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Research Spotlight - NISTS Award Winner

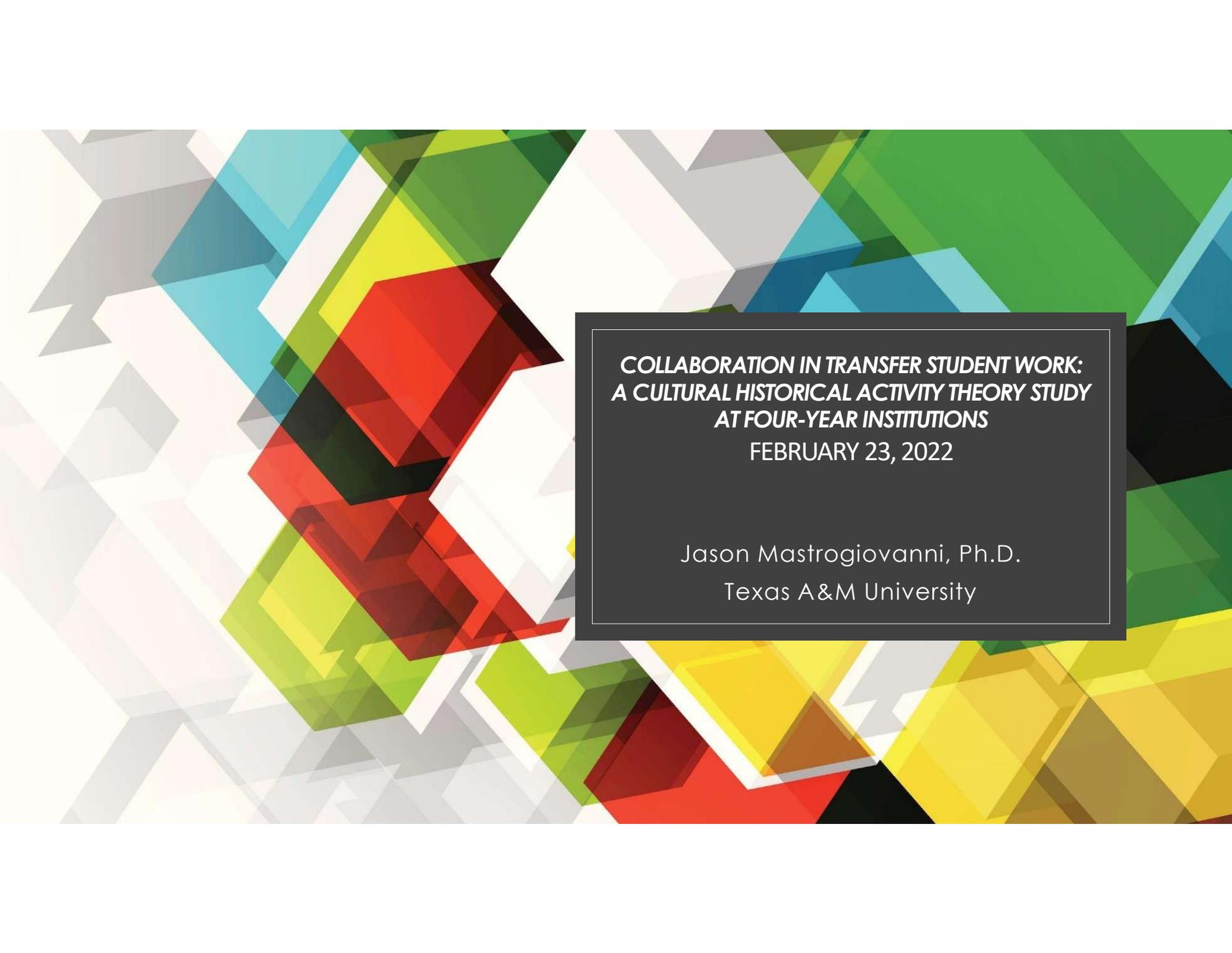
2309 - Collaboration in Transfer Student Work: A Cultural Historical Activity Theory Study at Four-Year Institutions

Partnerships and Collaboration, Leadership and Strategic Planning

Practitioner ability to effectively collaborate with colleagues inside and outside of the institution is a critical function of creating and sustaining transfer student programs and services. This session will share results from a research study on the practice of collaboration in transfer student work from the four-year institution perspective. Interviews and documents from practitioners engaged in transfer student work at two institutions will be analyzed using qualitative methods and an Activity Systems Analysis (ASA) framework.

