questionnaire in advance, and were interviewed face to face - with the exception of one interview done over the phone - for approximately 45 minutes. Audio recordings of the interview were made if the interviewee so consented, and all sixteen interviewees did so consent, so that I could record the richness of the conversation for transcription at a later date in order to most fully capture the dialogue and insights, and so that I could focus on listening and engaging, not note taking.

Participants were duly informed that results of this project may be published but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant without prior consent. Survey and interview participants may request and receive a copy of the results of the project. The data collected has been and will be securely stored. At the end of the project, any personal information will be destroyed, as will any raw data on which the results are based.

It was communicated to participants that they were free to change their minds and withdraw from the project, without disadvantaging themselves in any way. Participants could withdraw at the front end or at any time throughout, and also reserved the right to rescind any information that has already been supplied until the stage agreed on the consent form. Interviewees could also refuse to answer any particular question, and ask for the recording device to be turned off at any stage.

In a more indirect way, because this subject focuses on culture and leadership, the President of Olds College is also a human subject in this research project. A conversation with Tom Thompson in advance of conducting the semi-structured interview process was

in order, to proactively outline what some of the possible outcomes the data about the culture of innovation and the grassroots role in same may reveal.

Implications for First Nations Peoples

This project will be undertaken in Canada, so there are no considerations to be attended to regarding Maori. This issue has been taken up with the Kaitohutohu office at Otago Polytechnic on my behalf, and I have been advised that no further engagement with the Kaitohutohu is required.

There is not a mandated practice in Canada, as there is in New Zealand, of consulting with First Nations peoples with regard to research projects in post-secondary education. However, as my research examines how to cultivate an organizational culture that unleashes innovative problem solving, my findings might well be relevant in First Nations Band Councils who often struggle with organizational governance and effectiveness. There are no known First Nations staff or faculty at Olds College.

Project Outputs

Evidence that will be among the outputs of the project will include:

1. A paper of approximately 20,000 words that synthesizes my survey and interview findings, my subject readings from the literature and my own reflections, conclusions, practice recommendations.
2. A set of recommendations or a strategy that other Managers at Olds College can use as a tool to foster innovative cultures. Practical strategies or recommendations for nurturing, creating, sustaining or cultivating a culture of innovation, in my

practice setting at Olds College, and perhaps applicable in other organizations of higher education or beyond.

3. I will summarize that paper and the strategy into a Powerpoint Presentation to be shared, firstly, with my evaluative panel of Otago Polytechnic in Auckland on October 3, 2014; and subsequently, with Presidents and other leaders in higher education assembled for PIN 2014 in Korea.
4. Quantitative data from the survey sent out to Olds College staff. There are bar graphs, percentage breakdowns of those agreeing or disagreeing on sets of conditions that the literature suggests are optimal for creating an innovative culture of problem solving and solution finding. There are also open ended questions in the survey that provide more richness and qualitative input from the participating staff and faculty of Olds College.

Project Outcomes

Project outcomes will include:

- New ways of engaging employees at Olds College to foster, cultivate, maintain and capture innovation.
- A more skillful and thoughtful Jordan Cleland – a senior administrator with enhanced leadership capability, skills and knowledge.

The Learning Outcomes

I began this research project with an intended learning outcome to attain a marked increase in my understanding of how innovation can be cultivated, unleashed, but also captured, implemented and sustained.

The learning accrued from this project will augment my understanding of what factors create an environment for a more adaptable, and thus sustainable, Olds College in an environment of increased competition and dwindling public resources from government treasuries.

I have definitely gained a stronger appreciation and understanding of methodologies involved in formal research, which will be doubly impactful given that I am currently a non-academic leader within an academic institution. My undergraduate Bachelor's degree was achieved 22 years ago, and besides some certificate and short burst professional development activity, this is my first thorough academic undertaking in decades. I have learned the importance of developing a balanced set of questions, as extrapolated from the literature on the topic of workplace innovation cultures – questions that are not unduly repetitive, and are limited to one succinct and clear concept. I also honed the craft of qualitative data capture from strong grouping and summarized reams of rich data and opinion based on the answers to carefully crafted semi-structured interview questions.

My employer, Olds College, has and will continue to benefit alongside my individual learning from an executive leader with an enhanced understanding of innovative solution-finding and the culture and processes necessary for creation and capture of such problem-solving concepts. I believe the whole College will benefit from the dialogue that the participation of faculty and staff will have created, including subsequent interest in any implementation of my strategies or concepts.

I emerge from this project, having had participation from significant numbers of faculty and therefore, be more attuned to those instructors, their values, their excitements and frustrations as the core of our higher learning institution.

The Learning Strategies

I have utilized materials found on the web, as well as shared by academic mentor and my facilitator to aid my understanding of formal research procedures and requirements, in absence of any refreshing.

I have participated in a series of lectures and learning seminars through our Community Learning Campus Centennial ideas series (three forums with three speakers each and breakout group reflection and discussion on each.)

Regular check in, both one on one and in a broader conference call format has and will continue to occur with my academic mentor, my masters' facilitator and the Chair of the Post-secondary International Network – a group that will ultimately hear and critique an overview presentation of my findings and strategy framework.

I have been exploring these concepts, the structuring of my questions to elicit best information, the notable findings in my readings with the staff and peers around me; this is part of the learning journey as well.

3.0 Existing perception of culture and innovation at my Professional Practice

A survey was constructed and all staff and faculty of Olds College were asked to consider taking the survey via a campus-wide email and the web-based Survey Monkey application. 30 questions were asked, with 26 of them being on a four point Likert scale, and

four calling for more open-ended input. Olds College has approximately 350 employees, and the survey had 73 respondents for a statistically significant sample size.

3.1 The self-assessment of innovation and culture from the Olds College community

The full scope of data from my survey can be found in Appendix A, but a narrative highlighting of what I found to be the salient points of that data is as follows:

1. None of the 73 persons that participated in a survey made available to all staff with a College email account feel that it is not important to innovate to be successful. 100% believe that it is important that Olds College is innovative in order to be successful in its current and future operating environment, with 80% fully agreeing with that statement.
2. 88% percent of our people agree that Olds College is an innovative organization at present, with 31% strongly agreeing with that description.
3. A revealing factor that fit well with my hypothesis going into the research, is that 73% disagreed with the statement, “that innovative approaches exist uniformly across the divisions and departments at Olds College”. This suggests that there are pockets of high innovation as well as those of relatively no innovation; and latter comments from internal participants in the semi-structured interviews support this. I made sure to account for some “homerism” by asking a question immediately afterward that was “Are there departments or schools at Olds College that are more innovative than others?” that was “Is one of the departments or schools you listed (as more innovative than others) the area in which you work?” and only 37% said yes. This suggests a degree of objectivity - staff are not saying in large numbers, “my group is innovative, it’s just the others guys across the quad that are laggards.” So $\frac{3}{4}$ of participants feel that innovation is not uniform across the organization.

4. My survey data shows that the participants' understanding of the college's vision and strategies and how they are helpful in setting priorities are decent, but not very good or great. 71% believe the organizational vision is clear, 57% believe the strategies utilized towards achieving that vision are clear, and only 52% feel that the vision and strategies actually help them in setting priorities. This suggests that an organization that believes itself to be, and has many external observers also believing it to be, an innovative organization, could take innovation to the next level - or from good to great - by doing a better job of internal communication of those key ends of vision, mission, values and outcomes. There appears to be a want for some more open and regular communication of the operating context of the prioritization in the decision making environment at Olds College.
5. On the higher order questions of "culture", it is very gratifying to this member of the executive leadership team at Olds College that 97% of respondents declared that they are "emotionally engaged in the work I do at Olds College". Better still, 67% fully agree with that statement. Less than 3% somewhat disagree and nobody fully disagreed.
6. On a related measure of employee engagement, 88% agreed that they feel inspired to go the extra mile to help the College succeed, and 99% are proud to tell others that they are part of Olds College.
7. On the concept of freedom to make mistakes in the pursuit of creative problem - and solution-finding, 58% agree that they have such freedom while 42% disagree. As Olds College seeks to establish higher ground in optimizing the culture and environment for innovation in a higher education setting, measures would need to be taken to instill a significantly stronger sense of freedom to make mistakes in pursuit of innovation. An organization would optimally like upwards of 70 to 80% or more of staff believing that errors are part and parcel of a culture of

pushing boundaries and being truly creative. One of the Olds College staff members who has experience in both faculty and management roles at the College, believes aversion to making mistakes is probably that one cultural aspect of Olds College that needs most significant improvement. This staff member believes there exists a great limiting fear of making mistakes in the pushing of boundaries, at least among the rank and file at the College. This participant is a self-described experimenter, innovator and change-friendly agent. This participant also had the poorest view of the culture for innovation at Olds College when asked to numerically quantify on a scale of 1-10, providing a rating of 6.

3.2 What constitutes Innovation - Just the big stuff or smaller innovations?

A very unique set of insights was gained in my semi-structured interview process from a semi-retired, career executive in higher education, in the person of Dr. Robert Wilson. Bob was my peer and colleague for the first four of my seven years at Olds College. Dr. Wilson had the breadth and depth of experience in terms of serving in several Vice President roles on both the Academic and the Support Services side, several roles at different colleges in multiple Canadian provinces, 15 years in a senior administrative capacity at Olds College, but also being over three years removed from the work and culture of his time at Olds College. Because of this broad and deep vantage point, Dr. Wilson's thoughts on the duality of cultures within a single post-secondary institution are worthy of mention.

Wilson suggests that there are essentially two cultures at any college, polytechnic, or university: those that stand in front of students every day and teach; and those in support services roles, either front line or management. Wilson posits that the instructors, teachers, professors have to innovate every day as they stand all alone in front of a group of customers and try to impart the course material to them in a way that gets through; is meaningful and engaging. These instructors innovate and refine their approaches to teaching all the time, and as such, their innovations are smaller and more nuanced. He opines that what the support services and "suits" are up to in terms of the administration

of the corporate entity of the college, either doesn't really affect the instructor, or the instructor is not even aware of those approaches and initiatives. The instructors have a culture of their own inside the college environment. He suggests that there is some great research and writings on this duality, that is likely beyond the scope of this project, but worthy of reviewing separately in one's growth as a higher education administrator.

Wilson, like Clayton Christensen (1997), goes on to describe two models of innovation: *Adoption/diffusion* or small innovations which is a quite conservative approach, where a small percentage of a given population in a field or in an organization try a new tool or approach. Others watch, especially if the innovator has a reputation as a known innovator, and if the new tool or approach seems to be working, others will adopt that new method. That is most often how innovation works in an academic instructional environment and it is fairly conservative and the gains are small but it is still an important type of innovation nonetheless.

The other type is the bigger one, "*the game changer*", and these almost have to come from those at the top, with the authority and the control over the organizational finances. This is mostly space that Presidents, Vice Presidents, Deans, Directors and Managers play within, and it is the focus of much of my reading, discussion and reflection. These more marked types of innovation are, of course, very important, but it is key to have both types in your organization. Christensen described the duality of these "small and big" innovations similarly but with different titles: *sustaining* innovations and *disruptive* innovations.

Author Soren Kaplan (2012), who worked in-house with Hewlett Packard and in consulting roles with Disney, Colgate-Palmolive, Cisco and Philips to name just a few, says that for senior leaders, the big stuff of innovation is the most important, and increasingly more important in today's pace of change. In his book *Leapfrogging*, he writes, "today's business, political, economic and social challenges are so daunting that we're experiencing a palpable, collective yearning for breakthroughs - recognition that

small changes no longer move the needle and that incremental thinking won't suffice. This is the key to "leapfrogging" - creating or doing something radically new or different that produces a significant leap forward." (p. 71).

Kaplan himself cites the highly pedigreed and quoted innovation and business guru Gary Hamel and his view that "new problems demand new principles. Put bluntly, there's simply no way to build tomorrow's essential organizational capabilities - resilience, innovation and employee engagement - atop the scaffolding of 20th century management principles". There is a lot of harmony in the chorus that suggests leaders must embrace counterintuitive ideas that go against the grain of traditional notions of management and leadership if organizations are going to succeed in today's whirlwind world.

All participants in the semi-structured interview process were of the opinion that innovation needs to come from both "the top" or the senior leadership; and the grassroots, the bottom up, the middle. In describing this, some talked about the "big innovations or game changers" that almost have to come from the senior management who have the authority and control over the organizational finances to put such commitments into play; but that the smaller, every day innovations were necessary in a dynamic organizational culture and these are most often the innovations that come from the grassroots in any organization. Whether these are innovations or more aptly described as continuous improvement is likely a matter of perspective and semantics. Essentially all participants argued that you need innovation to come from both places to have a healthy organizational culture, the reverse also being true - you need that healthy, trusting, tolerance for risk organizational culture in order for the middle and front lines to play their role in driving innovation.

When asked to comment on the survey results from Olds College staff that revealed 60% of Olds College survey respondents believe that the innovation in our workplace is driven more so from the grass roots, interview respondents seemed to think this was a very good result - that if the people of Olds College were split somewhat evenly at 60/40, when

forced to choose on a four-point Likert scale on where innovation comes from at Olds College, that this is a good sign that it does indeed come from various positions and levels of authority in our organization.

4.0 Deeper Insights from the Literature, Qualitative Interviews and Reflection

To drill deeper from the data gathered from my Olds College staff survey and my review of a sampling of the literature, I created a semi-structured interview pro-forma that I used to get richer insights from eight (8) faculty, staff and managers within Olds College; four (4) leaders from within higher education but outside of Olds College: and a mix of four (4) front line and executive participants from the private sector that had a baseline familiarity with Olds College and our performance in our marketplace. The interview questions and pro-forma can be found in Appendix C. The themes of the interviews, my readings and reflection upon both are interwoven throughout the 4.0, 5.0 and 6.0 series of the rest of the paper.

4.1 The importance of Culture - A Shift from Command and Control Environments

Daniel H. Pink's book "*Drive - the surprising truth behind what motivates us.*" (2009) was highly impactful on my thinking and was a great source of discussion during my interviews and qualitative information gathering exchanges. Pink describes the traditional and, by far, most common approach to "management" in organizations, companies, and indeed, institutions of higher learning over the 20th and even the first part of the 21st century, as an industrial revolution holdover model of command and control, rewards and punishment, carrot and stick model.

This management paradigm posits that if you want more of a certain behavior you reward it, if you want less of a certain behaviour you punish it. It is highly intuitive, at least in the culture of work that has permeated our contemporary models of organizational leadership and performance. Pink references clinical research that suggests that if the workplace task is rote or algorithmic - that there is essentially only one right way of completing the work or task, rewards and punishment, carrot and stick management systems work very well. However, for work that requires some creativity and there are multiple ways of completing the task or getting “the” or “a” right answer - a heuristic problem to solve - rewards actually inhibit performance. Pink refers to many experiments that have revealed that monetary rewards or bonuses actually put the proverbial blinders on employees and actually reduce their ability to perform tasks or solve problems that are heuristic in nature - requiring even a little bit of creativity. (p. 27-29)

Pink calls this rewards and punishment model, “Motivation 2.0” - a reference to how computer softwares graduate or improve to better versions from 1.0, 2.0, etc. He says a great deal of research, that has not yet been widely embraced because it seems counterintuitive, supports the view that a “Motivation 3.0” is required - a framework and value system that believes that individuals, workers, employees are driven or motivated by an intrinsic satisfaction in a job well done, in a problem solved, in a mission accomplished. He postulates that human beings, or in the case of workplace cultures of innovation and performance, employees are motivated by three subsets of this intrinsic urge: a desire to have **autonomy**, **mastery** and **purpose** in their work (p. 83).

It is very positive that 81% of Olds College staff feel they have the freedom and flexibility to do their jobs effectively, that 67% believe they are part of the decision making process in their school or department, and that 72% Olds College respondents believe we do a good job of celebrating our successes.

However there would appear to be room for improvement in that just over half of survey respondents (53%) believe that there is a sense of trust at Olds College. On a related theme, just 59% feel that at Olds College, we are comfortable with constructive disagreement, respectful debate or argument; and only half feel as though they are informed about the wider political, economic and financial environment that faces the college. These are important indicators that Olds College is on the right track in terms of attainment of a culture of autonomy, mastery and purpose, but there is room to go from good, to much better, or great.

4.2 Examples of Deliberate Organizational Cultures of Innovation

An increasingly connected and globalized world, and the amount of inherent competition and the pace of change that accompanies that world, has changed the rules of success in private sector and in public sector markets like those in higher education. Simply doing what you have always done, and indeed what your competitors do, just a little bit better is not good enough anymore. Organizations will need to seriously rethink top down, command and control leadership structures and unleash new forms of innovation and creativity in order to survive and thrive.

To reinforce these concepts on this dynamics of change, Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in California and Clayton Christensen of Harvard have some compelling points of view. Warren gave a TedX talk (2012) where he tackles the issue of how organizations that were formerly relevant, become irrelevant and has a very direct description of how this happens: “When the speed of change around an organization is faster than the speed of change inside the organization, then the organization becomes irrelevant.”

