

Are You

**CHANGE**

Ready?

**Strategies for Workforce Management**

By Lauren Turner and Gail Gregory

The landscape in higher education continues to evolve. Institutions face challenges around funding, increasing costs, public perception, shifting demographics and more. As a result, college and university leaders must recognize the unique situations on their campuses that often require them to upend the status quo. They must see the need and set the tone for change, build consensus around strategies to support the future vision, and foster the collaborative workforce necessary to successfully implement and sustain these strategies. In this environment, top-down mandates will not produce the buy-in necessary for organizational change efforts to succeed.

### Change at UMass Lowell

The University of Massachusetts Lowell is currently in the midst of a large-scale organizational change effort — implementing a transformative strategic plan known as UMass Lowell 2020. The plan was developed, and is periodically updated, by a 200-member Strategic Planning Commission representative of all key university stakeholders (faculty, staff and students).

The strategic planning process was first launched in 2008, and the plan has undergone several revisions, with the most recent revision and restatement being a midway update completed in October 2015 ([www.uml.edu/2020](http://www.uml.edu/2020)). Since its inception, this strategic plan has guided UMass Lowell's broadly collaborative decision making — from its campus-wide and transparent approach to budget planning, to the expansion of academic programs and student enrollment, to human resources issues related to workforce and performance planning and management and more.

Today, UMass Lowell is a much different institution than it was just eight years ago. Student enrollment has increased by more than 50 percent, from 11,600 in fall 2007 to 17,500 today (with a goal of 20,000 by 2020). Other significant changes include a more diverse student body with a higher academic standing; an 81 percent increase in annual research expenditures; and a larger, stronger, more complex organizational infrastructure ... all while national rankings are climbing.

The university's five Pillars of Excellence — transformational education, global engagement and inclusive culture, innovative research and entrepreneurship, leverage our legacy and our place, and entrepreneurial stewardship — provide a common framework for planning, resource allocation and other key strategic decision making in light of the institution's new reality. Of particular importance to the topic of this writing is the fifth pillar, entrepreneurial

stewardship, which articulates how “an entrepreneurial approach to stewardship of human, physical and financial resources will be the hallmark of UMass Lowell's approach to building a healthy and sustainable future.” It is this pillar that has informed the many workforce planning and management initiatives taken up to build a strong workforce and organizational structure to support all facets of the plan.

### Strategic Workforce Planning

Defined simply, workforce planning is having the right people with the right skills, experiences and competencies in the right jobs at the right time. Ensuring that an organization has the “right” organizational structure and staffing model requires careful analysis of the current workforce, identification of future workforce needs, and implementation of solutions to close any gaps needed to accomplish the organization's mission, goals and objectives.

At UMass Lowell, several human resources principles and tools have aided this workforce planning process. HR has worked collaboratively with leaders across all divisions of the university as we've planned for the changes necessary to support the university's continued upward trajectory. A few examples of note include the establishment of an online one-stop “solution center” where students can pay tuition and fees, register for classes, apply for financial aid, view student employment opportunities and more; a complete reorganization of the department of athletics to support the university's move from Division II to Division I; collaboration with the provost and deans of six colleges in developing strategies to improve the faculty recruitment process; negotiating important strategic changes to the faculty collective bargaining agreement; and articulating faculty workload plans and developing college and department strategic plans that are in alignment with the UMass Lowell 2020 plan.

HR has also worked with all departments across the finance and operations division (facilities, HR, public safety, administrative services, IT and financial services) to conduct a comprehensive workforce review and restructuring, the result of which is a stronger division focused on providing critical services and operational support for the university's strategic plan.

A strong and collaborative executive leadership team and solid accountability measures have been foundational to UMass Lowell's success with these workforce planning initiatives. Also critical has been an HR team that serves as skilled internal consultants; fosters open and honest communication with and between managers and employees;

builds trust in relationships with union leaders (95 percent of UMass Lowell's workforce is unionized); develops and administers sound HR systems and programs; and uses HR data to effectively inform organizational change initiatives.