Jason Mastrogiovanni, *Executive Director, Office for Student Success*

Texas A&M University



**COLLABORATION IN TRANSFER STUDENT WORK:
A CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY STUDY
AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS**

FEBRUARY 23, 2022

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Texas A&M University

Collaboration in Transfer Student Work: A Cultural Historical Activity Theory Study at Four-Year Institutions

- Partnered with NISTS – Research Grant 2020
- Partnered with JNGI – Institutional Site broker
 - Foundations of Excellence for Transfer Students (Transfer-in) Institutions
- Dialogue about the findings – Collaboration, Transfer, and maybe FoE
 - This study focused on how “transfer-affirming cultures” (Handel, 2011) are **established and sustained** through these collaborations, with particular attention to the collaborative actions within and from the perspective of the four-year institution which appears to need more elaboration in the literature at this point.

Significance of the Study

COLLABORATION RESEARCH

- Internal motivations and context
- Group-culture and activity-culture
- New theoretical context and implied methodology for collaboration research

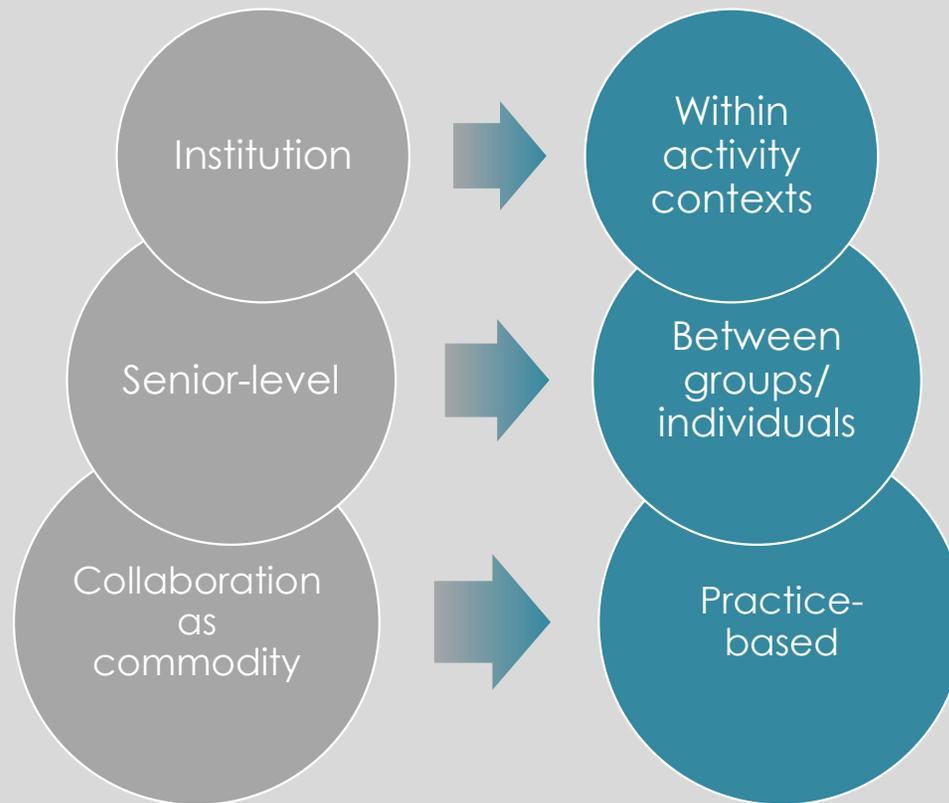
Klein, 2017; Youngs, 2017

TRANSFER RESEARCH

- Shine a light on the role of 4-year institutions in cross-institutional transfer activity

Handel, 2011; Jain et al., 2020

Problem – Collaboration Lens



Kezar, 2001,
2003, 2005b;
Bensimon &
Neumann, 1992;

