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# Diffusion of a Campus Innovation: Integration of a New Student Dispute Resolution Center into the University Culture

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*Campus mediation programs serve a variety of disputes while educating students in alternative dispute resolution. A major challenge to these programs is that of integration into the existing campus structure. This article draws on Everett Rogers's (1983, 1995) theory of the diffusion of innovations to discuss a strategic plan for the integration of a dispute resolution program into the culture of a college campus. Research was based on a program introduced at Temple University using a peer mediation model of conflict management. Guidelines are presented to assist others interested in integrating a student dispute resolution center into their own campus culture.*

The integration of conflict resolution programs on college campuses is gaining prominence in higher education. A conflict management system, or dispute resolution center (DRC), provides a nonadversarial mechanism for handling campus conflicts, educates students, administration, and faculty in alternative dispute resolution (ADR), and may result in the empowerment of students to settle future conflicts in a peaceful manner. Indeed, it has been recently argued that the unique challenges facing institutions of higher education make the campus DRC a necessity rather than a luxury (Douglas, 1998).

Colleges and universities have implemented such programs in a number of different ways. Four common models of campus DRCs include the *peer mediation*

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*model*, in which students are trained to mediate student disputes; the *mediation office*, in which a staff member does the mediation but may have assistants who help with intake or other duties; the *multidoor center*, where disputes are referred to the most appropriate service, such as a hearing panel, ombudsperson, judicial service, or mediator; and the *legal training clinic*, where law students are trained and act as mediators (Warters, 1995a). Each of these conflict management models shares the value of bringing ADR to the campus; residual effects for the university may include increased communication between students and academic affairs offices (Willett, 1998), increased student retention, and a more positive image in the eyes of students and parents. It is therefore not surprising that more and more campuses are developing programs that address conflict education and management (Holton, 1998; Warters, 1995b).

A number of challenges present themselves, however, when a university undertakes such a project. Attendees at a regional conference on peer mediation in higher education held in the spring of 1995 at Temple University identified three major obstacles: (1) reaching students and getting them to see the benefits of ADR, (2) explaining the program to administration, staff, and faculty, and (3) integrating ADR into the current practices used by the system to manage conflicts. Attendees who had successfully introduced programs agreed that, in order to achieve integration, the program must become a recognized part of the campus culture.

When Temple University was preparing to introduce its DRC, called the Conflict Education Resource Team (CERT), a needs assessment was performed to determine the types of conflict present on campus, the procedures currently in place for managing them, and whether or not members of the Temple community perceived these options as successful. The insights gained from talking to campus members were then used to design a course of action for integrating CERT into the Temple culture. The results of this research enabled the development of a strategic plan for CERT's integration. They also offer useful guidelines for other institutions wishing to institute conflict management programs of their own.

### **Theoretical Orientation: The Diffusion of Innovations**

The introduction of a DRC presents the opportunity to use a method of conflict management that was previously unavailable to students and is therefore an *innovation*, defined as "an entity, such as a new technology, idea, product, policy, or program that is introduced to potential users in the organization" (Lewis and Seibold, 1996, p. 131). The successful diffusion of innovations is a complex problem that has been addressed by organizational communication theory. This section provides a brief overview of the theoretical insights from the literature that guided the research for the Temple integration plan.

Everett Rogers (1983, 1995) was a pioneer in the area of diffusion of innovations when he first introduced his theory in 1962. He presented four main

elements in the diffusion of innovations: *the innovation, communication channels, time, and the social system*. Rogers recognized that all parts of a social system are interdependent and that the success of an innovation depends on the target culture's willingness to adopt it. By demonstrating the relationships among the type of innovation, its compatibility with the system, and the nature of the communication channels within the system, Rogers provided the pieces of this process that have stimulated a vast amount of research on innovation topics ranging from the individual to the international in scope. Looking at these three areas more closely will help determine the components that must be examined in order to develop a strategic plan for the diffusion of a DRC through a university system.