Warren offers the guidepost of the “DNA of relevance” - the D standing for Develop a lab mentality; an aptitude for experimentation and thus a comfort with failure. N implies that your organization should Never stop learning, because if you stop learning,

you have stopped leading. The A reminds to Acknowledge grief, because maintaining relevance will require changing and with the change necessary to grow, there will be pain and loss. It is not necessarily an opposition to change, it's just a natural human discomfort with the messiness and "ickiness" of change.

Christensen (1997) talks about two types of innovation: sustaining innovation that fits well with the concept of continuous and incremental improvement. Many organizations are good at this - they are attuned to the needs of their customers, and they know how to use the data and information that is in front of them to continuously refine. Disruptive innovation, however, is antithetical to what the current operating environment suggests are obvious management best practices. Christensen makes a very thorough argument, that I will only briefly summarize here, that emerging markets are small, and are not well navigated by big players in existing big markets (p. 35). As such, an organization can best achieve the disruptive innovation required for success in new and emerging markets, to stay current with or ahead of change, by creating spin off organizations that are largely independent of the mothership, even in budget. Google did this with GoogleX. They created independence, autonomy and an aptitude for risk by creating a spinoff organization. Embracing this in higher education would take a huge shift in thinking.

In *Practically Radical*, Taylor (2011) reinforces this theme: "We are living in the age of disruption: You can't do big things anymore if you are content with doing things a little better than everyone else, or a little differently from how you've done them in the past" (p. 13) He profiles some successful examples of organizations that are embracing this new reality. Virginia Mason Medical Centre in Seattle, WA, USA – borrowing best practices not from within its industry (health care) but from another industry (automotive) by fully committing to Toyota's Japanese-style quality management. Ideas that are routine in one industry can be downright revolutionary when they are imported into another industry. Doctors, nurses and other hospital staff working on assembly lines of Toyota plants as professional development training was very controversial at first. Many were eventually converted to the wisdom, but you have to accept that some will never

come on board. Said Gary Kaplan, CEO, “I recognized that you have to say good-bye (to some who won’t get on board) and this is a good thing. You can’t keep everyone happy”. (p. 62-66)

Highlights of Virginia Mason’s adoption of Toyota’s quality management in a healthcare setting:

- Eliminated millions of dollars of needless inventory
- Cut lab turnaround times by 85%
- Reduced staff walking distances by 60 miles per day
- Increased time nurses can spend at bedsides from 35% of work day to 90%

4.3 Autonomy, Flexibility and Emotional Engagement

I received a great deal of excellent insight and feedback from my semi-structured interviews, and most of it will be revealed in aggregate throughout my thinking in this paper. However, I am a professional communicator and storyteller at heart and find it always to be a differentiator to illustrate theoretical concepts through the example, through the eyes and the experience of an individual person - through story. Not to de-emphasize many of the great insights I was given, I want to really emphasize the case of one interviewee that works on the front line or at least certainly in the grass roots middle of her organization.

Heather Saunders is an employee for the private sector company Stratum Energy Consultants, owned and operated by Olds College graduate Marlin Redpath. Heather is a ¾ time employee who is the mother of young children who works in a front line capacity in something of a job share environment. Heather was chosen to be interviewed on this research topic of innovative workplace cultures because I know a number of the staff that work at Stratum (full disclaimer: my wife is one of them) and people seem highly

engaged and energized working in that environment, and I wanted to gain some front-line, middle-of-the-organization insight into the secret sauce of that environment.

The owner/proprietor of this small business of approximately 12 employees moved several hundred miles away to another province and comes back to the Olds, Alberta office roughly every other week to work on-site. His employees have always had a great deal of functional autonomy and this has only been enhanced by geographic separation. Heather admitted to me before we commenced our interview that she was nervous to participate and was not sure she had anything insightful to offer to me; maybe I “would be better off interviewing her husband who has a Master’s degree”, she is just a humble front-line employee, and what could a college Vice President possibly learn from her, etc. Yet her interview was perhaps the most illuminating and instructive of any of the people I interviewed in terms of reinforcing the major themes of the literature on the subject.

In the exchange related to the question on the role that freedom and autonomy play in driving innovation in a workplace culture, when I probed at how accountability can be ensured within the construct of freedom and autonomy, Heather said, rather unassumingly: “I know what my responsibilities are. I know the privilege I have working here. I don’t want to disappoint; it’s all on me - it’s me that’s accountable. We feel privileged to have this job, so you don’t want to lose it. You don’t want to lose the best job you’ve ever had. I don’t want to go to a place where I’m micromanaged and I don’t want to go to a place where I’m not treated like an adult. There’s that mutual respect; I think when you get it, you realize it and you don’t want to lose it, so you’re not going to take advantage of that (freedom and autonomy).”

What a tremendously powerful concept. It brought a lump to my throat and a mist to my eyes when she said it, it prompted the same visceral reactions in me each time I have retold the story verbally and it prompts the same hair-raising on the back of the neck as I

write it. In other words, it brings out emotion in this researcher because it comes from a place of emotion in the teller.

When Fast Company's Daniel Pink talks about the new paradigm of motivation, he stresses that it "begins with a different assumption. It presumes that people *want* to be accountable - and that making sure they have control over their task, their time, their technique, and their team is the most effective pathway to that destination." (p. 105) A strong majority, perhaps 80 to 90 percent I have ever encountered at Olds College or any other workplace I have been at have that intrinsic motivation and pride to excel at their work. Pink says that a paradox is that most workplace have rules, policies and even performance management frameworks for the 10-20% that might shirk their responsibilities, take advantage of autonomy and flexibility. (p. 173) Those people would clearly not be emotionally engaged in their work, like the 97% of survey respondents at Olds College or like Heather Saunders, who want to be accountable.

Much of my reading of the literature talks positively about organizations striving to be a "missional" culture. At my professional practice, Olds College, we have a tremendous foundation on which to build. In my survey sent to all staff, over 97% of staff agreed with the statement I am emotionally engaged in the work I do at Olds College." Of those, 67% fully agreed with the statement.

Before I started this journey of inquiry, research and reflection, I had in my mind a leadership paradigm of "Brick wall leadership". The concept of Brick Wall leadership is dependent on high levels of emotional engagement and a sense of shared purpose in a workplace, with a balancer of accountability to clear goals set by the employee. When I defend my research and paper to the Otago Polytechnic panel, I fear that I will not be able to pull it off without my voice failing, cracking with emotion. Brick Wall Leadership might be hard to do if you were selling steak knives or something that wasn't steeped in mission and purpose. A great advantage we have in the business of post-secondary,

tertiary, higher education is that have the common bond of participating in the growing of people and their futures.

I personally feel a great deal of emotional engagement for the work I do at Olds College, and I can see it and feel it in many people around me in that workplace. I find myself getting emotionally caught up all the time at Olds College, and that has been the case uniformly over the seven years I have served this college. I must be some sort of sentimental softy you think, and to some extent that may be true, but as my Prior Learning Assessment paper reveals, I worked five years at Workers' Compensation crown monopoly, two years in private sector management consulting and eight years advising ministers of the Crown in the Alberta Legislature, and not once in those preceding 15 years did an emotional response to talking at my work or about my work ever occur.

Can your people get caught up in the emotion of the core mission and purpose of what you fundamentally do in your workplace? Is your mission some vanilla statement of bureaucracy, or are you an organization whose very reason for being is clear, is distinct and succinct, and you strive to be “the most of something?”

Do you have any Heather Saunders' running around your organization saying you don't need to hold me accountable with metrics and carrots and sticks like a rat in a lab “I know what my responsibilities are, I know the privilege I have working here, it's all on me, it's me that's accountable. I don't want to go to a place where I'm micromanaged and I don't want to go to place where I'm not treated like an adult.” This is the cultural and foundational starting point, where a leader has to cultivate or unleash this environment of trust, autonomy, purpose and allowing people to master their important role in the success of the whole. There is not an off-the shelf framework or structure you can lay in as a piece of engineered management; it requires a deeper commitment to the things that really motivate the people that spend over half of their waking lives working for you and your organization.

Will people go through a brick wall for your mission, for you, for their organization because they feel like they are part of something bigger, and that they legitimately have a say and own a piece of the puzzle? It starts with your culture, and from that, the innovation and driving and the future-proofing does not need some fancy, over-systemized framework or recipe, or more accurately, you do not need much of one. You do need a loose and somewhat flexible mechanism for capturing, evaluating and implementing all of the great stuff that will come naturally flowing out of our cultivated, nurtured workplace culture where you have unleashed the often untapped well of quiet genius within the organization. As well, you certainly need to keep people focused on how their individual goals, ideally set by themselves in discussion with the supervisor, are a critical means towards meeting the ends set by a Board of Governors in concert with Senior Leadership.

Zappos.com CEO, Tony Hsieh, whose company sells shoes and other clothing on-line, believes vehemently that he is not in the clothing retail business but *in the customer service business*. So unlike many or most of his competitors in online retail that operate large call centres, he does not time or tape his customer service agents' order calls. He gives the agents latitude within their own judgment to throw in perks to enhance the customer services experience. That may cost him some money, but he opines that he saves that several times over in not paying much at all in marketing expenditure, commenting that "marketing is a tax one pays for being unremarkable." (Taylor). Hsieh believes that if his company obsesses on the outcome of customer experience, with front line staff who are given the flexibility on how to discharge that mission, his marketing will be done for him by customer word of mouth, and he and all the people in the organization will drive the results that will make them successful.

4.3.1 Time.... and Innovation

Much of the literature on what it takes in an organizational culture to be truly best in class in terms of innovation suggests that time and perception of time is very important. Some organizations like Google (Stone 2013) and Atlassian (Taylor 2011) have explicitly identified percentages of time that are to be earmarked or blocked off as innovation time, ranging from half a day to a full day per week, or other dedicated percentage (10 to 20%) per month or quarter. The notion is that there needs to be a time blocked off from meetings, ringing phones, metrics and reporting, and electronic mail. Innovation and innovation's more basic driver, creativity, seldom comes out of busy and cluttered.

There are multiple articles and blog posts on the phenomena of how prevalent in our society it is to self-describe as "busy". That being busy is synonymous with being "important". One commenter on this phenomenon is "marketing clarity coach" Michelle Kirsch. Kirsch writes that at first she thought that our western culture's obsession with busy was ego-based - that it was "about feeling important and accomplished and grown up" (2014). She dug deeper and wondered if people weren't using busy as a shield for not keeping in touch with friends or family or even worse, as it concerns our work, if it is a defense mechanism for not starting on the really important work that needs to be done.

Writes Kirsch: "When we're busy, we don't even have time to do the work we're really meant to be doing. We don't have time to go the extra mile for a client or customer. We don't have time to make a difference for someone. Busyness acts like an invisible barrier around us, keeping us from getting over-involved, hurt or even from failing. We can't fail if we're too busy to start." (emphasis hers).

Reflecting on when I do my best, most meaningful work at Olds College, it is not on those days where I am "all meeting-ed up" with back to back appointments on the regular grind of the ebb and flow of our jobs. I do my best work, have my most creative insights, when I have larger chunks of unfettered desk time - especially if I turn my e-mail off.

There must be some wisdom in this notion of dedicated, blocked off, innovation and creativity time. There are elements of reference to those adages of “working smarter, not harder”. If you are always picking just the low hanging fruit off your to-do list, you might never get to the top of the tree.

Tying this back to the perceived current reality of my professional practice, only 36% of Olds College staff survey respondents feel that they have a portion of their work week where they can commit a block of time towards creativity and innovation; and only 7% fully agree. The literature suggests the organizations that are doing innovation at highest levels take the concept of freedom further than just freedom to make mistakes, to freedom related to time, and freedom away from the workaday grind in order to carve out that necessary creative space.

“Innovation needs time to develop” says Soren Kaplan (2012). Staff in organizations get so consumed by being reactive to all the little fires, emergencies and administrivia that can dominate a work day, week, month. Companies like Google and 3M recognize this, a carve out 10% of any work week or month for “free” or dedicated innovation time.

Freedom can, and many argue should, involve the freedom to attend to personal errands or tasks on company time. In an article very straightforwardly titled “Let Your Employees Mix Business and Personal Time at Work” in Entrepreneur magazine, Lisa Evans (2014) argues that allowing people the autonomy to tend to home or personal tasks at work allows the employee to get rid of a distraction so they can subsequently sharpen their focus on the work related task. Evans coins a phrase of “homing at work” as a play on words from the more broadly known “working at home”.

I am very receptive to this and tie it into concepts of emotional engagement and even into my own concept of Brickwall leadership. If you expect your employees to be “all in” for the mission of your collective work - all in for the organization - it will necessarily entail them doing some work on their own time, thinking through their challenges and

opportunities on nights and weekends. The reverse should also be true, not just from a general position of fairness, but from a perspective of granting the autonomy and control over an employee's work/life conflict that will allow them to flourish. Moreover, this will signify that yours is a results driven culture, not an inputs driven environment.

There is a movement called the Results Only Work Environment or ROWE. In the book "Drive: The Surprising Truth Behind What Motivates Us" (2009) author Daniel H. Pink credits ROWEs as the idea platform of Cal Ressler and Jody Thompson of the American retailer Best Buy. In its purest form, a ROWE does not care about when an employee gets into the office, when (s)he leaves or even if (s)he come into the office at all. Many who have not only experimented with the concept, but overtly labelled this framework for their employees, believe that their people accomplish significantly more in this "results matter more than inputs", or "time served" culture.

"They were focused on the work itself, rather than on whether someone would call them a slacker for leaving at 3 PM to watch a daughter's soccer game." This is particularly true of employees who are charged with doing creative work, like my staff in Advancement at Olds College who do marketing and communications, special event planning, fundraising and external relations. For these types of employees "it's all about the craftsmanship. And they need a lot of autonomy" (p. 85).

Moreover, organizations that have embraced Results Only Work Environments believe that it is an important differentiator in terms of employee retention; and that employees are far less likely to leave a ROWE workplace for even a five figure pay increase. "The freedom they have to do great work is more valuable, and harder to match, than any pay raise, and employees' spouses, partners, and families are among ROWE's staunchest advocates" (p. 85).

These cultural approaches speak to the common concept of emotional engagement of employees, shared ownership and problem-solving. We have all heard the question

“what keeps you up at night?” but isn’t a better question “what gets you up in the morning?” What keeps people more committed than ever, even as the environment gets more demanding than ever? “The most enduring source of advantage in becoming the most of something is to have emotionally charged employees to recapture the imagination of emotionally drained customers.” (Taylor, p. 107).

It is very important to not get overly caught up in the freedom and flexibility aspects of the paradigm of the Results Only Work Environment, without fully accounting for the fact that the R in the acronym ROWE stands for Results. It would be easy to get carried away with these, some might say, “new school” or new-age notions of freedom, autonomy, flexibility and appreciation and forget to keep an equal and balancing emphasis on results and outcomes.

A Senator from the University of Alberta, Allen Snart, visiting Olds College over the summer, immediately after hearing Tom Thompson extol the Olds College framework commitment to high performance governance and obsession on the ends and outcomes, made the quotable statement “There is no freedom in the absence of structure.” The nuanced yet very important balance is this: enhancing the autonomy, ownership and freedom while staying grounded in the accountability of great results for the organization.

That said, a key to good goal setting in driving important outcomes is that the goals are not too numerous, not too specific, and most importantly, set by the employee her/himself rather than imposed by the boss. This is the approach to goal setting that I have generally enjoyed with my President, and that my Directors and Managers have always been able to utilize in their relationship with me. A group of scholars from Harvard Business School, Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management, and the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School wrote a paper about the overuse of goal setting, the unintended hazards, while emphasizing that goals that people set for themselves are usually best and that “people will become more committed to goals they helped to set.” (Ordenez et. al p. 26).

Culture of Emotional engagement to team and mission

I noticed a fun, light example from my culture in Olds College Advancement at the same time I was at the apex of reflecting on my interviews and readings from the literature. A dark-haired stocky member of the Olds College fundraising team showed up to a coffee and cake social gathering in a staff meeting room wearing a pink, short sleeved button down shirt. Ten minutes later, a dark haired stocky Olds College Dean of Trades showed up to the festivities, wearing a “sherbet orange” short sleeve, button down shirt. A teammate says "we need a picture of this for the next copy of our Horizon’s magazine" which our team produces quarterly, and the next one says "we now need just the yellow one for a bowl of Froot Loops (breakfast cereal). A few laughs, but then the creativity of one of our graphic designers kicks in and at 7:00 PM that night - not on “company time”, keeps the esprit de corps going with the following:



Is this a major contribution to advancing the lofty mission of Olds College? Of course not. Is it an example of a culture of camaraderie, trust and fun that makes the real contributions towards the organizational goals and outcomes when they are needed that much easier to elicit, and better quality from committed and emotionally engaged staff? Absolutely.