Whitt et al., 2008;
Arcelus, 2008;
Klein 2017;
Youngs 2017

Problem – Transfer Lens



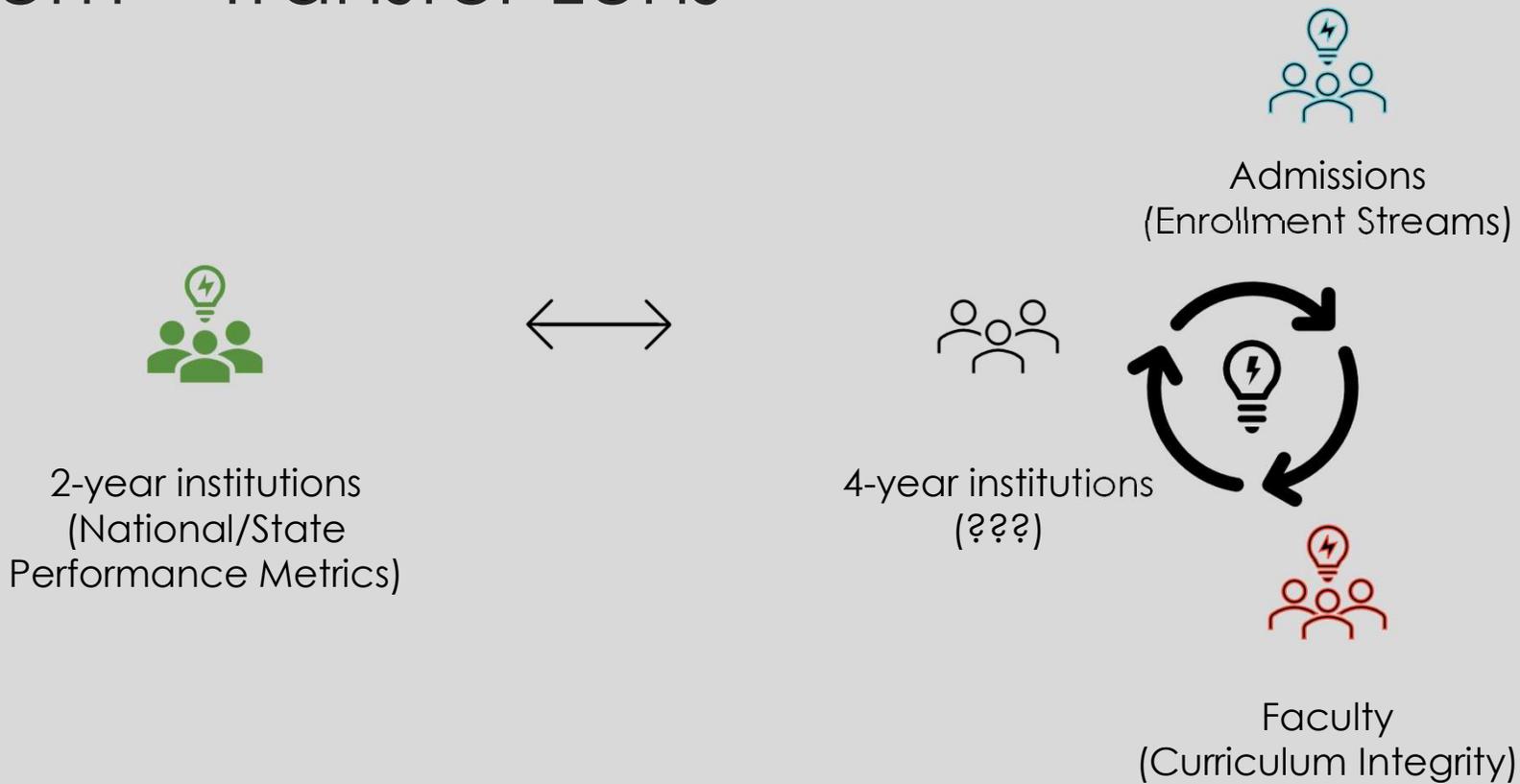
2-year institutions
(National/State
Performance Metrics)



4-year institutions
(???)

Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Handel, 2011; Jain et al., 2020

Problem – Transfer Lens



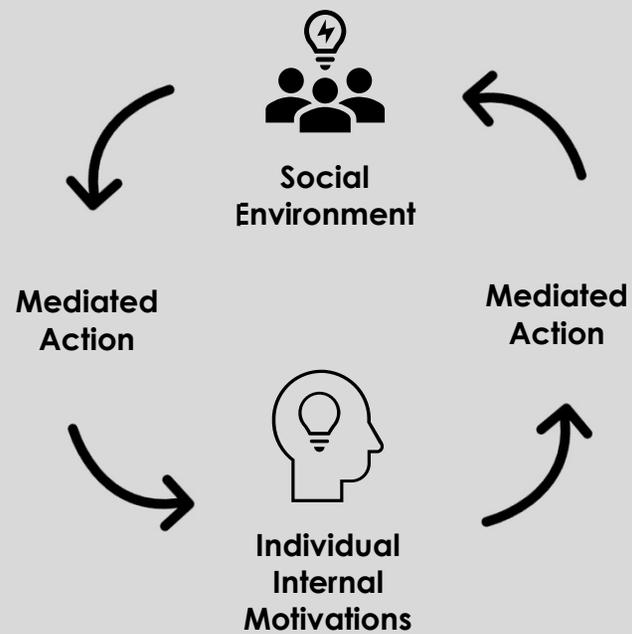


Purpose

Motive directed actions of individual educators at the 4-year institution when engaged in cross-institutional transfer activity

Theoretical Context

CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (CHAT)



Engeström, 2001;
Vygotsky, 1930/1978

Theoretical Context

CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (CHAT)



Engeström, 2001

Methodological Overview

Qualitative Case Study

Population

- Institutions
(FoE transfer self-study)
- Participants
(FoE participants)

Data Collection

- Documents (FoEtec)
- Interviews

Incentives

- NISTS Grant
- \$50 gift card for Interview
- \$50 gift card for transcript review

Data Analysis

- Constant Comparative
(Charmaz, 2014)
- Activity Systems Analysis
(Yamagata-Lynch, 2010)



FINDINGS



How do educators in four-year institutions contribute toward collaborative, cross-institutional transfer activity?

What motives do educators share while participating in the cross-institutional transfer activity?

How do educator motives differ while participating in the cross-institutional transfer activity based on their organizational goals and shared norms?



How do educator motives in the four-year institution influence the cross-institutional transfer outcomes?

Research Questions

Emergent Themes

The Value of
Including Others

Communication
and
Internal Perception
of Progress

Differences in
Institutional
and Educator
Motivations

Private University

- “Metro CC” included as members
- Strong institutional inclusion
- New employee “Darren” immediately added to dimension group
- Student voices not present

State University

- Advisor inclusion beneficial for understanding student exp.
- Perception that committee was formed by who the leaders knew
- Student affairs employee “Ingrid” advocated for lost voices and was successful in getting added
- Student and CC voices not present

The Value of Including Others

Four Manifestations

Learning from Others

Empathizing with Different Perspectives

Forming Relationships

Lament of Lost Voices

Activity Systems

Private University Activity System

Darren's Inclusion and Trust Activity

Ingrid's Activity

Private University

- Covid was a communication challenge, but grace was given
- Faculty “Esther” and “Stanley” given agency to work with counterparts at “Metro CC”
- Faculty “Esther” and “Margaret” valued transparent communication from leadership

State University

- Covid was a communication challenge, but skepticism took hold
- Some indication that communication breakdowns in FoE process led to “leadership-voiced” final report
- “Valerie” de facto leader of continuation historical external communicator now responsible for internal communication

Communication and Internal Perception of Progress

Three Manifestations

Communication Amongst Grass Roots Community

Leadership Role in Internal Communication

External Factors in Communication of Progress

Activity Systems

Esther's Communication and Trust Activity

State University Activity System

Valerie's Lack of Communication and Skepticism Activity

Institutional Motivations

- Enrollment and institutional finances a common theme
- “Chris” and “Tim” from State – Competition and declining high school population
- “Margaret” from Private – Metro students' sense of belonging

Educator Motivations

- Varied, but not enrollment or
- “Esther” – personal, former transfer student
- “Tim” from State – Existential

Differences in Institutional and Educator Motivations

Manifestations

Institutional Motivations

Educator Motivations

Activity Systems

Tim's Existential Activity



DISCUSSION

*Implications for
Transfer
Student Work
in 4-year
Institutions*

1. Intentional **inclusion** may build **trust** within the 4-year institution activity.

- or -

The intentional or unintentional **exclusion** of groups may instill **skepticism** within the 4-year institution activity.

2. The **lack of internal communication** may instill **skepticism** within the 4-year institution activity.

3. Intentional **inclusion** may defend against the establishment of **skepticism** within the 4-year institution activity.