**The Nature of the Innovation.** As indicated earlier, the key to the successful diffusion of any innovation is the likelihood of its adoption by the target culture. According to Rogers (1983), this likelihood is largely determined by two components: (1) the innovation's relative advantage over other options and (2) its compatibility with current beliefs, practices, and values. *Relative advantage* is the strength of the reward or punishment associated with adoption of the innovation. Innovations frequently carry status rewards that increase their perceived value and speed their adoption (for example, technological advances; see Kimberly and Evanisko, 1981; Rogers, 1983). The rewards to be gained from innovations that are social or preventive in nature, however, are not immediate and therefore not as readily perceived; these innovations experience a longer time lag for adoption (Cobern, Porter, Leeming, and Dwyer, 1995; Geller, Kalsher, Rudd, and Lehman, 1989; Gregory, 1994).

In the interest of reducing this time frame, researchers have investigated the effect of incentives and target commitment on the rate of innovation diffusion and adoption (Cobern, Porter, Leeming, and Dwyer, 1995; Geller, Kalsher, Rudd, and Lehman, 1989). Rogers (1983) had concluded that, of the two, the former practice of providing an incentive to adopt is less likely to produce quality, long-term adoptions and may run counter to the goal of systemwide integration. Support for the advantages of the "obtaining commitment" strategy was reported by Geller and others (1989) in their study of a campus seat belt campaign. They found that students who had publicly committed to wearing seat belts showed greater duration of seat belt use after the conclusion of the campaign than those who had only been offered the possibility of a prize if seen wearing their seat belt by a campaign official. Cobern and others' (1995) study of grass cycling (not bagging grass clippings) also found that when neighbors made a commitment to persuade others to start cycling, neighborhoods more quickly and extensively adopted the practice.

Another important consideration is how aligned the innovation is with the values, beliefs, practices, and needs of the target culture, in other words, its *compatibility* (Rogers, 1983). The more compatible an innovation is with previous beliefs and practices, the more likely it is to be adopted. Meyer and Goes (1988) point out that in an organizational context it is important to differentiate between

compatibility with current *values*—how system members choose to handle things—and compatibility with *practice*, or current formal procedures. If an innovation differs too much from the previous practice—researchers have termed this *radical innovation* (West and Farr, 1990)—it is likely to require changes in previous ways of thinking and acting. Researchers who have studied the introduction of quality improvement programs have noted that they are often unsuccessful because they require radical changes in basic philosophies (Lewis and Seibold, 1996). This is especially likely to happen when the values of the innovator or management are different from those of the target (Damanpour, 1991; Gregory, 1994; Hage and Dewar, 1973; Kimberly, 1979). This is important, as the goals and values of administration and faculty are not always aligned with those of students, providing a good argument for consulting students before making the decision to implement a DRC (Willett, 1998).

This last point is particularly salient in the case of mediation, as the success of this innovation may rely heavily on its voluntary nature. Although studies have concluded that mediation has high success rates whether mandatory or voluntary (Brett, Barsness, and Goldberg, 1996), there is also evidence that when mediation is made mandatory by university sanctions, its effectiveness decreases because students are less likely to put forth the effort required to reach understanding and settlement (Keltner, 1998). Furthermore, student apathy toward the process defeats mediation's purpose of fostering individual growth and empowerment to settle future conflicts (Bush and Folger, 1994). This voluntary requirement highlights the fact that mediation is based on a cooperative orientation to conflict, whereas the predominant methods used on college campuses are adversarial (Douglas, 1998). The question of compatibility is further exacerbated by the fact that universities are made up of students, administrators, staff, and faculty, and individuals within each of these groups have different attitudes and orientations toward conflict and its management.

***The Nature of the System.*** Because a culture's norms are often barriers to change, the importance of understanding the system cannot be overstated (Rogers, 1983). An important starting point in building an integration plan is to determine potential differences between the norms of the innovator and those of the target group. The more similar the innovator and the target group, the more rapidly the innovation will be diffused (Rogers, 1983). Although the organizational diffusion literature has addressed this relationship and its impact on the time frame for innovation adoption at length, page limitations make a complete review impossible here. One somewhat overstated conclusion that can be drawn, however, is that the larger, more diverse, and more complex the organization, the slower the diffusion process will be (see for example, Baldrige and Burnham, 1975; Corwin, 1975; Fennell, 1984; Kimberly and Evanisko, 1981; King, 1990; Zaltman, Duncan, and Holbek, 1973). This has obvious implications for a university setting, which frequently has these characteristics.