While we could write volumes about the myriad change efforts HR has helped facilitate across campus, here we'll focus on just one: a comprehensive review and analysis of the university's financial services department.

### **Analysis and Restructuring of Financial Services**

In order to contribute to the success of the UMass Lowell 2020 strategic plan, the finance and operations division recognized the need for a comprehensive workforce management review of its financial services department. To carry out this review, the vice chancellor for finance and operations partnered with HR and a higher education consulting firm, and in doing so created a team of individuals who could bring both an understanding of team dynamics and history as well as objectivity and an external perspective to the process. Throughout the initiative, there was an emphasis on creating opportunities to build trust and engagement with all those impacted by the change.

**Want to hear more about UMass Lowell's workforce planning strategy? View the free, on-demand webinar "Strategies for Workforce Management: Are You Change Ready?" at [www.cupahr.org/webinars](http://www.cupahr.org/webinars). You can also find additional resources in the Workforce Planning toolkit in CUPA-HR's Knowledge Center ([www.cupahr.org/knowledgecenter](http://www.cupahr.org/knowledgecenter)).**

### *Leaders as Champions for Change*

The financial services leadership team was engaged at the outset to serve as champions for change. It was in fact responsible for initially identifying the need for change, as it recognized that the university had "outgrown" its systems and staffing model. The leadership team was willing and eager to partner with HR and the consulting firm and could envision outcomes that would better serve the university, more productively engage existing staff, and effectively plan for staffing shifts, including the addition of key strategic positions. If key members of the leadership team are not constructively engaged at the outset, a project of this nature will be at best challenging to implement, and at worst, unable to succeed.

### *Change Process*

At early planning meetings with the financial services leadership team, discussion centered around expectations for collaboration throughout the review and analysis process, as well as the timeline and milestones for completion of various stages of the review and implementation. Key considerations included:

- 1) Identifying available resources for the project, including the potential for additional resources to be made available, as necessary, to implement identified solutions.
- 2) Analyzing the current state of the workforce, including consideration of incumbent employees' strengths, limitations and interests; how staff were currently spending their time; expected attrition; and opportunities for promotion and the potential for gracefully exiting employees if necessary.
- 3) Envisioning the future state of the workforce needed to support the UMass Lowell 2020 plan, including consideration of reporting affinities and realignment; critical strategic positions (new or restructured); seizing the opportunity, where possible, to play to individual strengths; and the importance of performance accountability.
- 4) Identifying strategies for communication during the review process and implementation of action items to support sustained change (discussion included how important it was to ensure periodic communication with impacted staff, noting that any change process has the potential to build trust and engagement — or not — depending on how it is managed).

It was clear that the vice chancellor of administration and operations was ready to serve as an "executive sponsor" for this project and that the financial services leadership team was on board. At the outset, and with an aim to build trust and better understand the leadership team dynamics and organizational history, HR engaged the team in a visioning exercise, asking them to consider several questions, including: What would your job look like if ...? What would you be doing differently than you are doing today if ...? What's working? What's not working? Specifically, to get at perceived service gaps, we asked them to consider: What keeps you up at night? What work takes up too much time and doesn't add proportionate value?

What are you not doing that you feel you should be doing? In essence, we were asking them to consider what success would look like and what they saw as their key opportunities and challenges.

### *Assessment*

The consulting firm worked with us to evaluate the current state of the finance and operations division. For the impacted departments, it reviewed the organizational structure to see if it met current as well as proposed future needs of the division. An anticipated retirement in a key position needed to be considered in any future structures. Also examined was work performed by individuals over the course of a fiscal year. The ultimate question was: Are the right people focused on the right things? Lastly, a retreat was conducted with the group to share the project's objectives, provide a common language and set context.

Evaluating the organizational structure involved interviews with the vice chancellor, interviews with other divisional leadership, the development of multiple iterations of structures and the development of communication strategies. Initially, the consulting firm focused on the functions rather than the people performing those functions. The interviews were an opportunity for leadership to share its view of what was working and what wasn't working and its view for the future. In addition to these viewpoints, functional alignment, potential number of direct reports and the long-term direction of the division were also taken into account to create alternate versions of new structures and pros and cons for each.