Structures vs. Collaborative Practice

- Four-year recommended structures – Stempel, 2013
- Advisory boards and improve comm - Burack et al., 2014
- State participant – Valerie - State wanted JNGI to provide “answer”
- State participant – Chris – Skeptical of Transfer Implementation Group

Defining Roles Internally & Externally at Four-Year Institutions

- Reflecting on my positionality – Group-culture not necessarily silos
- State participant – Valerie – pre-existing role as external communicator
- State participants – Adrienne & Chris – Explained TIG

*Implications for
Transfer
Student Work
in 4-year
Institutions*

Boundary Spanning (Inclusion)

- Border crossing – Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1994
- Bilingual/cultural – Barr & Fried, 1981; Fried, 1995
- Boundary spanning – Klein, 2017; Engeström, 2008
- Private participant – Esther's relationship with institutional leaders
- State participant – Ingrid's agency – “expert generalist”

Empathetic Perspective Taking (Inclusion & Trust)

- Cognitive Functions - Bensimon & Neumann, 1992
- Private participant – Darren extends trust to Metro CC
- Private participant – Stanley thinks about future Metro CC collab

Perception of Progress (Internal Communication)

- Vague notion “attend to culture” – Kezar, 2005b
- State participants – Chris, Tim, & Ingrid – Lack of comm & skepticism
- State participant – Valerie – Dual roles; de facto leader & lay person

*Collaborative
Practice*

Questions?

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Supplemental Slides

Institutional Sites

“Private University”

- Foundations of Excellence Self-Study in 2019
 - Partnered with “Metro Community College”
- Private, religious-affiliated, four-year institution
- Undergrad enrollment - 1,500-3,000 students.
- Urban area location
- Master's university w/ medium programs (Carnegie)
- In-state tuition is more than \$35,000.
- Transfer students 9% of the incoming student pop.
- Transfer admissions requirements:
 - 2.5 GPA
 - at least 15 transfer credits

“State University”

- Foundations of Excellence Self-Study in 2019
 - Two-year represented through “Valerie”
- Public, four-year institution
- Undergrad enrollment - 10,000-15,000 students.
- Suburban area location
- Doctoral university (Carnegie)
- In-state tuition is less than \$12,000.
- Transfer students 22% of the incoming student pop.
- Transfer admissions requirements:
 - 2.0 GPA
 - at least 12 transfer credits

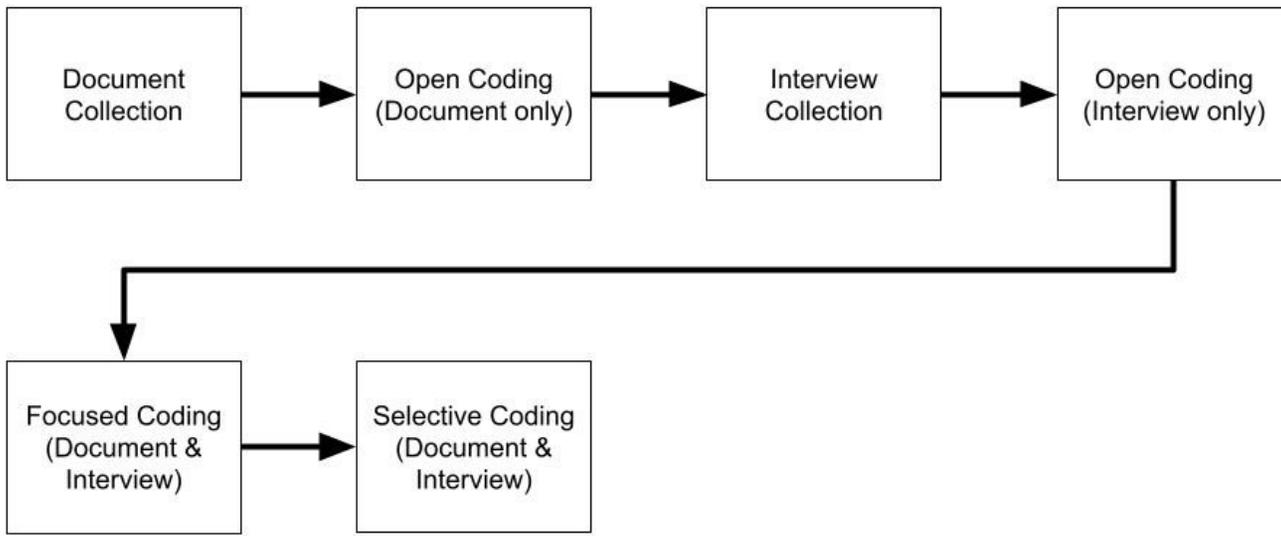
Participants

“Private University”