It is also important to note that within any system, adopters fall into different categories and each group has a different role in the diffusion process.

The first to adopt, or *innovators*, are usually perceived as deviant by the rest of the system and therefore should not be relied upon to influence other organizational members. The next to adopt, the *early adopters*, are generally seen as opinion leaders and are more likely to influence others (Rogers, 1983). Researchers have found that the opinions of organization members who are respected and seen as leaders frequently have more influence over employees than executive directors or those with more legitimate power. An important part of the research process is to locate opinion leaders and discover ways to create networks between them and other campus groups.

**Communication Channels.** Rogers (1983) has identified three major communication channels in the diffusion process. Mass communication channels send information to the entire system, or large segments of it, and are generally initiated by the innovator (via mailings, newspaper, or radio, for example). These channels are most valuable at the beginning of the diffusion process when the goal is to spread awareness of the innovation, as well as the need for it. System members must also learn why the innovation is relevant to their lives in order to set the stage for its adoption.

A second channel is the *change agent* (Rogers, 1983), who reaches a wider audience than do peers yet is also able to customize messages for different members of the target group, unlike many mass media channels (Lin and Burt, 1975). Change agents are generally representatives of the innovation, such as peer mediators or DRC administrators in this context. The drawback of the change agent is that recognition of their role as representatives of the innovation tends to result in decreased persuasive power. Nevertheless, the change agent is an important source of information regarding the innovation and how it works.

The third communication channel consists of interpersonal networks, and recent research has found that the communication among organizational members is the primary determinant of whether members will adopt an innovation (Lewis and Seibold, 1996). Such peer and interpersonal networks are most salient once the target population has general knowledge of the innovation and the goal of diffusion becomes to persuade system members to adopt it. Rogers (1983) found that organization members are more likely to trust and be influenced by their peers than by change agents who are perceived as "selling" the innovation.

The degree of *interconnectedness*, or amount of contact among system members, is also highly correlated with the rate of diffusion (Rogers, 1983). In this regard it is important to make use of *weak ties* to connect subgroups within the social system (Rogers, 1983). Weak ties refer to organization members who come from different parts of the system and therefore interact infrequently. Because these members usually have different support networks and access to different resources, they are likely to provide each other with new information and are therefore a critical link between subgroups and the larger system. Opinion leaders represent crucial weak ties between the innovation and the rest of the organization, supporting the centrality of their role in the diffusion of an innovation.

## Summary and Overview of Research Method

According to the literature just reviewed, a strategic plan for the integration of a DRC into a campus culture must include an in-depth understanding of the innovation to be diffused, its compatibility with the target culture, the structure of the organization and its members, and the available communication channels within the system. In order to obtain this understanding, the author conducted a study at Temple University that was guided by the principles of action research (Stringer, 1996). The research agenda included the following components:

**Participant Observation.** At its inception, the Conflict Education Resource Team (CERT) had a core committee and a larger steering committee. Attendance at these monthly meetings for two semesters (eight meetings) allowed the researcher firsthand access to important decision making with regard to CERT itself, its presentation to students, and the various mechanisms being employed to do so. Membership on the core committee also provided the researcher increased credibility when interviewing the Temple community about the innovation.

**Interviews.** Interview data were collected from three different groups in this study. Thirteen university members—administrators and faculty—were chosen on the basis of their history of disseminating information to the student body or familiarity with the organization's culture of conflict management. These interviews were open-ended so that insights could be gained in the areas in which each participant had particular knowledge or interest.

