



UofT Innovation Hub

Key Insights from Organizational Learning Team

The Innovation Hub's Organizational Learning team formed to better understand the experiences of faculty and staff who support students. During the 2016–17 academic year, team members spoke with staff and faculty working in various divisions and departments across UofT; participants had experience ranging from 6 months to over 25 years. These empathy-based interviews revealed the challenges and stories of faculty and staff who work with students.

Common Staff and Faculty Challenges:

Staff and faculty face some common challenges when supporting students and performing their daily work:

- They may be unaware of student needs and how to best help students or direct them to appropriate resources; some staff and faculty are wary of missing the balance between supporting students and letting students build resilience.
- Training and supervision is inconsistent between departments, making collaboration and communication difficult.
- New staff and faculty feel uncertain of their authority and unclear about directions when starting their role at U of T. They experience a lack of communication about boundaries, limitations, and expectations for success.
- The decentralized nature of the university makes it challenging to build connections.
- The competitive atmosphere fosters animosity by placing departments in competition with one another for resources and recognition.





Insights:

From these challenges, the team drew three key insights about staff and faculty needs, and identified tensions they feel in trying to meet these needs.

Insight 1—Values Alignment: Staff and faculty want to work in an environment where spoken and lived values align. When the values of an organization are consistent, what we believe and how we work are in sync.

Related Staff and Faculty Needs: Honesty, trust, openness

Tension: Collaboration versus competition

Insight 2—Clarity about Success: Staff and faculty look for markers that will tell them whether they are successful at work, especially when working in cross-departmental collaborations.

Related Staff and Faculty Needs: Success measures, boundaries, transparency

Tension: Structure versus flexibility in goal setting and expectations

Insight 3—Connection and Knowledge: The interviews showed a lack of awareness about the resources available on campus, as well as a lack of relationships that encourage information sharing.

Related Staff and Faculty Needs: Assurance, community, institutional knowledge

Tension: Centralized versus decentralized communication and flow of information

Design Principles

Based on the insights they identified, the team created three design principles to use when creating programming and work processes for faculty and staff. These principles will support them in their work with students:

Design Principle 1—Alignment: Ensure stated values align with enacted values

Design Principle 2—Definition: Define success for both the process and the outcome

Design Principle 3—Integration: Integrate efforts by leveraging people and knowledge across campus

Three Ingredients for Success

To simplify these design principles, the team defined three ingredients for success that can be applied to program/service design work:

1. Do what we say we are going to do
2. Clearly define success and how we are going to get there
3. Work from what already exists