Two more spinoffs from that story: earlier in the day, there was a multi-department email discussion chain about whether we should discontinue the practice of paying \$15,000 to \$20,000 for an external audio visual company to work the lighting and sound of our major events like the convocation, the black tie Gala showcasing and fundraiser event, etc. The question was whether we should buy our own equipment instead, train a staff member in its use and proceed that way. An argument against this idea from a staff member in a separate division was as follows: “From past experience, a person in such a role would necessarily have to work some nights and weekends, which would not be attractive and thus, there would be high rates of turnover in this position. The commenter that made this argument is relatively new to Olds College, but has a long career history of experience in several *other* post-secondary institutions.

Upon considering this observation, I thought to myself that if this particular drawback to having an in-house events AV person were true; that we would not be able to find people willing to put shoulder to wheel to advance the Olds College mission and tell our story to stakeholders on nights and weekends a few times each month, there would be essentially no staff in Development/Fundraising, Communications, Athletics, Special Events at Olds College. The reality against that speculation is that there are 24 strong in this department of the college that have the autonomy and pride of ownership over their work, freedom to work and work hard when it is required and the corresponding freedom to catch up on their lives as people and family members on “company time” when reasonable and necessary.

One last word on this, one of the designers that was responsible for some of the creative hijinks and "culture-sustainers" is a mom with young children who lives in a community that is a 40 minute drive to Olds. As is often the case in booming energy sector Alberta, her public sector paycheque was not the primary salary in their household; and about 2 years ago, a tearful and quick escalation of the sheer taxation of being a working mom and having to commute to work, pick up the kids, deal with ear infections and the like, culminated in a letter of resignation to my desk. I quickly met with this staff member and,

in essence, said I do not accept your resignation. If you are telling me you enjoy your work, enjoy this team the nature of your work as a designer, we appreciate and highly value you and we don't need to see your face 5 days a week. We value your talents and contributions and we will do whatever telecommuting framework it takes to keep you in the fold. That was two highly productive, highly creative years ago and this employee draws rave reviews for her work from all departments and divisions on campus.

This point is illustrated in Drive (2009), as the author describes a new phenomenon in the traditional low motivation, high turnover world of call centres. Pink describes approaches by on-line clothing retailer Zappos.com and airline JetBlue - both American companies that dominate customer satisfaction rankings in their industries - to the staffing of call centres. Call centre jobs are normally micromanaged by supervisors that listen and record calls for "quality assurance" and look at metrics to boost productivity by timing the length of customer interactions (less time spent thought to be better). This makes often difficult, demanding and tedious work, even drearier. Employee turnover in call centres in the United States and the United Kingdom average about 35% which is double the average rate for other jobs. Zappos.com and JetBlue have gotten great results from a new model coined "homeshoring", a pun-intended contrast to off-shoring.

"Instead of requiring customer service representatives to report to a single large call centre, they're routing calls to the employees' home offices. This cuts commuting time for staff, removes them from physical monitoring, and *provides far greater autonomy over how they do their jobs.*" (Emphasis mine.) Job satisfaction in this homeshoring model is significantly higher, but perhaps more importantly, "this autonomy-centred approach draws from a deeper pool of talent." Many homeshore employees are parents, students, semi-retirees and even people with disabilities - those that want to work, but often need to do it their own way. Reports are that between 70% and 80% of home-based customer service representatives have college degrees which is double the amount in traditional call centres (p. 102).

One of my interviewees in the semi-structured interview phase of my research that was recommended to me by my academic mentor and supervisor is a college President in Northern Saskatchewan (Canada) named Dr. Thomas Weegar, who did his doctorate in a concept called “Appreciative Leadership”. Weegar defines appreciative leadership in education as “a strength-based approach to leadership which focuses continually on capacity-building and seeing possibilities and opportunities.” Weegar argues that Appreciative Leadership in education is an approach that could help address the leadership skills shortages: “New generations have come of age. Younger people expect different things from work, from community, and from leadership than the generations that preceded them. Today, people want to be engaged and be heard. They want to be involved in the decisions that affect them and to be acknowledged for a job well done.” (2013, p. 2).

Organizations led by baby boomers and even Gen-Xers are going to have a really difficult time wrapping their heads around that. That a new generation of millennial or Generation Y (sometimes called Generation “why”) employees are not as motivated by the carrots of financial rewards or bonuses, and put more of a priority on doing interesting work and career/life/family balance. This phenomenon is well documented, but simply recognizing it, versus making substantive changes in favour of a more autonomous, trust-based and, indeed, appreciative work environments are altogether different hurdles. This is, again, why the culture of a workplace has to proceed any meaningful discussion on that workplace being one of innovation.

Back to the pastel coloured shirt photos: when I commented to the team “We either have a great workplace culture, or we’re just plain crazy!”, the saved-by-flex-work telecommuting employee replied “I am pretty sure we are both... and proud of it!”. For added emphasis, this employee works in an entry level “union” position.

4.4 Tapping the Quiet Genius - the Architecture of Participation

In Taylor's book "Practically Radical" (2011), he profiles an innovation framework for maximizing employee input and participation from all levels and roles in an organization, that also serves as a means of idea evaluation. The example provided is of a military software company out of the state of Rhode Island in the USA called Rite Solutions who have created an internal stock market for stimulating and evaluating ideas. The internal market is called "Mutual Fun" and each employee of the company, from executive to front line program or clerical staff, is assigned \$10,000 in money that they can invest in the ideas of their colleagues. An employee that has an idea for a new product, an efficiency improvement and new market space to penetrate, writes a summary of the concept - an "Expect-us" rather than a prospectus - complete with a ticker symbol. Other employees then use their opinion money to "invest" or indicate enthusiasm for an idea, or even volunteer to work on the project and refine the idea. In the initial years of this framework, Rite Solutions claims that ideas generated from the internal stock market accounted for 20-30 percent of sales. (Taylor, 2011, p. 206-214)

Rite-Solutions was founded by Joseph Marino and James Lavoie who had spent much of their careers in more traditional command and control corporate environments where the executives called the shots and the rank and file did what they were told. The founders were determined to create a very different culture, and sought to democratize the input and evaluation of ideas process by creating an internal stock market to allow for what they call "the architecture of participation." I wanted to pull on the thread of this idea, so brought the chapter of Taylor's book to my colleagues.

After bringing the concept to our executive team for general discussion on two occasions, I got consent for further, more detailed concept exploration. I deputized a committee of two Directors from each of the other two divisions at our College (Academics and Research, Student and Support Services) and myself to evaluate this, and spent 90 minutes with a Rite-Solutions Vice President with a demonstration webinar. We were

left a little flat by our interpretation of how dynamic and front of mind this solution is in their organization, and why the higher education customers they have do not embrace it organization-wide, but for specific project work instead. Concept exploration continues at the time of this writing however.

The biggest reason we are not yet ready to proceed with a license to the Mutual Fun architecture of participation software at present is because as a group, we think Olds College has more work to do on its culture of full participation, tolerance for risk, and environment of trust. Even then, it is certainly possible that the power of this internal stock market for Rite Solutions is that not only did they custom create it, it was created by the two very founders and it speaks to the ethos and culture right from the top – those that we talked to that bought the license to the Mutual Fun framework and had responsibility for uptake and adoption were junior to mid-ranking functionaries who shared that “nobody here thought they had to make time to take this seriously”. It might also be that borrowing someone else’s licensed product is *diminishingly once removed* from the zeal and commitment that it took to create such a paradigm in the first place. Or perhaps it will be a nice capturing mechanism after Olds College has taken an already strong culture of participation and innovation from good to great, but even if not, just the fact that 1/3 of Olds College’s Leadership Team is wrestling with such concepts translates to the truism that often the benefit is in the journey not the destination.

An ad hoc instance of harnessing the untapped genius

For an example of harnessing the untapped genius, consider the case of Barb Dixon, who, on the org chart at least, is “just a secretary”. Barb is the Executive Assistant to a Vice President (me) who has a job description that speaks to document production, scheduling and minute taking, filing, etc.; but do I ever have to confess to being liberal with the “and other duties that may be prescribed from time to time” clause in her job description. Olds College has been under some “prime funder duress” over the past few years. A year and a half ago, the Government of Alberta pulled a previously committed 2% increase to the

base operating grant off the table, and reduced that operating grant by a further 7.3% across the system - effectively a 9.3% reduction in funding. Our publicly mandated and publicly funded College has had to control its primary expenditure, staff salaries and benefits, in a combination of layoffs, “redundancies” and not backfilling vacancies. It has been over two years in this environment of fiscal prudence since Olds College has had a dedicated, centre of plate, Alumni Relations Officer. The essential function of alumni relations has had to be dispersed to the many, and the many is those that choose to step up in a missional culture.

Olds College’s President brought a glossy marketing publication from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government to my attention. Harvard/Kennedy had a recruitment campaign that highlighted their graduates who were at different scenic places in the world holding a 30 by 40 centimetre piece of red cardboard containing the words “you are here”. To Barb and I, there were some seeds of a strong concept for recruitment through the exciting things being done by your alumni, but Harvard’s piece was a bit confusing and abstract. Did this mean to the person viewing the photo “You are here?” You could be here? Harvard helped me get here? But you are here was not tight marketing, in our non-Ivy League professional opinion because it required further explanation down the line.

So Barb Dixon, a “secretary”, took an idea from the hallowed halls of Harvard, and made it better. Our sign has obvious college iconography and colours and is held by alumni in visually arresting workplaces saying “Olds College helped me employ my passion”. We are still collecting the first half dozen alumni participants before launching the campaign in the fall of 2014, but so far, we have one of our graduates who is the Deputy Head Groundskeeper at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club - the host site of Wimbledon; a Member of Parliament holding the sign in front of the Canadian Parliament Peace Tower; and an Equine sciences graduate holding the sign alongside her Arabian mount in the internationally acclaimed horse show, Cavalia.



Moreover, Barb implemented the idea into a college marketing paradigm that promotes our essential value proposition, while flattering and deeply engaging our successful, powerful, influential and currently, or soon to be, wealthy alumni ambassadors. This is an example of tapping into the quiet genius of the many and the rank and file of an organization if your culture is one that you allow for such democratization of input and participation. Barb did not need the title, just the trust, opportunity and challenge to show us her creativity and aptitude.

Barb, who prides herself in being a self-described “rover” or extra/back-up resource for the various functions within our department of Advancement, has another unofficial, untitled, un-additionally compensated role - the deputy Special Events Coordinator. Olds College has a compelling value proposition, but we are a bit off the beaten path of the major population centres in Alberta - where the prospective students, donors, media, politicians and industry recruiters of our graduates reside in much greater numbers. We have great success in creating spectacular special events to draw people out of the cities and other communities in Western Canada to come get a more first-hand account of our story and differentiated approach. As such, we do it a lot, and we only have one centre-of-plate, Special Events Coordinator, and we had tended to burn them out every two years with the load and the stress.

Barb and I both came to a realization that I really only keep her busy for about 60% of any given workday or workweek with my need for administrative assistance, and Barb has been spending a significant portion of her time, with the full buy-in, support and gratitude from our actual Special Events Coordinator, being the back-up resource on some events and the lead event coordinator on another set of mutually agreed events. It has worked very seamlessly, seems to have helped abate the burnout factor on the prime human resource, has added greatly to Barb's sense of purpose, engagement and overall job satisfaction. She also coaches Olds College's varsity athletics curling team - and her mixed team won an Alberta championship title in just our second year in the Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference. Barb is "all in" for Olds College on multiple fronts.

A proper question would be "and has that always been the case?" Did you know all this stuff about leadership and getting the most out of people with a culture of trust, empowerment and autonomy, rather than rewards and punishment management before you even started your journey of studies with Otago Polytechnic? Certainly somewhat. I have re-watched the slickly produced video snippet on my philosophies on leadership after I won the Association of Community Colleges of Canada Award of Excellence for Leadership, and I still believe those things I said in this video snippet back then.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCyaaqrxX0M>

I think that I now believe things further to that monologue more deeply; I have a greater understanding of concepts that I was articulating 18 months ago.

4.5 You need Some Structure without over-Engineering the Innovation Process

Innovation is not something that can be bureaucratized and over-structured, but there ought to be something of a loose framework that is understood by all in the organization.

Many organizations are able to do a fine enough job on the front ⅓ of the innovation process; that being the idea generation and brainstorming stage. Most find, however, that they lack for a way to make sure that the ideas get a measured hearing or proper scrutiny; and that the ideas are SEEN to get a fair-shake in that hearing. Many employees will participate with great zeal and enthusiasm in brainstorming creative solutions or new approaches, but will quickly get discouraged from participating again if they do not see a certain percentage of those ideas finding uptake and implementation. There has to be a clearly understood mechanism, that is not too rigid, for evaluation.

In the evaluation stage, some thought needs to be put into how ideas from throughout the organization are evaluated and also by whom. Is your culture one where you trust the judgment of frontline, grassroots or junior management employees to partake of the evaluation process, alongside middle and upper leadership? Is there time earmarked for this evaluation? Is there a discipline to circle back and communicate which ideas will proceed either to: further testing and evaluation or implementation, but also communicate which ideas will not be pursued further and some measure of statement as to why?

Ideas are the easier part – eventually, someone has to pick the best ideas. An organization would do well to not only enhance the democratization of the idea generation process but also the decision making process. Even then, it is important to understand that not all ideas are good ideas, so leaders have to become skilled at rejecting the bad ones without demoralizing people. Someone will need to reinforce that all were duly considered and got a fair shake.

5.0 Summary and Application of These Concepts I've Reflected On

I began this Otago Polytechnic Masters of Professional Practice back in April of 2013, so have been in the headspace of trying to synthesize what I have learned on the job, through experiential trial and error, from mentorship I have received. I have also

attempted to be very deliberate in my review of the literature and thinking on how to cultivate, nurture and unleash a culture of innovation in an organization; and have been doing so for the past eighteen months. I do not presume that I have “how to cultivate a culture of innovation in higher education” all figured out.

I do believe I have concluded that the recipe contains not too much about structures and measurements, but a great deal related to coaxing/nurturing/unleashing/**cultivating** a workplace culture that has *the favourable conditions* or climate of trust, autonomy, tolerance of risk and failure, democratization of input, and emotional engagement and ownership. There is no framework or structure that is the silver bullet unto itself, and such a structure is not even half of the equation. I have come to conclude, for now - as I am sure I will grapple with these issues for the remainder of my career - it is “mostly” about your culture, and “a little bit” about mechanisms for idea capture, evaluation and seed funding. It is about an 85/15 split, if a rough numerical approximation helps.

5.1 Advice from a Master of Leadership Candidate to a fellow leader (brother)

An application of what I'm learning - a note to my younger brother, a very successful private sector Senior Vice President.

I have been thinking about our chat this morning on and off, and how some of the many things I have read in my Masters in “Leadership” over the past year plus - most of the literature coming from your rough and tumble private sector world not my ivory tower one - might be helpful. This morning is the third time you have verbalized to me that one of the major reasons why you have to work like a dog is because you don't have the confidence in any/many of your soldiers or lieutenants. You said it this morning, you said it two months ago on the way down to see Grandma in Lethbridge, and you said it driving from Innisfail to Rocky Mountain House at last year's golf weekend.

There was a term coined out of IBM Executive Jane Harper a few decades ago called “humbition” – a fusion of the words ambition and humility. What it means in a nutshell is that real business geniuses do not pretend to know everything, and moreover, know how to tap the hidden genius in the staff (hidden also implies that you might have to take a leap of faith, you might be disappointed with the results in some, but more than pleasantly surprised by others). When I sent you that email last week about “trust it” - the mantra you used to have written on the underside of the bill of your baseball hat from your days as a college pitcher, I wasn’t talking about baseball. I was grappling with this subject at my kitchen table within my Masters’ studies before the rest of my house got out of bed for the day. It wasn’t about baseball at all, and in this case, it’s not “trust your fast ball, breaking ball, or talent” it’s trust THEM and if truly you can’t, fix that.

Knowing how busy you are, I am not going to recommend you read this 300 page book, but since I’m writing these into my paper anyhow, some of the more quotable excerpts (Taylor, 20122, p. 244, 245):

“Fierce personal confidence, a sense of infallibility as a leader, used to be a calling card of success. Today it is a warning sign of failure, whether from bad judgment, low morale among disillusioned colleagues, or burnout from the pressures of always having to be right.”

“Innovation can’t be planned, it can’t be predicted; it has to be allowed to emerge.”

“Real business geniuses don’t pretend to know everything. Instead, they recognize that in an interconnected world, bursting with smart, well-trained, enthusiastic people, the most powerful ideas often come from the most unexpected places; the quiet genius locked deep inside the organization, That’s the mindset of executives who figure out how to get killer results without killing themselves.”

“It’s easier to identify and solve the complex problems of a globalized world if more eyes are deputized to identify and solve those problems.”

Anyhow, I thought I’d share and you can take what you like from this. Don’t work too hard little brother.