Students were also interviewed to assess their knowledge and perceptions of CERT and ADR. Students were asked to describe their knowledge and experience of conflict on campus, their own responses to conflict, and their ideas regarding methods for presenting CERT to students. Data were collected from student dorm residents as well as commuters, and importantly, these standardized interviews were administered by their peers. A total of 135 students were interviewed in this process.

The final set of interviews was collected from other institutions of higher education having similar dispute resolution centers. Representatives from these centers were interviewed via a message sent through a campus dispute resolution electronic network (CCRNET), as well as telephone interviews administered by CERT interns. This interview process resulted in comparative information regarding the variety of methods used to promote campus DRCs and to attenuate the stigma attached to obtaining help with conflict.<sup>1</sup>

**Document Analysis.** In addition to the meetings attended, written documents in the form of minutes, memos, brochures, and other miscellaneous correspondence regarding CERT were used to gather information. Brochures and other written materials were also collected from interviewees to gain additional insights and increase the reliability of results.

## Guidelines for Integrating a New DRC on Campus

The research program resulted in the presentation of a strategic plan for the integration of CERT into the Temple University community and culture. Although the specifics of that plan will not be reviewed here, generation of the plan also produced a set of guidelines for the integration of a new DRC into the culture of any college or university campus. The following section presents these guidelines, first outlined briefly in Exhibit 1, using the Temple case to illustrate major points.

**Compatibility of the Innovation with the System.** First and foremost, the needs of the system must be assessed in order to determine a DRC's compatibility with current practices and beliefs. This includes talking with administrators and staff in such departments as the residence halls, disciplinary councils, and campus police. These contacts provide valuable information about the types of conflicts that exist on campus and the processes available to manage them, and may show where the existing conflict management options fall short of handling the predominant conflicts. At Temple, for example, the most common type of campus conflict occurs between roommates, yet many of these conflicts are not serious enough to use the formal process or judiciary board. Although resident assistants (RAs) are able to resolve some of these situations, they are not always perceived as neutral and, as a result, the most common method of resolving conflicts is for one roommate to change rooms. Because one of Temple's goals in creating CERT was to improve roommate relationships, this discovery was critical in illustrating the need for an alternative method of conflict management. This example provides one demonstration of how current practices may not be designed to address the most common type of conflict. When these gaps are exposed, they serve as evidence that a DRC is needed on campus.

In addition to convincing campus members of the utility of a DRC, it is also necessary to determine whether or not the predominant beliefs about conflict

### **Exhibit 1. Outline of Guidelines for the Integration of a Campus DRC**

Interview representatives from a variety of campus groups, including administration, staff, faculty, commuter students, residents, and student organizations.

Use interviews to gather information in the following areas:

- Compatibility of a DRC with current practice (needs assessment)
- Compatibility of ADR with current beliefs about conflict and its management
- Identification of opinion leaders to locate weak ties between campus groups
- Identification of potential channels for innovation diffusion and costs associated with their use

Develop materials that position the DRC in a way most compatible with campus needs and beliefs.

Recruit opinion leaders to diffuse the innovation and take advantage of as many diffusion channels as possible on campus.

and its management are concurrent with the values underlying ADR. This information will reveal how difficult "selling" the innovation will be and show which methods for diffusing the innovation are most likely to be successful. Asking various organizational members about their experiences with campus conflict provides a rich source of information about the campus climate, such as whether a more cooperative or competitive climate prevails. Once this information is gathered, it is possible to position the new DRC in a way that will be most appealing and compatible to the target groups.

The Temple study is once again illustrative. Student interviews revealed that many Temple students prefer to avoid rather than confront conflict. Staff and students alike suggested that because Temple students have many responsibilities outside of school, they would rather adjust their schedules (or change dorm rooms) than take the time to work out a conflict. Interviews also revealed, however, that these students frequently experience on-the-job conflict and many have lost a job due to disputes with bosses or co-workers. Temple students are therefore strongly motivated by the desire to obtain a good job and foster better working relationships with employers. Based on this information, it was recommended that CERT form a partnership with Career Services and promote its ability to help students learn to more effectively work with others and retain a job by taking advantage of CERT's services.