While looking at the structure of the financial services organization, we also looked at the work performed by individuals to see where people were spending their time. Managers split the work performed in their areas into major and minor categories and the consulting firm created a customized spreadsheet to reflect those categories. Each employee divided his or her work efforts over the course of a fiscal year into these predefined categories and entered it into the spreadsheet. Reports were created for each department showing how time was being spent by major category, minor category and by person. These were shared with managers, who discussed what surprised them, what was as expected, where they felt more time and less time should be spent and what work was not getting done.

For example, several areas showed that there was an imbalance between proactive and reactive activities. Employees needed to troubleshoot because problems further upstream were not being addressed. Addressing those strategic issues takes time, but the data showed how much time *not* addressing them was taking on an ongoing basis.

### *Gaps*

This assessment process validated much of what the financial services team perceived as gaps in its structure and service model at the outset. Some of these concerns included

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a focus on transactional activities and not enough time spent on planning and policy development; the need to improve customer service, strengthen internal controls and better coordinate efforts and improve processes within the department and across the university; insufficient staffing to support the growing university in some key strategic areas and limited back-up capabilities; and the need for improved reporting to support operations management and executive decision making. These identified gaps translated to solutions that could be operationalized.


### *Implementation of Solutions*

As a result of these discussions and the comprehensive analysis, a vision for the future organizational structure emerged. HR worked with the financial services leadership team to develop a strategy to implement the plan. The plan involved revising job descriptions for several positions, many of which represented promotional opportunities for incumbent staff; restructuring the organization to create better internal alignment (e.g., the establishment of a department within financial services responsible for functions inclusive of "procurement to payment," where these functions had previously reported to different managers); establishing performance improvement plans for staff whose performance was deemed unsatisfactory; adding key strategic positions (in the areas of capital budget management, strategic sourcing and contract management and travel advisory services); developing a plan for workforce training and development, which included individual staff development opportunities as well as organization-wide

programming to promote positive engagement with these change initiatives; and developing a comprehensive communications plan which included plans for communicating with financial services employees as well as the UMass Lowell community about the new financial services organization.

### Why Now?

UMass Lowell's 2020 plan has been the driver of the university's recent transformational growth and change. However, all organizations are dynamic entities and require constant and vigilant attention to organizational structure and climate to remain high performing. Strategic priority alignment, key staff departures, budget and other resource challenges, changing workforce and national demographics, technology and many other factors drive organizational change.

Organizations most likely to be successful in utilizing change to their advantage are the ones that no longer view change as a discrete event to be managed, but as a constant opportunity to evolve the business. There is no more important time than now for colleges and universities to take up the call to be "change ready." 

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## Success Factors for Change



Different organizations have their own unique factors that can contribute to a successful change effort, but there are a few "must-haves" that will greatly increase the odds of success.

- 1 Communicating the rationale for change.** Some leaders focus on the crisis aspect of change while others focus on the opportunity aspect. When a leader communicates exclusively about the crisis, people can become paralyzed and believe any change effort is useless. On the other hand, when a leader focuses exclusively on the positives, people can believe that leadership is hiding something from them or they can become more resistant ... if things are so great, why change at all? Effective communication finds the balance between transparency surrounding the challenges that require change and a positive, inspiring vision for how the organization can get through those challenges.
- 2 Clear goals.** What are you trying to accomplish? What does a successful outcome look like? You can't assume there is agreement on this, so be explicit.
- 3 Accountability.** Without accountability, people know they will not be held responsible for their reactions or performance. They may appear to buy in to the change, when in actuality their plan is to simply outlast it (after all, they've seen change come and go before!).
- 4 Internal champions.** Internal champions can contribute to a change effort by serving as a link between leadership and those impacted by change. They can inspire others by displaying their own enthusiasm for what's to come.