5.2 Learning & Reflection applied to the Chief Executive of my Professional Practice

“It’s your ship” - autonomy, trust and ownership - Dr. H.J, (Tom) Thompson, President, Olds College

As the organization of my professional practice which forms so much of the context of this Masters research project, a few words are in order as to how my experiences with the leadership of Dr. Tom Thompson and how they match up with the literature on cultures of autonomy, freedom, purpose, risk taking and how they contribute to an ethos of innovation.

First, on autonomy balanced by accountability for results rather than micro-oversight of inputs. I often go a full week, and sometimes more without once seeing or talking to my immediate supervisor. We have regimented “one on one” meetings with a jointly produced agenda, once every two weeks (although, importantly, it was a weekly recurrence in my and the other Vice Presidents’ first 6 to 12 months on the job). There are semi-annual performance reviews (they were quarterly in year one) with the 12 month review being the formalized version, complete with written documentation; and the six month review is more of a verbal “check-in”.

At first, I found this level of freedom rather unnerving, it was very different from any boss relationship I had experienced before. Freedom and autonomy is certainly a double-

edged sword, especially when one is unaccustomed to the latitude. Tom also espoused that I not make my problems his problems, but rather bring him solutions and recommendations once I had figured it out within my own sphere of authority and accountability. Tom is wholly willing to be a sounding board, a coach, and mentor but he was not going to solve the problems for me; he would remind me, empower me that “it’s your ship” with the intonation that I was ultimately responsible for my crew of staff and our navigation of our often challenging waters. Tom’s leadership style is best in class as it concerns the current thinking in empowerment via freedom, autonomy and mastery of one’s own sphere of mandate. While I got used to it after the first year or so of my first six years under his tutelage, I do not think I fully appreciated the wisdom of this approach until I engaged in the research project in cultivating a culture of innovation, and best practices in trust, autonomy and empowerment.

An examination of Tom Thompson as innovative risk taker is also highly complimentary. In the area of human resources, Tom believes in finding talent by “overturning stones” that most others in his industry fail to look under, and that you can take aptitude, transferable skills or talent, a self-incentivized person with “the eye of the tiger”, “grit” and “coach ‘em up.” “Coach ‘em up” is the olds sports coach, athletic director and professional sport executive lingo in Tom and means that skills can be taught, and that quite often, giving a younger, ambitious candidate a chance, perhaps earlier than she or he might warrant on a straight read of the curriculum vitae, is where you get your best returns. Tom has also revealed that in his experience, taking a less experienced candidate with high aptitude or “upside” also means the coaching is easier as the employee is less entrenched in their way of doing things; hamstrung in some ways by too much experience.

Tom Thompson hired this Vice President to lead a team of fundraisers in the middle of a first ever comprehensive, major capital campaign with zero fundraising experience at the age of 36 years. Previously, I was a “Manager” two rungs below a Vice President in my last organization. The role also entailed communications, event planning and

government relations - fields in which I had a great deal of skill and experience, but for over 50% of the job responsibility in fundraising, I was a highly inexperienced, counterintuitive hire. And I struggled, a lot, in my first year. Many on my newly inherited team also seemed to believe I was too inexperienced and counter-intuitive of a hire. Those intangibles, the coaching, and perhaps the eye of the tiger and grit were most responsible for having a highly successful run in the last six of my seven year tenure at Olds College, including meeting and surpassing the ambitious targets of that capital fundraising campaign; planning, funding and executing the Olds College Centennial series of brand-pushing, stakeholder-pulling events; and winning a nationwide award of excellence in leadership amongst that national association of colleges and technical institutes (ACCC) in Canada.

Tom did the same thing four years later in the hiring of another mid-thirties, long-shot of a candidate to replace a veteran Vice President of Academics and Research. Dr. Jason Dewling was “merely” an Associate Dean at another small college and was in a nationwide competition that had candidates who were post-secondary Vice Presidents looking to make a lateral move, or Deans and Directors of other colleges, universities and polytechnics looking to take the next natural step up. Jason had success very early, is an extremely diligent, creative and innovative leader, and is another young dark horse that Dr. Thompson took, some would say, a shocking flyer on.

Dr. Dewling fits well within Rick Warren’s notion of a lab mentality. Jason is a leader at Olds College that is highly curious, always learning, reading and seeking improvement, and is driving those same traits in his reports and division. It occurred to me later in the process of my research and reflection just how many of the sources in my literature review and bibliography came from Jason and his insatiable desire to learn and be better; and how that cannot help but both push and pull me and those around him to be better. A workplace culture filled with leaders like Dr. Dewling will very likely never cease to be relevant.

Two years after that, a veteran Vice President of Student and Support Services needed to be replaced, and again, Tom took a gambit on a young woman in her early forties, rather short on experience, especially on the finance and corporate services side of the portfolio, but with a “high running motor”, a great and supple mind and infectious enthusiasm and curiosity. Kathy Kimpton is now just over two years on the job as Vice President, Student and Support Services and, like me, struggled mightily in her first year, but has made great breakthroughs in the past year on highly innovative approaches to new campus housing solutions, negotiating a highly dense maze of obstacles in securing an enterprise resource planning model for the College, and injected some esprit des corps into what had previously been the least engaged division of the College.

Tom’s cultural propensity for risk taking goes well beyond staffing and into big initiatives that bring huge swaths of investment and opportunity onto the Olds College campus. A first of its kind innovation came largely from Dr. Thompson’s vision for shared facilities and shared governance of a Community Learning Campus in concert with a primary joint venture partner in the K-12 Chinook’s Edge School Division. Other initiative partners included municipal governments, the University of Alberta and the government of Alberta. This cohabitation of high school and college, with a myriad of health and wellness supports and government social services functions, has created new opportunities for learner pathways via dual credit programming: high school students taking college level course for credit against both their high school diploma and a post-secondary credential. The facilities themselves, being best in class, particularly in a rural environment, served as critical mass for attendance, participation and other investment throughout the campus.

After the incredible success of that multiple public sector partnership, Tom’s executive team saw an opportunity to tweak the model into a public/private limited partnership on an underused parcel of college land that had great highway frontage exposure. A hotel and convention centre structured in a Limited Partnership with a private sector hotelier. This project sees Olds College as a leaseholder and 40% equity partner, but with no

responsibility for the design, construction or operation of the hotel's commercial enterprise. Student access for learning has been built into the agreement, and eventually a teaching brewery was added to the contiguous physical plant. This partnership was undertaken to produce a set of conferencing facilities and upscale hotel that was absent in the community and done through the lens of the College's claimed role in rural economic development. The initiative was undertaken to complement the learner pathways available on campus in terms of hospitality, tourism, eventing and brewing; and finally, the Limited Partnership will be a significant and long term source of alternative revenue in an era of reducing funding support from the government that has no end in sight.

Where Dr. Thompson may be at odds from the emerging practices of culture of innovative workplaces, is in the area of democratization of the decision-making and innovation processes to all levels of staff in the organization. Tom has great faith and trust in Board Governance, and in a closely held philosophy that high performance governance focuses on the ends or the outcomes, goes beyond the common governance responsibility for fiduciary stewardship, into strategic governance and ultimately into "Generative thinking". The bold ventures outlined immediately prior came very deliberately out this governance and generative thinking paradigm. Tom describes some of the best governors he has worked with as those that can see beyond the tip of their nose and see around corners. He uses the analogy of Canadian hockey icon of icons, Wayne Gretzky, who often self-described his ability to go to where the puck is going to be, not where it currently is, in describing that important, yet rare ability to be anticipatory as to where the future is going, and to "see around corners".

This great faith in the power of Board Governance has been a valuable differentiator in the highly successful 13 years and counting tenure of Thompson at the helm of Olds College. When Tom looks for the next big idea, or very often, looks for assistance in bringing one of *his* many and constant "big, hairy, audacious ideas" into more refined clearer focus, Tom has great trust in the collective genius of the carefully selected and nurtured board, as well as external advisors from industry and alumni for idea generation

and improvement. I do not think it is unfair or inaccurate to say, however, that Tom does not look nearly as much to his staff below his most immediate tier of Vice Presidents for that idea generation, concept polishing and evaluation. That is a bit off-side with the current literature, but I note that current literature is often coming from the more corporate, monolithic culture of the private sector.

Only the naive would suggest that Olds College should ever stop leaning heavily on driving innovation from a high performance governance model that focuses - nay obsesses - on the outcomes. This has clearly been an extremely strong source of competitive advantage for Olds College over the past decade. Olds College would be very wise to continue to mine the reservoir of strategic and generative thinking from the highly engaged Board and Executive, *in addition to* cultivating a culture where the same power is coming from an exponentially larger number of trusted minds in the bottom and middle of the organization. If all of the eggs of innovation are in the basket of Board and Executive, there is the very real risk that the taps could run dry by losing a few highly capable contributors.

6.0 Conclusion and Summary

In my Learning Agreement I set out, through this project, to determine:

1. Whether the staff and faculty at Olds College feel that their current workplace is one characterized by innovation.

Yes. 88% feel that their College is an innovative organizational environment, and numerically, the rate our level of innovation as eight out of ten on innovation in their own college compared to their perception of the environment elsewhere in higher education in Alberta.

2. If faculty and staff at Olds College can freely and easily list multiple examples of innovative solutions in their department and elsewhere in the College; but also the drivers of those innovations.

Yes. Some are the ones I would have expected as a Vice President within the organization, and others I did not even know about, but absolutely yes, they flow freely from top of mind.

3. How innovation can be cultivated at the departmental, divisional, team level by Vice Presidents, Deans, Directors, Faculty, Managers, Program Coordinators, Supervisors, Instructional Assistants and all staff.

Note: I received early caution from project mentors, which was then reinforced in the literature, to be cognizant that too much structural embedding or codification can be counter-productive to the creativity necessary for true innovation.

4. How administration and leaders in general can create tolerance for the associated risks necessary to true innovation while working within a Board Policy Governance framework. This recognizes that Olds College, as a publicly mandated and publicly funded institution with a Board appointed by government, is not fully in control of its own destiny.

Note: This is an outcome I was originally going to confess to having not fully met, while committing to reflection and continued pursuit. However my Otago Polytechnic facilitator recommended, after an “almost final” draft of this final paper was done, sharing it within my professional practice for feedback. This allowed me to scratch the surface of the answer to this stated goal by means of some valuable feedback from our long serving, highly effective president; who was not an interviewee during my research.

To encapsulate very briefly in this concluding summary, Dr. Thompson believes that only one person can create the environment for the necessary tolerance for risk in a higher education Board Governance framework and that is the President or Chief Executive - the Board's sole employee. And because the President is the only person who can perform this important function, he/she must do so, in order to create the circumstances for a high performing organization. Tom believes that the President must spend an inordinate amount of time, energy and focus on dealing with the Board; the Board as a whole body, the Board Chair individually, and important subsets of the Board like the executive committee and other committees tasked with particular areas; all aimed deliberately at shaping and reassuring the boards *confidence* in the staff and administration.

Tom is absolutely convinced, after two decades of being a President in a Board governed post-secondary environment that “governance is a highly unnatural act”; that the natural tendency of well meaning board members that want to contribute, want to do a good job, is to roll up their sleeves, get their hands dirty and try to do the work of the organization/administration they are tasked with governing. Thompson believes that allowing this more natural and intuitive inclination to be acted on is the recipe for disfunction in most Board Governed institutions of higher education.

Instead, a President who seeks to cultivate a culture of innovation has to be relentless in working at keeping Board confidence in the capacity of the Vice Presidents, Deans, Directors right on down the line to do the good work of any organization. Thompson believes strongly that keeping the Board singularly and consistently focused on first setting then monitoring the outcomes and its policy role, thereby “unencumbering” every other staff member at the college to have the autonomy, flexibility and opportunity to do all of the innovative work that I have thoroughly described in this reflective paper. To make more memorable and thus

transferable in a sound-byted slogan, it occurs to me that the singular sentence that captures this is:

Unencumbered to unleash an uncommon culture of innovation.

This is my account for having a very late stages awakening on this goal, which has only partially been met.

5. Is there a recipe or framework that can be transferred and applied in other organizations?

Yes; or somewhere between a confident yes and certainly the strong beginnings of one. It would be presumptuous to say that I have it all figured out after 18 months of study, discussion and reflection. More likely is that the “lab mentality” mentioned earlier in this paper will need to be applied, and the recipe will need to be tested, tweaked, modified and perfected by the people working within the culture of innovation.

6.1 Checking in Against the Up-front Hypothesis

I began my research project which was, in large part, an examination of my existing “professional practice” with the hypothesis:

to the extent that innovation exists at Olds College, it is mostly driven by a highly creative, highly persuasive and charismatic President and senior leaders around him. When this President leaves, there is a strong chance that much of the innovation will dry up or cease.

More plainly, I worried as a member of the senior leadership team myself that many would have the opinion that the executives comes up with the novel ideas and the

workers get told that it is their role to follow through. At the conclusion of this research project and staff engagement, that I am pleasantly surprised to have been at least somewhat wrong in that suspicion. Through the staff survey I learned that there is a 60/40 split on where innovation comes from at Olds College, with 60% agreeing with the statement that innovation at Olds College “is driven more from the grassroots than from the top down”. This is substantiated further in the qualitative interviews that revealed beliefs that innovation comes from different levels of our organization - both the middle and the top. This is a healthy phenomenon and sheds light on success we have had through innovative approaches.

7.0 The Recipe framework for Innovation

I agreed through the formulation of my Learning Agreement that one of the outputs could be distilling all my findings into a representative step-by-step framework or “recipe”.

The Innovation Recipe - Five Major Summary takeaways

1. A general culture of **Trust** and staff **Autonomy** is essential.
 - ❖ Flexibility on *how* to meet self-set goals against broad outcomes (*what*).
2. **Emotional engagement** is needed in a clearly **defined and communicated** mission and **outcomes**.
3. Dedicated **Time** for creativity - it seldom comes from busy.
4. **Some ... structure** is needed to capture, evaluate and pay for the creativity.
5. **Earmarked financial resources** must be set aside for innovation seed capital, even in the tight/lean years.

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely acknowledge several people that were instrumental to the success of this educational journey. First my Executive Assistant Barbara Dixon, who saw this project within *our* professional practice as highly aligned with her role at the College from the earliest days. Barb helped with interview bookings, editing, conference call patch-ins, and most significantly, the effort intensive process of transcribing the audio recordings of my semi-structured interviews - an unbelievably selfless service to me. There were times that Barb's keenness for this project when I was in a rut and ready to procrastinate some more forced me to find the resolve to get my butt in gear. Thanks a great deal to Barb Dixon.

Dr. Joe Sertich of Minnesota, USA served as my academic mentor, and as I observed a few times during the journey, got to use his "other" skills as a Certified Life Coach to keep me on path and away from the abyss. Joe gave me dozens of hours of his time, experience, wisdom and energy, yet he never knew or even met me once before agreeing to that role, being as he was a referral from my President and the CEO of Otago Polytechnic. That a stranger, who is now a friend, would give so freely of his volunteer time for an emerging leader in higher education is the ultimate example of paying it forward - a debt I will need to pay forward some day.

I wish to thank Phil and Glenys Ker of Otago Polytechnic for pushing me beyond my comfort zone, not once but twice. The first instance was more symbolic in hindsight; there was a notion suggested by Phil, prior to a visit I paid to New Zealand to act in an advisory capacity to Otago Polytechnic that bungee jumping might be a touristy thing to consider once the work was done. It was highly unlikely in my mind, and absolutely out of the question as far as my wife was concerned. Well the Kers seem to know human nature and which buttons to push with highly competitive persons, and somehow a subtle challenge to our essential courage ended in both of us jumping off the 50 metre bridge over the Kawarau River near Queenstown, NZ. On the same weekend, they raised the issue of me pursuing a Masters degree, a concept I had previously investigated, applied,

then aborted for "young family" reasons just prior to final enrolment. Somehow the Kers had me painted into a corner of enrolment before my plane returned from NZ. I am not sure I would have taken that "leap" without their push either. There were some trying times in the middle of my studies where both Kers had to provide some tough love, with Phil providing a metaphor of the requisite pain and difficulty faced by any and all pioneers. I am grateful for the pushing and pulling from Phil and Glenys Ker.

I checked in with my supervisor and mentor Dr. Tom Thompson dozens of times throughout - not on the nitty gritty of process and editing of writings but on the bigger concepts and ideas. Tom also played a very key role in my staying on track where many full time-employed, graduate studies candidates before me either begged multiple extensions or abandoned programs of study altogether. And it goes without saying that Tom is the architect of a very strong culture of innovation that is the focal point of my investigation.

My Vice President colleagues, a PhD and Master themselves, played sounding boards to my synthesis and reflection. Dr. Jason Dewling steered me to many of the readings in my literature review, and Kathy Kimpton helped me by challenging initial drafts of my interview proforma. I am quite sure they both picked up my slack somewhat when I did some of the work of this Masters of Professional Practice on "company time" and for all this I thank them as well.