Even though this presented a promising way to reach the student population, it is also important to reach campus staff. Interviews revealed that staff members spend a lot of time trying to resolve conflicts and frequently feel overworked and overwhelmed. CERT might therefore be presented to this group as a service that can decrease their work load, which immediately displays the relative advantage of CERT for this subgroup and also increases the possibility that staff members will refer cases and spread the word to others.

Understanding compatibility in this way can also help overcome the resistance of those members who dislike any procedural change. As illustrated in the examples, understanding the challenges that conflict presents to various campus groups can provide valuable information about how to tailor the program to meet individual needs and make system members more amenable to using the DRC or referring it to others.

An effective test of compatibility requires conducting interviews with a wide range of informants in order to obtain useful insights about the campus population and culture. It is also especially important to speak to those staff members who represent currently available conflict management practices to both reduce the possibility of duplicating services and reveal gaps in conflict management needs and practices as described earlier. Speaking with these informants has the additional benefit of revealing the general orientations to conflict and its management that are present among the different groups on campus. To help summarize this section, a brief list of the groups or departments that may provide this information, along with the main questions each can answer, is provided in Table 1.



**Table 1. Obtaining Answers to Questions About Compatibility**

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Questions to Ask</i>
Housing staff and resident assistants	What types of conflicts do you see? How are they resolved? What do you do when you cannot resolve them on your own, but they do not involve a policy violation?
Leader of disciplinary committee Campus police	What types of conflicts do you see? How are they resolved? Who do you refer them to when they do not involve a policy or law violation?
Human resources staff	How do employees typically resolve conflicts? When are you called in to assist? How do you try to assist or train others to manage conflicts?
Faculty union president	What types of faculty conflicts exist? How are these generally resolved? Do you see the utility of alternative forms of dispute resolution?
Students	What types of conflicts do you face on campus? How do you generally manage them? Would you use the DRC if available? When would you use it?

***Understanding the Nature of the System and Its Components.*** Vital to the successful diffusion of any innovation is the ability to garner support from all system components and obtain member commitment to share the new information with others. It is therefore necessary to identify the major campus subgroups and the likely opinion leaders within each. This can be accomplished through the use of a “snowball sample,” in which interviewees offer the names of other people in the institution who, they believe, would provide needed information, as well as be interested in and benefit from the innovation. Each of these contacts helps diffuse the innovation even more, assists in developing organizational buy-in for the DRC, and provides access to opinion leaders.

Although Temple University is a large urban institution, the major system components are similar to those of most college campuses: students, faculty, administration, and staff. Of course, within these groups the subpopulations may vary. Among students there might be commuters, residents, full- and part-time students, fraternity and sorority members, athletes, student club members, and so forth. Faculty are segmented by discipline; staff and administration embody different subcultures as well. Throughout the research process it is

therefore necessary to identify these groups and their leaders—those who will be most likely to influence others to adopt the innovation.

To illustrate how research can provide insight here, a meeting with the CERT steering committee revealed that fifth-year athletes present a group of individuals who, at Temple, are frequently well respected by the younger athletes and are motivated to get involved in activities that enable them to “give back” to the school. This group is therefore an ideal target to recruit as opinion leaders because athletes are more likely to accept the recommendations of their teammates than those of a coach or CERT representative.

Other possible opinion leaders in the university system might include fraternity and sorority presidents, advisers, or RAs. Interviews may also reveal less apparent candidates. Commuter students at Temple, for example, said that they are often amenable to following the recommendation of a faculty member they trust. Faculty represent a vital campus connection for commuters, who spend limited time on campus and are therefore unlikely to learn about the innovation from other sources. Identifying faculty members as opinion leaders for commuters was a particularly significant finding for Temple because an interviewee had indicated that faculty often feel left out of the loop regarding new campus events and programs. Analysis of the student and faculty interviews, therefore, revealed that a key to reaching commuter students is through faculty, pinpointing them as an important group to target in CERT’s diffusion efforts. Once again, it is only through speaking with members of the campus community that such information can be gleaned, and it is crucial to successful integration of the DRC.