Finally, the Chief Operating Officer of our household and family, and more tenderly, the great love of my life, Jody Cleland. Jody went back to work for the first time in seven years in the middle of this Master's degree and was so inspired by working again, and the workplace culture she found herself in. Yet she had to deal with a husband that had even

more on his plate than ever, but who also had some struggles with adjusting to his wife being back at work. I might be an eclectic acquired taste at the best of times, so I thank Jody for her patience, support, forgiveness and love when my quintessential Jordan-ness bordered on the neurotic. Thank you Jody for “taking the leap” with me all through this life.

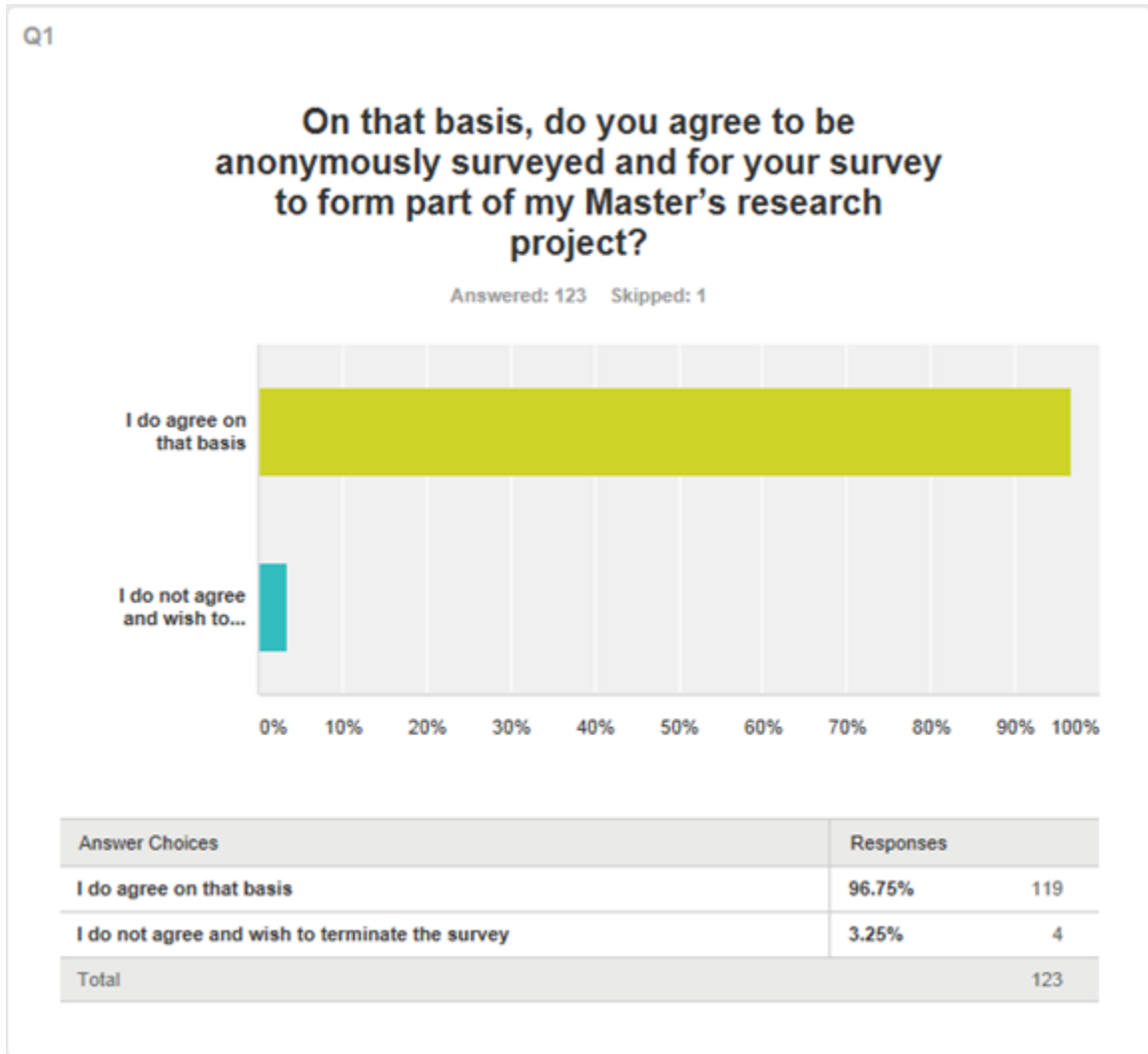
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Appendix A

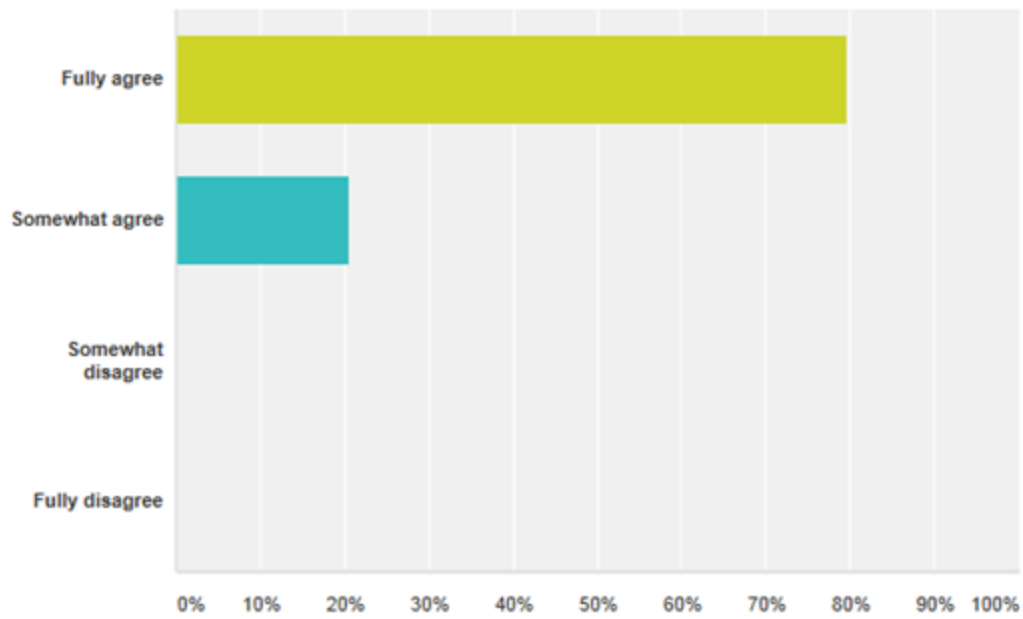
Olds College Survey - All staff and faculty invited to participate



Q2

It is important that Olds College is innovative, in order to be successful in its current and future operating environment.

Answered: 73 Skipped: 51

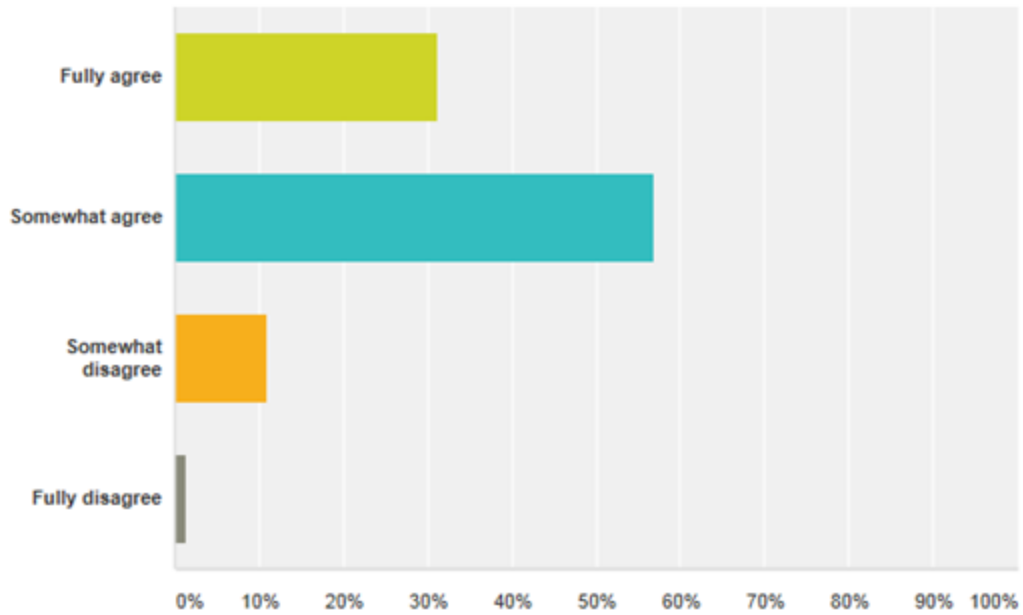


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	79.45%	58
Somewhat agree	20.55%	15
Somewhat disagree	0.00%	0
Fully disagree	0.00%	0
Total		73

Q3

Olds College is an innovative organization.

Answered: 74 Skipped: 50

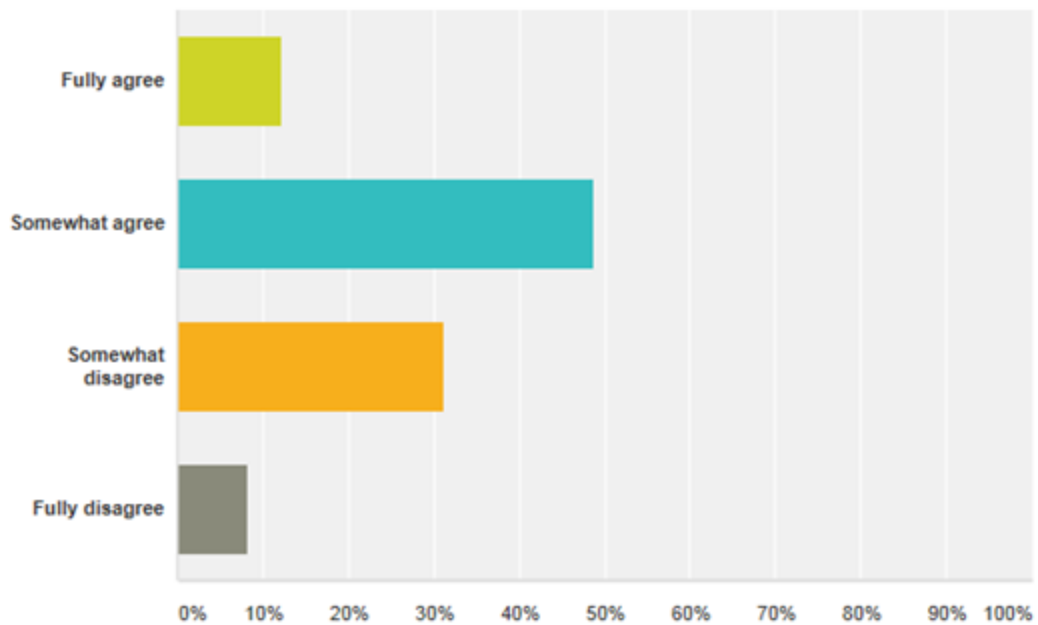


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	31.08%	23
Somewhat agree	56.76%	42
Somewhat disagree	10.81%	8
Fully disagree	1.35%	1
Total		74

Q4

To the extent that innovation exists at Olds College, it is driven more so from the grass roots than from the top down.

Answered: 74 Skipped: 50

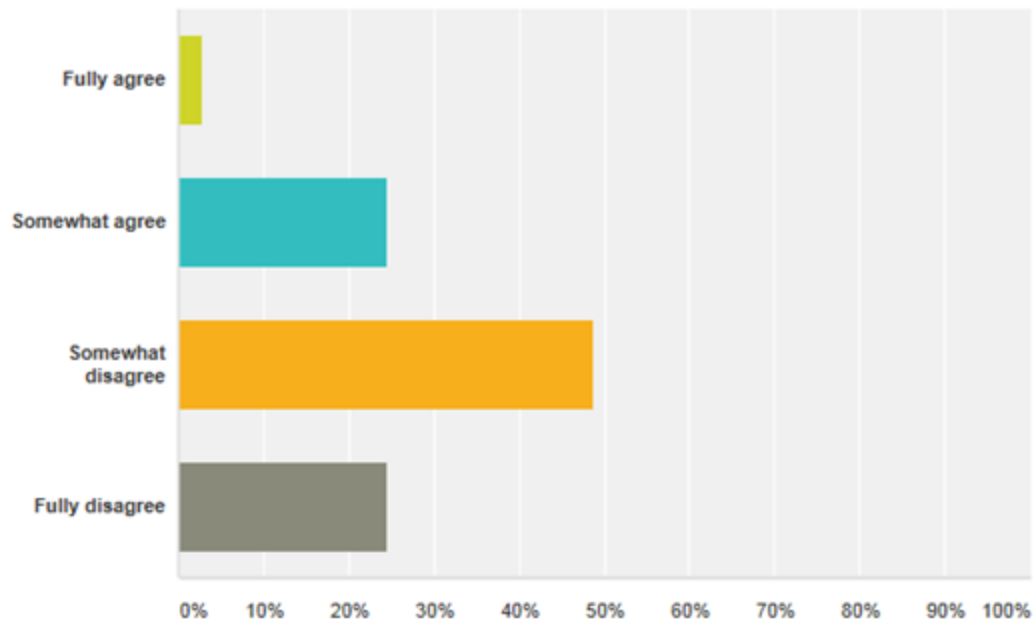


Answer Choices	Responses
Fully agree	12.16% 9
Somewhat agree	48.65% 36
Somewhat disagree	31.08% 23
Fully disagree	8.11% 6
Total	74

Q5

To the extent that innovation exists at Olds College, it is relatively uniform across all departments or schools.

Answered: 74 Skipped: 50

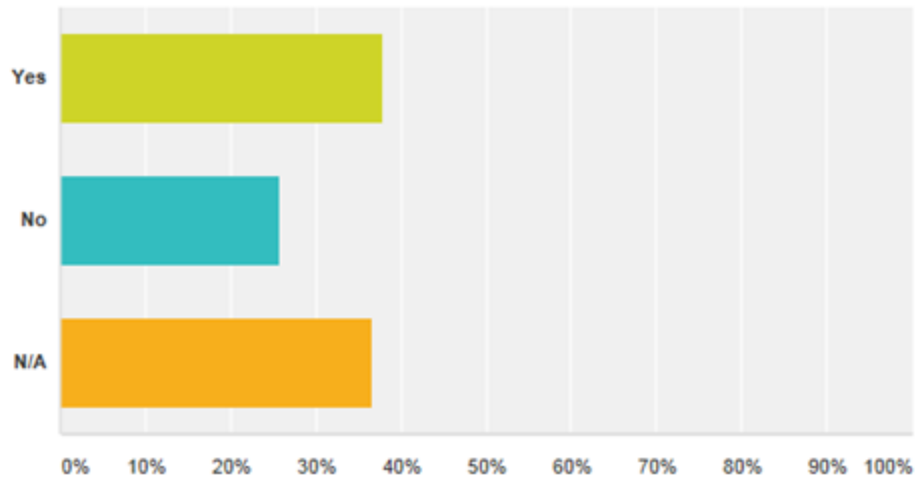


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	2.70%	2
Somewhat agree	24.32%	18
Somewhat disagree	48.65%	36
Fully disagree	24.32%	18
Total		74

Q7

Is one of the departments or schools you listed above the area in which you work?

Answered: 74 Skipped: 50

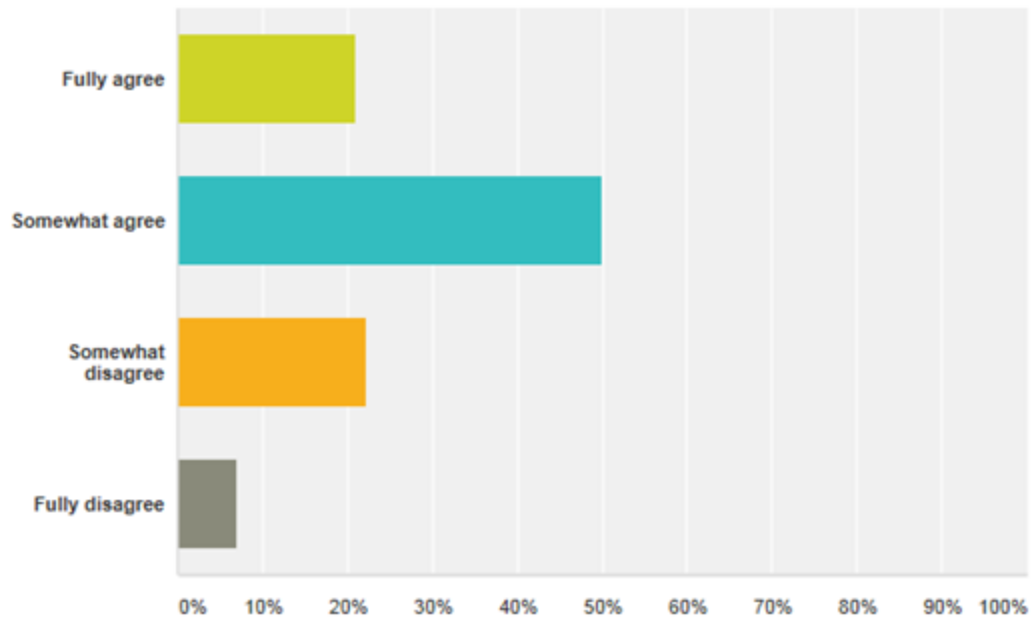


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	37.84%	28
No	25.68%	19
N/A	36.49%	27
Total		74

Q8

Olds College's organizational vision is clear to me.