**Networking the Components.** The final element of the research process is identification of the communication channels available to diffuse the innovation. Questions regarding how administration and staff have communicated with university members in the past and how students and faculty learn about campus programs and policies can be woven into the interviews to collect this information throughout the research process. Compiling a list of possible channels and learning the costs (not to mention logistics) associated with each is the practical element that allows the final strategic plan to be developed.

It is important to recall that three types of channels will be important: mass communication, change agent, and interpersonal. It may be necessary to interview representatives of some of the channels in order to find out whom they reach and how many, and to determine which channels should be used during different stages of the diffusion process. It is important to start with mass communication channels to spread general awareness of the new program as quickly as possible. The unique characteristics of a college campus, however, require constant use of some mass channels, as large groups of new students are continually arriving. In fact, the complexity of the university system requires the use of a variety of communication options in order to reach as many members of the community as possible and forge the desired networks among campus groups.

Table 2 provides a list of communication channels that might be available on a variety of college campuses, based on the research at Temple. Once the relative advantage of the DRC has been identified, along with an understand-

**Table 2. Possible Channels Available for Diffusion on a College Campus**

Mass Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Banners in student union</li> <li>Brochures (sent to department offices, given out in large quantities)</li> <li>Direct mail</li> <li>E-mail</li> <li>Fliers (on bulletin boards, kiosks, doors, classrooms)</li> <li>Handbills (passed out in high-traffic areas)</li> <li>Information fairs</li> <li>Information tables in student union</li> <li>Paycheck stuffers</li> <li>Posters on kiosks</li> <li>Student activity calendars</li> <li>Student handbooks</li> <li>Student organization mailboxes</li> <li>Student and faculty newspapers</li> <li>Electronic message boards</li> <li>University relations fax hotline</li> <li>Radio station</li> </ul>
Change Agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom presentations</li> <li>Greek organization workshops</li> <li>Networking with faculty, staff, and administration</li> <li>New-employee orientation</li> <li>New-student orientation</li> <li>Open houses (for prospective students)</li> <li>Athletes' workshops</li> <li>Panhellenic council presentation</li> <li>Peer or core committee informal networks</li> <li>Presentations to faculty senate</li> <li>Presentation to student affairs directors</li> <li>RA presentations</li> <li>Student government training</li> <li>Visits to high schools (for prospective students)</li> <li>Workshops for residence hall floors</li> </ul>
Interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advisers</li> <li>Faculty presentations and discussions with students</li> <li>Fifth-year athletes</li> <li>Freshman seminar courses</li> <li>Student organization presidents</li> <li>RAs</li> <li>Satisfied customers (word of mouth)</li> <li>Staff (coaches, tutors)</li> <li>Steering committee networks</li> </ul>

ing of the system components and the networks that can be made to link them, all the tools are in place to develop a strategic plan for diffusing the innovation and beginning the integration process. In order to illustrate how this might be accomplished, the final section provides selected examples from the plan devised for Temple in each of the three channels. The final table (Table 3) provides a summary of each suggestion, its timeline, and its benefit, in order of the amount of resources needed for successful implementation.

### **Recommendations for Diffusing a Campus DRC**

The following suggestions were generated as a result of the research at Temple University and have been adapted so they are applicable to a variety of campuses. A major consideration for the use of any diffusion channel is, of course, the DRC's available resources. The ideas presented in each section to follow are therefore listed in order, from those requiring minimal effort to those having greater costs in terms of monetary or human resource demands.

**Mass Communication Channels.** The following are effective means of communication:

*Electronic message boards.* These boards flash relatively brief messages in high-traffic locations such as the student union or cafeterias. Although they cannot supply a lot of information, they do attract attention and serve as a reminder of the DRC's availability. Electronic boards and other types of campus signs are appropriate mechanisms for spreading knowledge of the DRC and can be used to complement other diffusion efforts throughout the year. Getting a message on the board will probably require making a reservation at the beginning of each semester and agreeing to be rotated with other messages throughout the year as space permits. On the plus side, advertising the program this way is often free.