Answered: 72 Skipped: 52

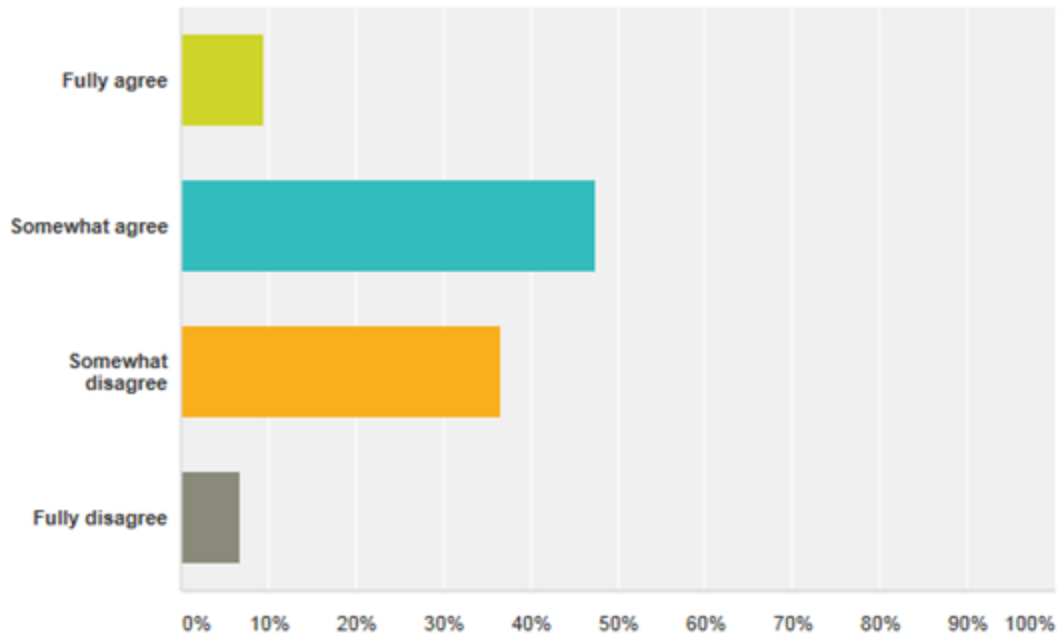


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	20.83%	15
Somewhat agree	50.00%	36
Somewhat disagree	22.22%	16
Fully disagree	6.94%	5
Total		72

Q9

Olds College's strategies in achieving its vision are clear to me.

Answered: 74 Skipped: 50

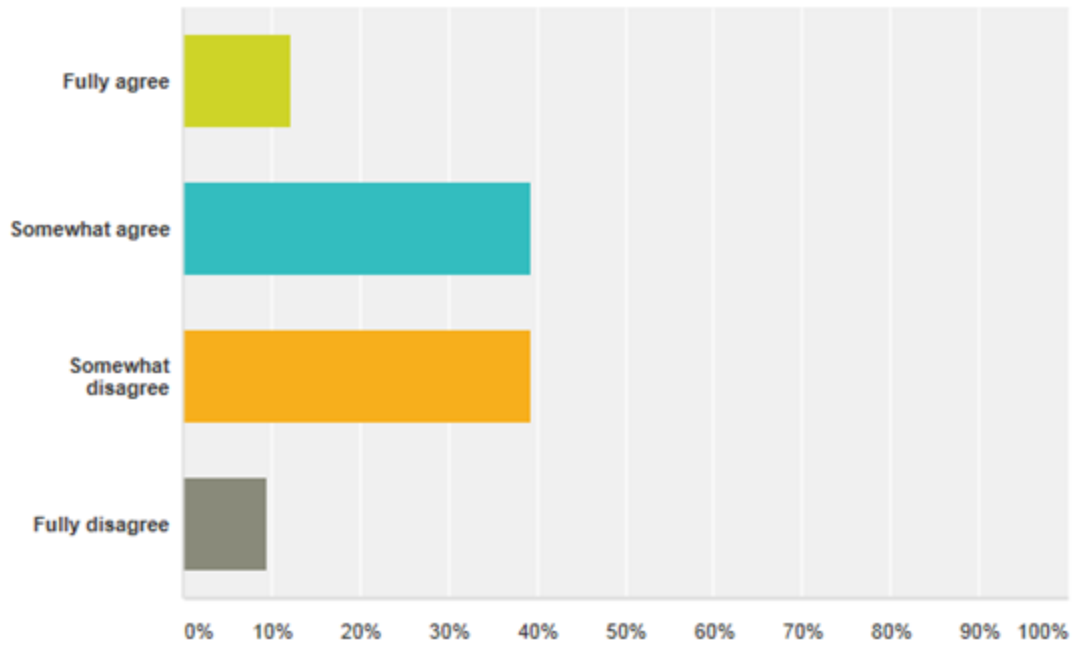


Answer Choices	Responses
Fully agree	9.46% 7
Somewhat agree	47.30% 35
Somewhat disagree	36.49% 27
Fully disagree	6.76% 5
Total	74

Q10

The vision and strategies usually help me in setting priorities.

Answered: 74 Skipped: 50

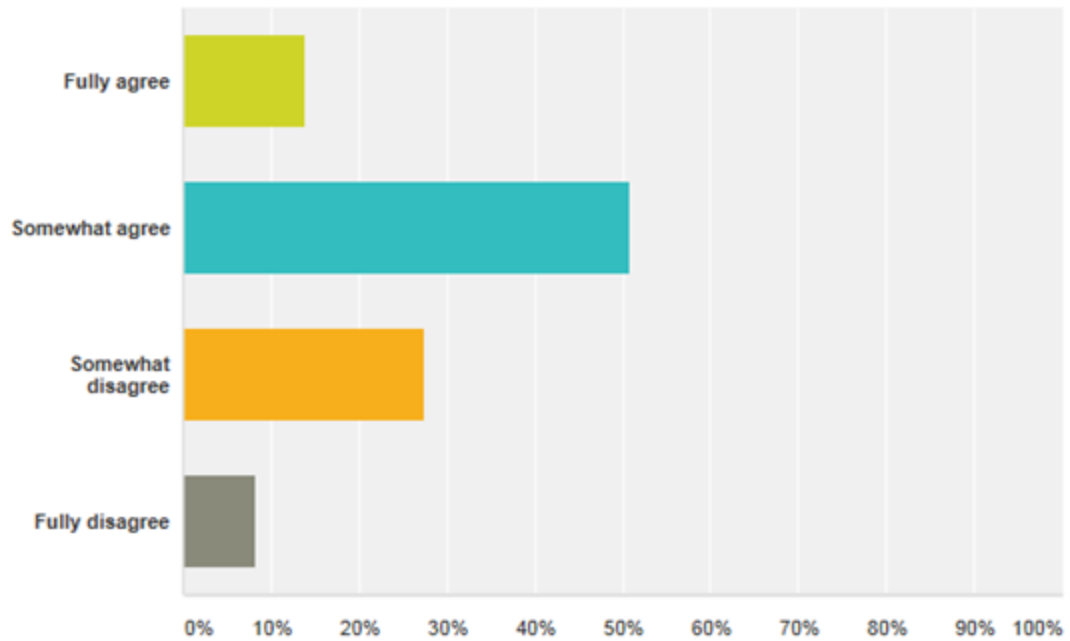


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	12.16%	9
Somewhat agree	39.19%	29
Somewhat disagree	39.19%	29
Fully disagree	9.46%	7
Total		74

Q11

Our organization's announced visions and strategies inspire me.

Answered: 73 Skipped: 51

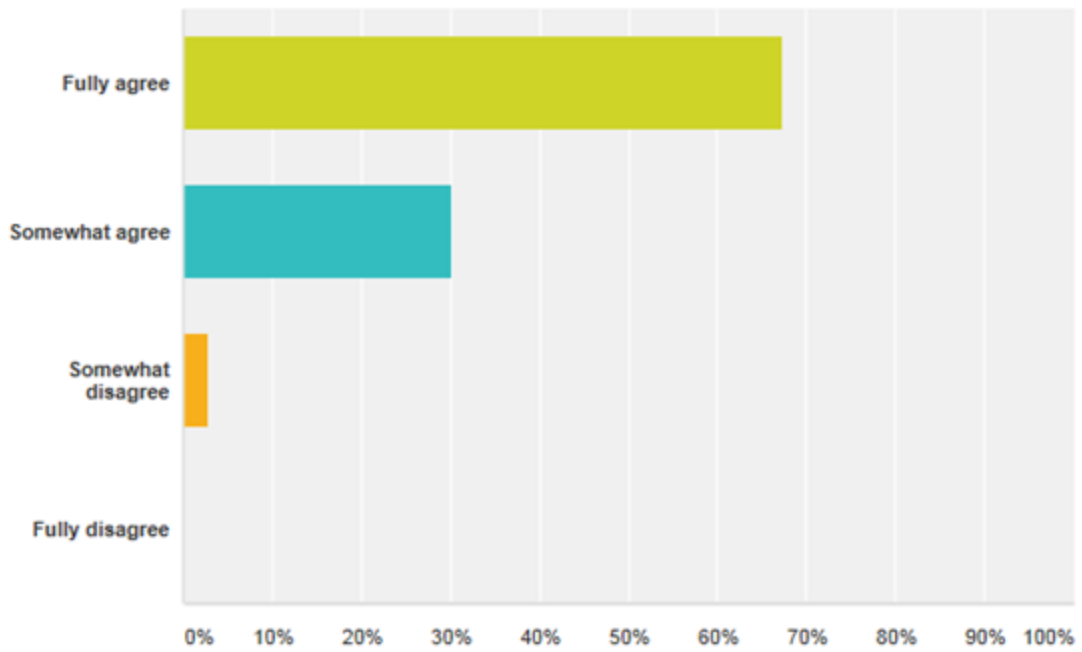


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	13.70%	10
Somewhat agree	50.68%	37
Somewhat disagree	27.40%	20
Fully disagree	8.22%	6
Total		73

Q12

I am emotionally engaged in the work I do at Olds College.

Answered: 73 Skipped: 51

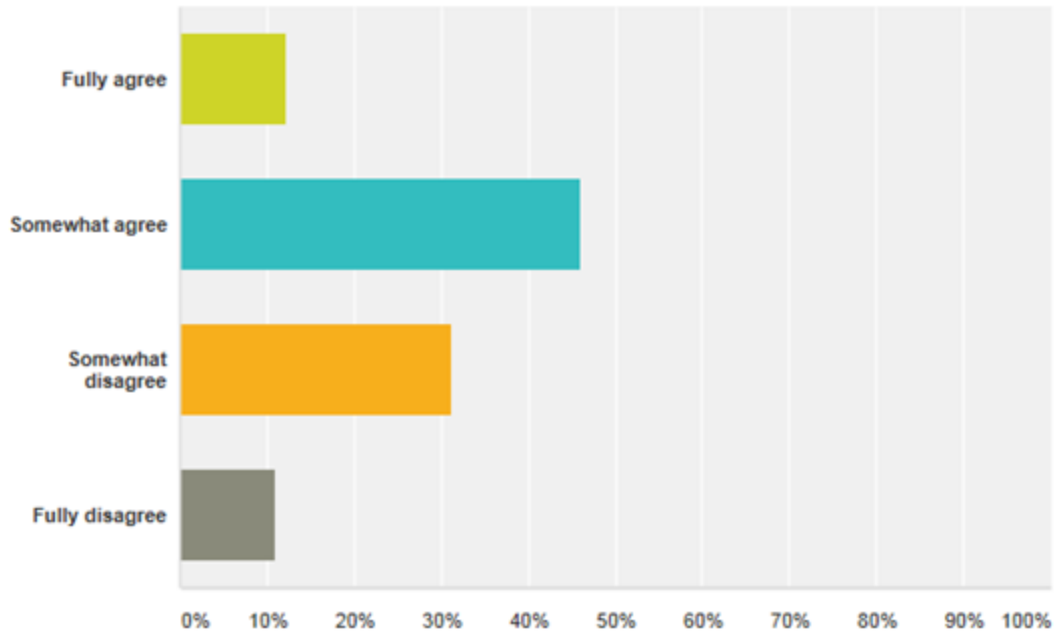


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	67.12%	49
Somewhat agree	30.14%	22
Somewhat disagree	2.74%	2
Fully disagree	0.00%	0
Total		73

Q13

At Olds College, we are free to make mistakes in the pursuit of creative problem solving.

Answered: 74 Skipped: 50

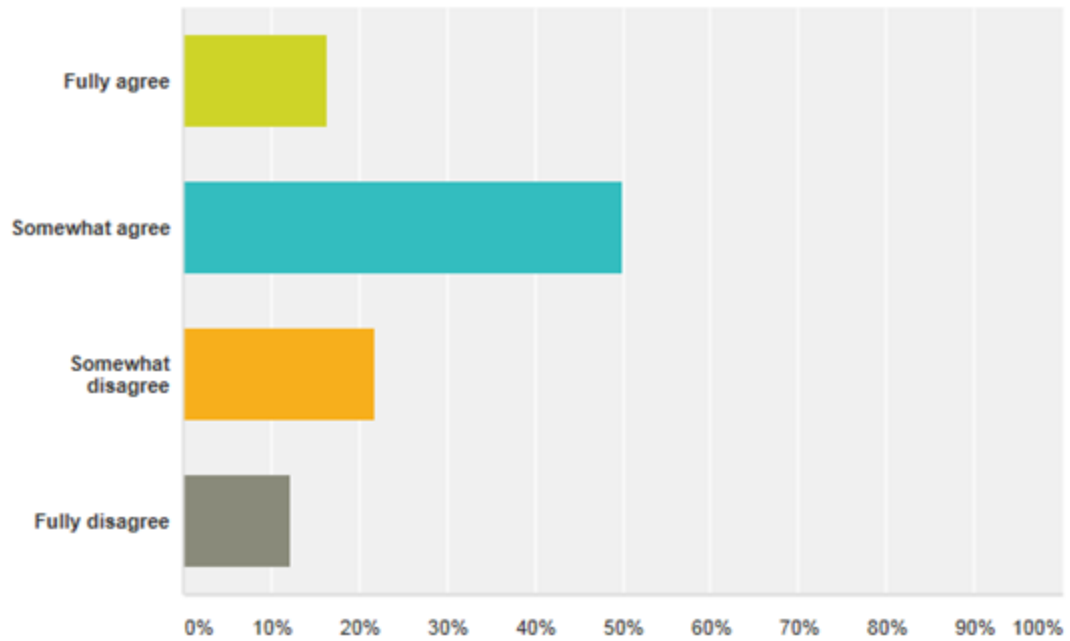


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	12.16%	9
Somewhat agree	45.95%	34
Somewhat disagree	31.08%	23
Fully disagree	10.81%	8
Total		74

Q14

At Olds College, staff/faculty are supported in being innovative.

Answered: 74 Skipped: 50

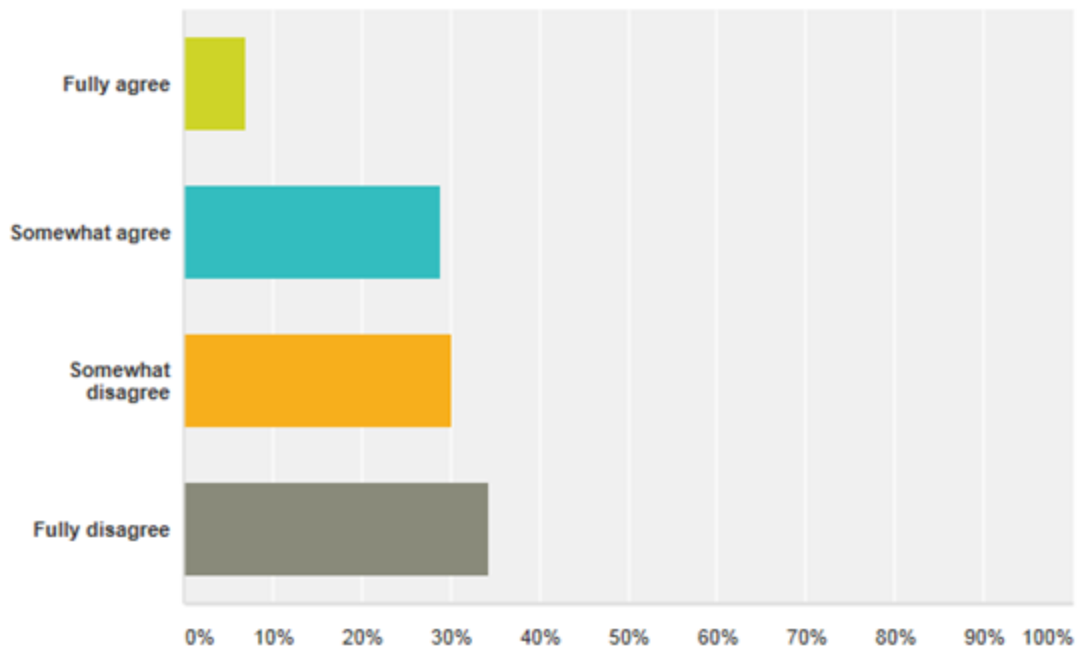


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	16.22%	12
Somewhat agree	50.00%	37
Somewhat disagree	21.62%	16
Fully disagree	12.16%	9
Total		74

Q15

I believe I have a portion of my work week where I can commit a block of time towards creativity and innovation.

Answered: 73 Skipped: 51

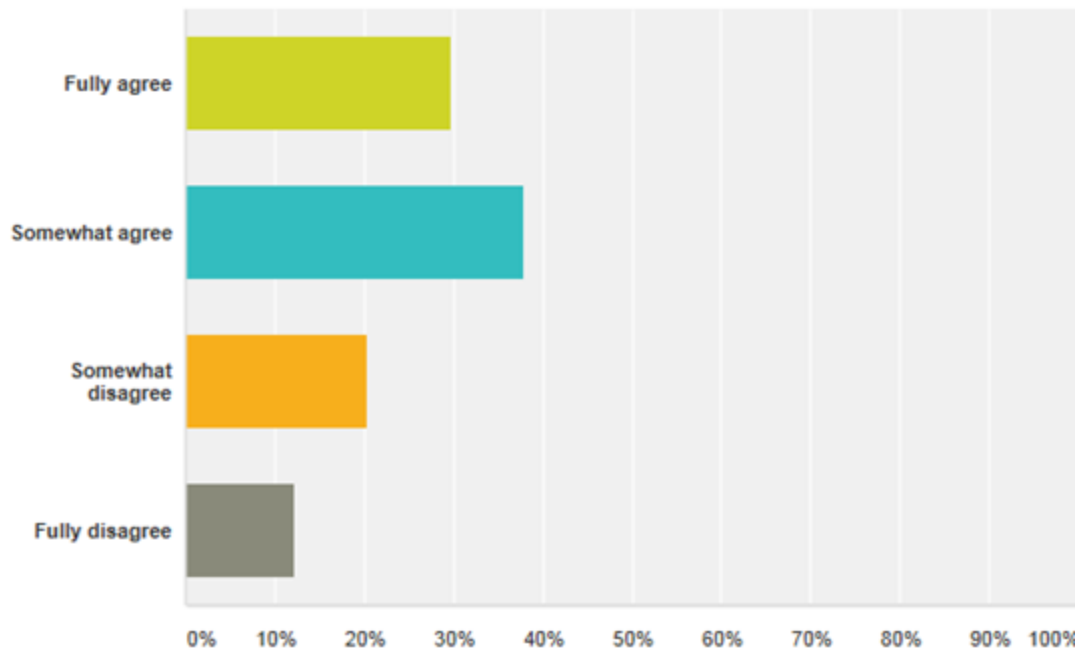


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	6.85%	5
Somewhat agree	28.77%	21
Somewhat disagree	30.14%	22
Fully disagree	34.25%	25
Total		73

Q16

At Olds College, I feel I have to get too many levels of permission before solving a problem.

Answered: 74 Skipped: 50

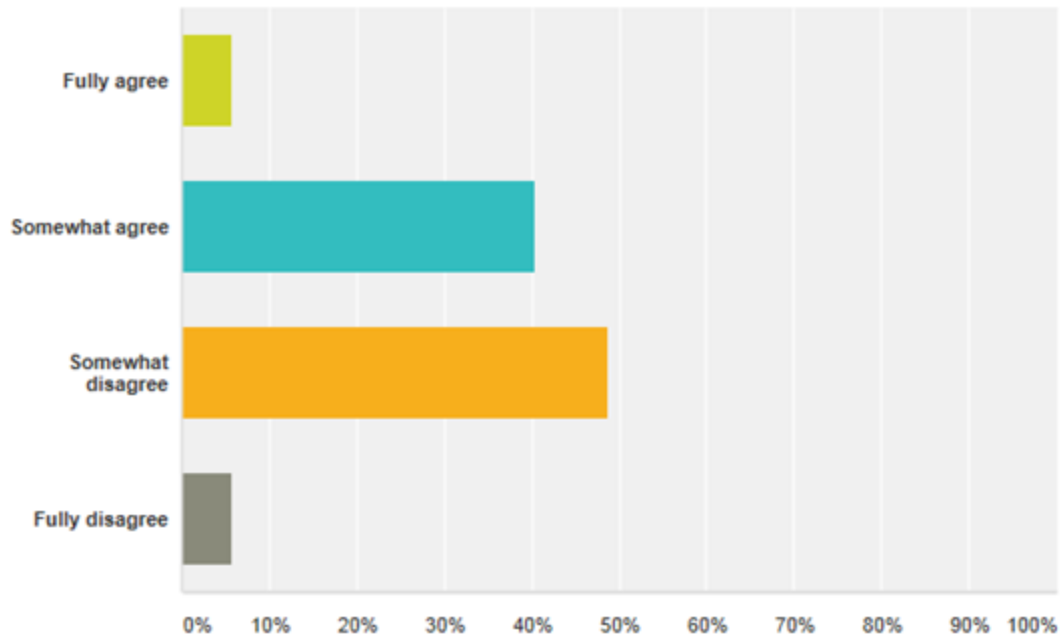


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	29.73%	22
Somewhat agree	37.84%	28
Somewhat disagree	20.27%	15
Fully disagree	12.16%	9
Total		74

Q17

When innovative approaches to challenges are identified, there are structures in place to capture, evaluate and ensure that some portion of the ideas are then implemented at Olds College.

Answered: 72 Skipped: 52

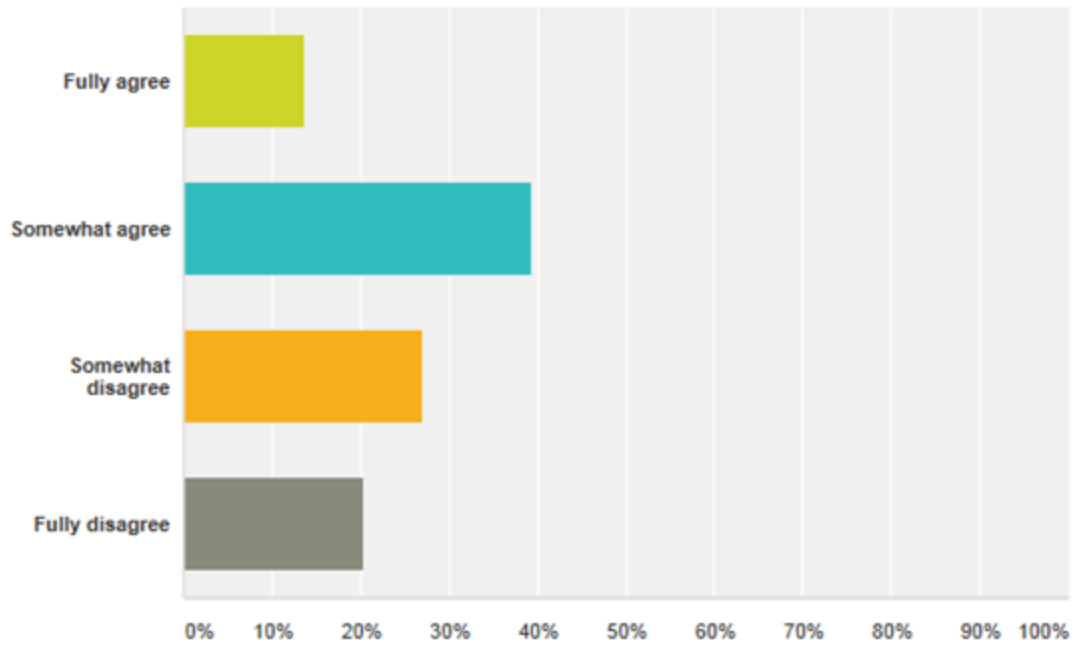


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	5.56%	4
Somewhat agree	40.28%	29
Somewhat disagree	48.61%	35
Fully disagree	5.56%	4
Total		72

Q18

Overall, there is a sense of trust at Olds College.

Answered: 74 Skipped: 50

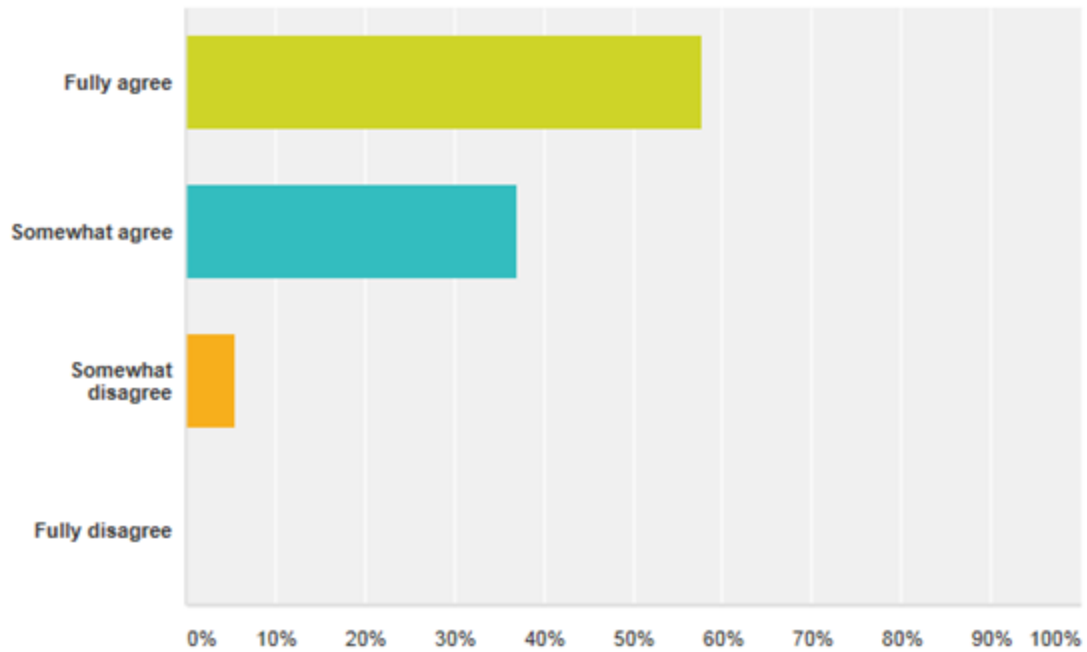


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	13.51%	10
Somewhat agree	39.19%	29
Somewhat disagree	27.03%	20
Fully disagree	20.27%	15
Total		74

Q19

My job gives me a sense of personal achievement.

Answered: 73 Skipped: 51

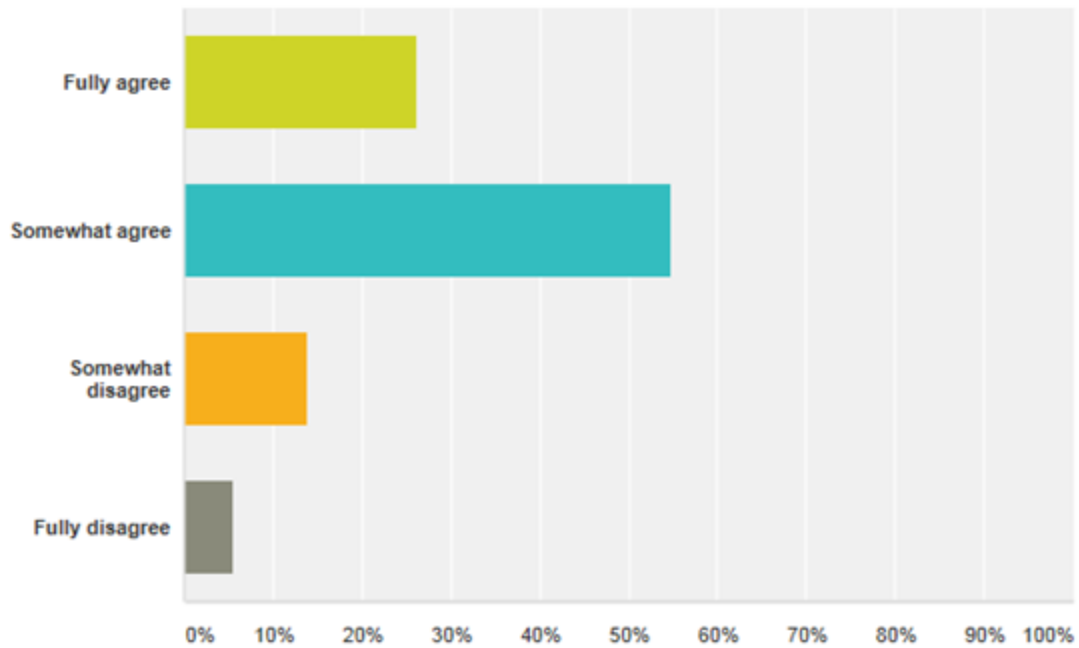


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	57.53%	42
Somewhat agree	36.99%	27
Somewhat disagree	5.48%	4
Fully disagree	0.00%	0
Total		73

Q20

I have the freedom and flexibility I need to do my job effectively.

Answered: 73 Skipped: 51



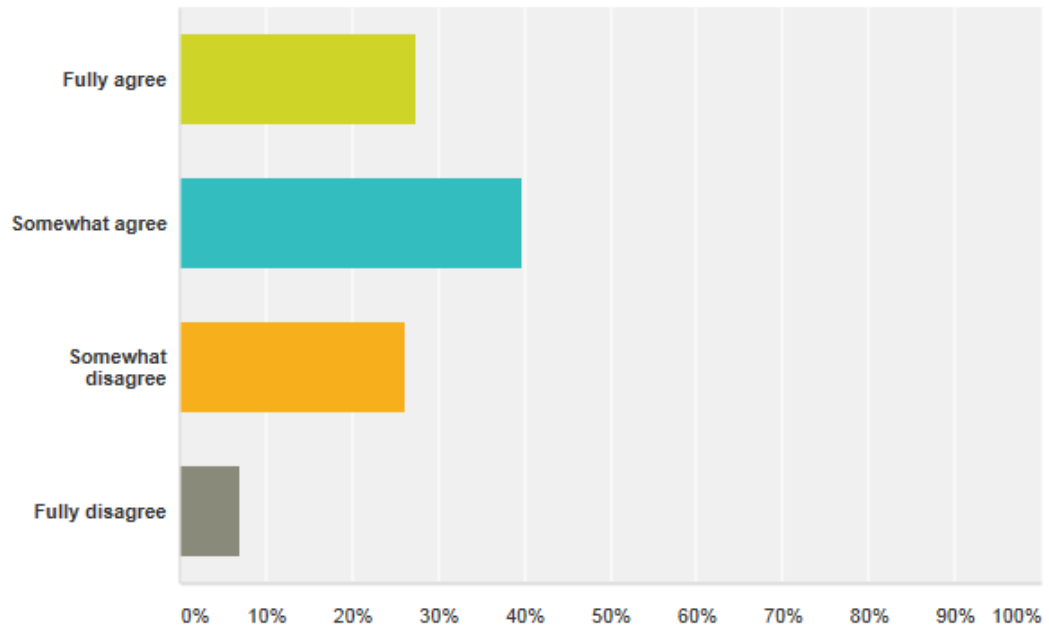
Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	26.03%	19
Somewhat agree	54.79%	40
Somewhat disagree	13.70%	10
Fully disagree	5.48%	4
Total		73

Q21



I participate in decision making processes in my School/Department.