*Direct mail to organizational leaders.* This is somewhere between a true mass communication channel and change agent channel, but the idea is to send information directly to the mailboxes of all student organization leaders. The letter should provide information about the service to students who are likely to be opinion leaders and are therefore an important network in the diffusion process. Letters should introduce the DRC and offer a free conflict management workshop for each campus organization. This gains the change agents' entry into each student organization to network directly with students, in addition to having opinion leaders diffuse the innovation.

*Direct mail to faculty department heads.* In addition to reaching student organizations, faculty assistance in diffusing the innovation must also be sought. DRC representatives should therefore send information about their services to faculty department heads in order to provide initial information and to try to get invited to a faculty meeting. A presentation of the DRC's services and benefits at a faculty senate meeting may also help recruit faculty as allies for the program.

**Table 3. Summary of Recommendations in Order of the Amount of Resources Required**

<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Benefit</i>
Electronic message board	During a special event or year round	Reaches entire system to act as a reminder of the innovation
Direct mail to organizational leaders, department heads, and advisers	At least once a year to student organizations, as needed with others	Creates a link between the innovation and opinion leaders who may have influence with students
Classroom presentations	As often as possible each academic year	Creates awareness or reminder for hard-to-reach students such as commuters
Freshman orientation	Each August and January	Creates awareness among new members
New-employee orientation	Year round	Creates awareness among new members
Recruiting open houses	Whenever they occur	Provides information to potential system members who will view the DRC as a part of the system
Information fairs	Each fall and spring	Serves dual function of creating awareness for those who have not heard of the DRC and as a reminder
Workshops and training sessions	As often as possible among the various student groups	Provides knowledge and creates awareness among students who diffuse the innovation to other students
Newspapers and radio	Radio only if there is a specific event; newspaper each fall "Welcome Back" issue, possibly during midterms and finals	Reaches large number of students to create awareness and acts as a reminder during high-stress periods
Student affairs reception	One day during lunchtime or early evening	Provides an opportunity to network and gain allies among the department heads within the division of student affairs

*Direct mail to student advisers.* In addition to faculty, student advisers provide a link between system components as they have daily and on-going student contact. Advisers may also be aware of conflict brewing between students and faculty. It is therefore imperative that this group be made aware of the DRC's services in order to encourage them to refer students to the program.

*Freshman and new-employee orientations.* In a university setting where new students and employees are constantly arriving, it is especially important for the DRC to have a presence in each orientation session. Information about the DRC should be provided by a change agent if possible, but due to time constraints it is more likely that the DRC will have to provide written materials in new-student and employee information packets. To help increase integration, information should also be written into any existing university bulletins such as the student handbook or employee manual.

*Information fairs.* DRCs should participate in campus information fairs that often take place each spring and fall. They serve as a reminder of the DRC to the entire campus population, whether the student is in the initial "knowledge" stage or a later "reminder" stage of the innovation decision process.

*Radio and newspapers.* Although neither of these options were widely recommended by interviewees, there are advantages to using these media to create awareness of the DRC when resources permit. As with the orientation programs discussed, this is a good way to present the DRC as part of the campus culture and speed the integration process. Newspapers may also be beneficial as a reminder of the DRC's availability during midterm and final exams—times when many students noted that there is increased stress and conflict.

**Change Agent Channels.** The following are additional ways of presenting information about DRCs.

*Classroom presentations.* It is highly unlikely that faculty members will be comfortable presenting information about a DRC on their own due to their limited contact with the program. Many instructors and faculty, however, may be willing to have a representative of the DRC come into their classrooms to do a brief presentation about conflict management and the DRC's services. In-class presentations are the best way to reach commuter students who, as mentioned previously, are likely to come to campus for classes only. Although change agents may not be as persuasive as opinion leaders, direct contact by DRC representatives allows for a more personalized presentation and the opportunity to answer student questions on the spot.