Answered: 73 Skipped: 51

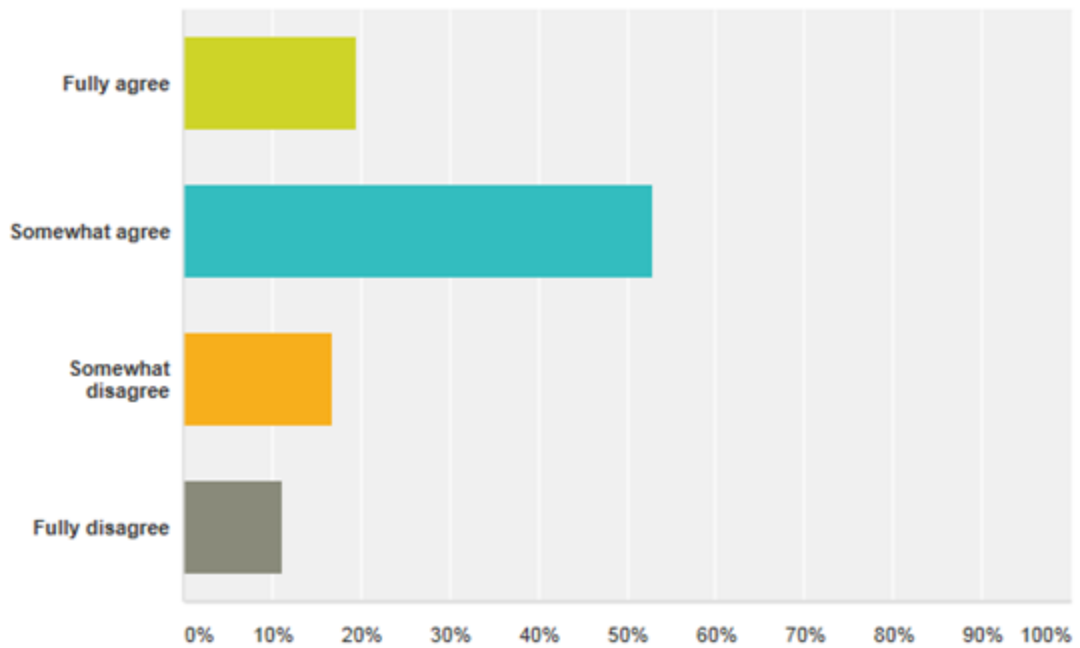


Answer Choices	Responses
Fully agree	27.40% 20
Somewhat agree	39.73% 29
Somewhat disagree	26.03% 19
Fully disagree	6.85% 5
Total	73

Q22

We celebrate success in my School/Department.

Answered: 72 Skipped: 52

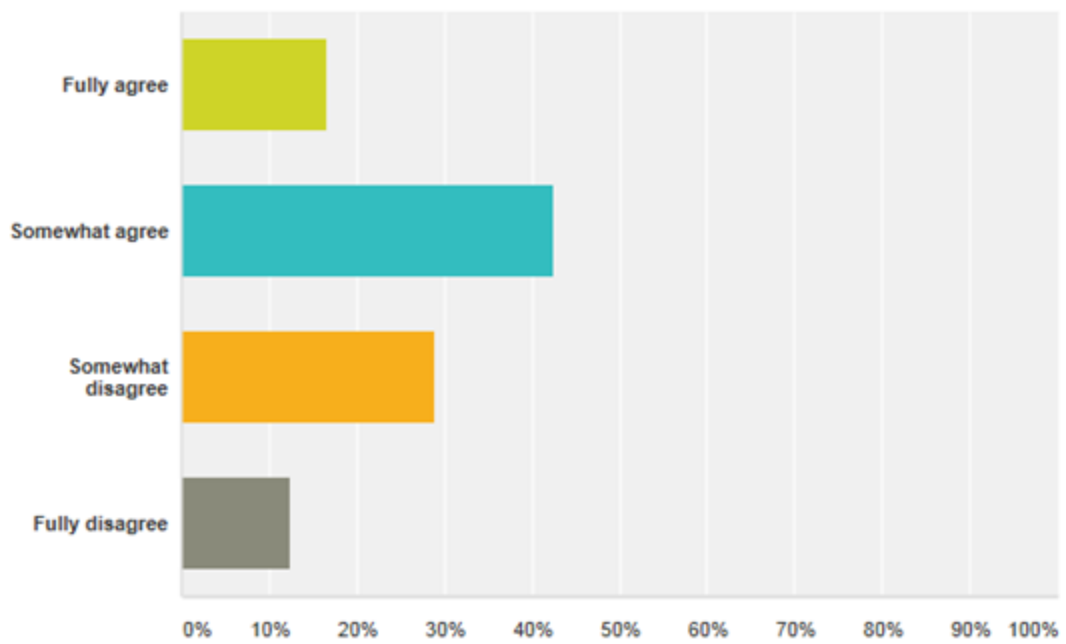


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	19.44%	14
Somewhat agree	52.78%	38
Somewhat disagree	16.67%	12
Fully disagree	11.11%	8
Total		72

Q23

In my work area we are comfortable with constructive disagreement, respectful debate or argument.

Answered: 73 Skipped: 51

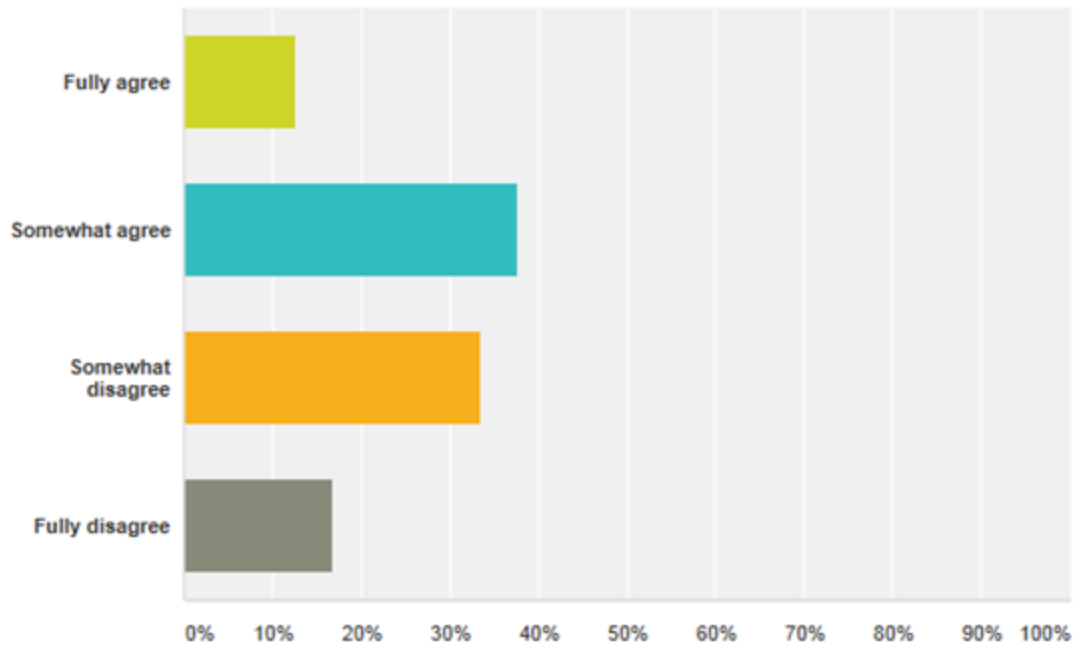


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	16.44%	12
Somewhat agree	42.47%	31
Somewhat disagree	28.77%	21
Fully disagree	12.33%	9
Total		73

Q24

I feel informed about the wider political/economic/financial environment Olds College operates within.

Answered: 72 Skipped: 52

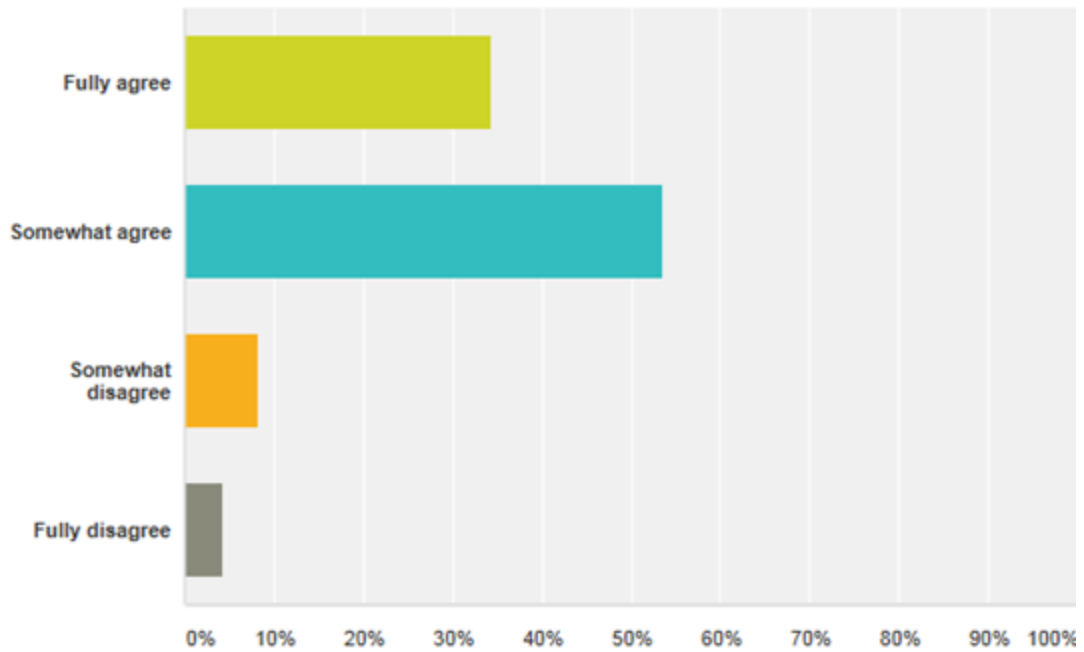


Answer Choices	Responses
Fully agree	12.50% 9
Somewhat agree	37.50% 27
Somewhat disagree	33.33% 24
Fully disagree	16.67% 12
Total	72

Q25

I feel inspired to go the extra mile to help Olds College succeed.

Answered: 73 Skipped: 51

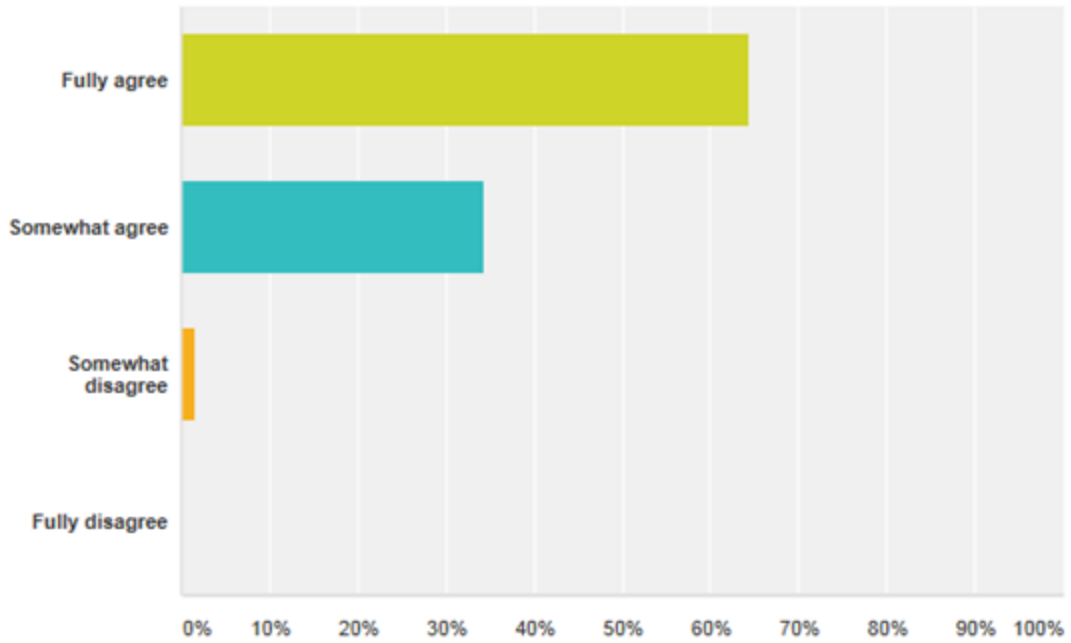


Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	34.25%	25
Somewhat agree	53.42%	39
Somewhat disagree	8.22%	6
Fully disagree	4.11%	3
Total		73

Q26

I am proud to tell others that I am part of Olds College.

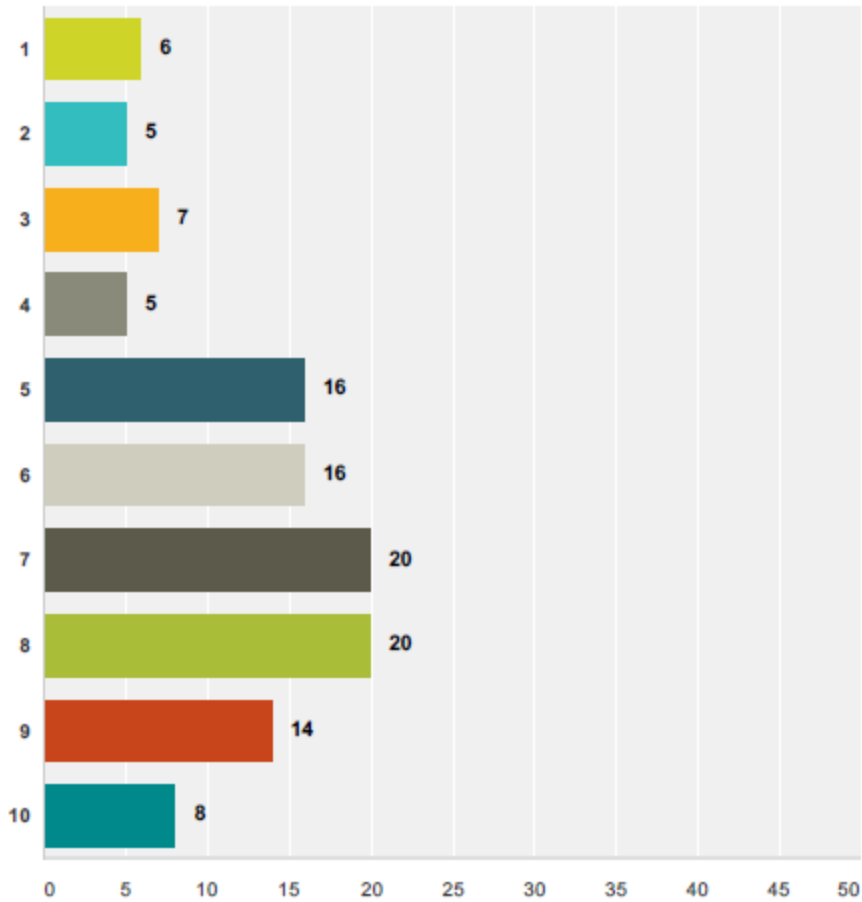
Answered: 73 Skipped: 51



Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully agree	64.38%	47
Somewhat agree	34.25%	25
Somewhat disagree	1.37%	1
Fully disagree	0.00%	0
Total		73

Q30 On a scale of 1-10, ten being highest, how innovative do you feel Olds College is relative to other colleges, post-secondary institutions?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 52



Appendix B - Semi-structured Interviewees

Removed to protect the confidentiality agree to participating interviewees and participants.

The academic panel that reviewed this thesis and framework was privy to these participants, their names, organizations and the titles however.

Appendix C

Semi-structured interview proforma

For a reference point, I chose one of the many possible definitions of innovation so that I and my interviewees had a common reference point.

A Definition of innovation for the sake of our discussion: Innovation is the application of different/new/better solutions to meet existing challenges, new requirements or unarticulated needs. It requires and allows for creativity. It differs from improvement in that innovation refers to doing something in a substantially different way, rather than doing the same thing a little bit better.

Immediately following that definition, the interview pro-forma asked the following questions:

1. How would you rank Olds College's culture or track record of innovation on a scale of one to ten?
2. Less than half of participants from my survey agreed that there are structures in place to capture and implement innovative ideas. How important is creating a framework for idea generation, idea evaluation, idea implementation? Do you have any ideas or suggestions from your own experiences, capture and implement strategies you have read about, or experienced at other organizations?
3. In my survey to Olds College staff on innovation, open-ended questions were asked on "what are the catalysts of innovation" and "what aspects slow or prevent innovation"? A high frequency response to **both** questions was "lack of/cuts in funding". What are your thoughts on why this apparent contradiction exists? Which do you believe to be more accurate? You have probably heard the saying "Fear is a great motivator." – what is your opinion on that statement?

4. 60% of participants to my survey on aspects of innovation at Olds College agreed that innovation is driven from the grassroots. 40% disagreed with that statement and; therefore, see innovation at Olds College as driven from the top down. What would you attribute this 60/40 Olds College split on where innovation comes from? Where do you think innovation should come from?

5. Much of my reading on innovative cultures, as well as the questions I asked in my staff survey are related to the concept of “freedom: freedom to make mistakes in pursuit of novel solutions. Freedom from undue bureaucracy or having to obtain too much permission to act. Freedom on things like telecommuting and flexible work hours. How important is freedom and autonomy and how can this be balanced with accountability in your view?

6. Do you have any bold innovative ideas for Olds College?

7. What question do you wish I had asked on innovation that I did not, or put another way, are there any other thoughts you have on innovation and the culture that supports it that we haven't not covered?