*High school or other recruiting open houses.* DRCs should make an effort to be included in open house presentations that are given at area high schools to recruit new students. This is especially important because many high schools have peer mediation programs and these students might be familiar with the mediation concept; when they arrive at the university, they will already be aware of the DRC and possibly be prepared to use it if necessary. As more new students arrive, this should increase the rate of integration for the DRC. New students will view it as part of the university culture.

*Workshops and training opportunities.* The peer mediators provide important information about the DRC and constructive conflict resolution every time they perform a workshop or are involved in a student training program. The workshops are therefore another excellent method of diffusing information about the DRC while simultaneously spreading the message about the possible benefits to be derived from conflict. Aside from the actual mediation or coaching sessions themselves, these probably provide the best opportunity to change the student culture of conflict management.

Recruiting workshop attendees as ambassadors for the DRC should always be a prominent goal of the DRC agents. It is especially important to hold workshops for students identified as opinion leaders among their respective groups such as RAs, athletes, fraternity and sorority leaders, student orientation leaders, student organization leaders, and student government leaders. When these students are persuaded of the advantages of the DRC, they provide an important link between the innovation and their respective student groups.

*Reception for student affairs department heads.* Hosting a reception for student affairs staff might require more resources than available, but it has a number of benefits. For one, offering food or beverages is a good way to get attention and attendance at an informative session. There are typically several department heads within the division of student affairs, each of whom have staff members who work with students on a regular basis. These people definitely need to know about the DRC and should be recruited as allies for the program. A reception would therefore be more influential for this purpose than another piece of paper in their mailbox. If existing funds preclude the possibility of such a function, student affairs personnel might instead be reached through a presentation at a director's meeting. One important part of a presentation directed toward this group would be to emphasize how the DRC can lighten their workload by providing a place to refer students who come to them for assistance.

*Interpersonal Channels.* There are not many "strategic" recommendations that can be made in this area, as these are the informal networks that come into play once there is awareness of the innovation on campus. The use of interpersonal channels largely depends on earlier success in forming networks among the different components of the university system. According to Rogers's theory, once the early adopters have adopted the innovation, they should begin to persuade other members of the system to adopt. In order to achieve a faster rate of adoption, it is important to keep in mind that although some of the ideas noted here may be done in "one shot," other networking efforts must be continuous in order to reach new students, staff, and faculty as they enter the system.

Because successful conflict management can enhance campus life in all segments of the college or university, it is imperative that administration, staff, and faculty be aware of the DRC and their conflict management options (Rifkin, 1998). Key people in each of these groups may be able to successfully

refer others to the DRC, which is often reported as the best way to diffuse the innovation. Some examples of key members include human resources staff, faculty senate leaders, and the president of a faculty union, if applicable. These people not only have influence but also have direct experience with conflict as it arises and may therefore be vital to helping change the culture of conflict management within the university system.

## Conclusion and Summary

As has been discussed repeatedly throughout this article, successful diffusion of an innovation requires the use of three types of channels. As campus members begin to adopt the innovation, more and more networking should result in increased diffusion and adoption of the innovation throughout the system. In order to ensure that this process occurs, there are certain actions the change agents must take to make sure that the innovation is successfully integrated into the system and not allowed to fall into discontinuance due to insufficient information.

The preceding plan includes recommendations for some of the strategic moves that could be made by a DRC to reach the following goals: create awareness of its services, recruit allies for referrals and increased networking, and ensure that the diffusion process is continuous. These processes are all vitally important to a university culture, which requires the use of numerous networks to link its diverse, continually changing population.

## Note

1. I would like to acknowledge the schools that participated in this round of interviews by responding to the CCRNET request or speaking with CERT interns: Baltimore City Community College, Boise State University, Bridgewater State College, Brigham Young University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Montclair University, North Central College–Illinois, University of Massachusetts–Amherst, University of Oregon, University of Victoria, Western Michigan, and Wright State. These schools have programs ranging from informal student conflict resolution groups to ombuds programs, and many use peer mediation models similar to that used by CERT. Thank you for providing ideas and sharing your experiences with integrating conflict resolution programs at your institutions.

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