“Darren”	Academic Affairs Middle Manager Committee Member
“Stanley”	Faculty Middle Manager Committee Chair
“Esther”	Faculty Front-Line Committee Chair
“Jill”	Academic Affairs Senior-Level Committee Chair
“Margaret”	Faculty Front-Line Committee Chair

“State University”

“Chris”	Enrollment Management Middle Manager Committee Chair
“Ingrid”	Student Affairs Middle Manager Committee Member
“Adrienne”	Academic Affairs Front-Line Committee Chair
“Valerie”	Academic Affairs Middle Manager Committee Chair
“Tim”	Academic Affairs Front-Line Committee Member



Collection and Analysis Order

Open Coding

Activity Systems Analysis

- ASA-Action
- ASA-Community
- ASA-Division of Labor
- ASA-Object
- ASA-Outcome
- ASA-Rules
 - ASA-Covid
- ASA-Subject
- ASA-Tension
- ASA-Tool

Collaborative Qualities

- CQ-Actionable
- CQ-Barrier Elimination
- CQ-Change
- CQ-Collaborative Hist.
- CQ-Communication
- CQ-Compromise
- CQ-Documentation
- CQ-Feedback
- CQ-Generative
- CQ-Good Data Story
- CQ-Improvement
- CQ-Inclusion of Others
- CQ-Incremental
- CQ-Institutional Size
- CQ-Intentionality
- CQ-Learning
- CQ-Name Collab.
- CQ-Perspective Taking
- CQ-Relationships
- CQ-Sharing Info
- CQ-Supportive Env.
- CQ-Time Invested
- CQ-Trust

Motivation

- MO-Assessment Data
- MO-Complaints
- MO-Consistency
- MO-External Pressure
- MO-Financial Benefit
- MO-Improvement
- MO-Institutional Status
- MO-Intrinsic
- MO-Making Decisions
- MO-Need Understand
- MO-Resource Shortage
- MO-ROI
- MO-Service
- MO-Student Belong
- MO-Student Diversity
- MO-Student Enrollment
- MO-Student Equity
- MO-Student Experience
- MO-Student Know.
- MO-Student Metric
- MO-Student Prep
- MO-Unrelated

UnCollaborative Qualities

- UQ-Barriers
- UQ-Buy-in
- UQ-Competition
- UQ-Different Values
- UQ-Discrim/Exclusion
- UQ-Hist. Invocation
- UQ-Hopelessness
- UQ-Not Priority
- UQ-Not Sharing Info
- UQ-Outsourcing
- UQ-Poor Comm.
- UQ-Poor Data Story
- UQ-Poor Service
- UQ-Reactionary
- UQ-Resistance to Chg.
- UQ-Silos
- UQ-Skepticism
- UQ-Status Quo
- UQ-Top Down

Transfer Elements (Old Recommendations)

- REC-Academic Support
- REC-Administrator
- REC-Admissions
- REC-Advising
- REC-Articulation
- REC-Assessment
- REC-Bridge Initiatives
- REC-CC
- REC-Communication
- REC-Coordination
- REC-Curriculum Align.
- REC-Early Alert
- REC-Employee Diver.
- REC-Faculty
- REC-Family Services
- REC-Financial Aid
- REC-Governing Body
- REC-Grass Roots
- REC-Infrastructure
- REC-Investment
- REC-Learning Exp.
- REC-Marketing
- REC-Mentorship
- REC-Orientation
- REC-Policy Alignment
- REC-PostMatric
- REC-PreMatric
- REC-Relationships
- REC-Representation
- REC-Residence
- REC-Reverse Transfer
- REC-Rewards
- REC-Seminar
- REC-Shared Value
- REC-Student Cmty.
- REC-System
- REC-Transfer Students
- REC-Understand

Focused Coding

Activity Systems Analysis

- ASA-Action
- ASA-Community
- ASA-Division of Labor
- ASA-Object
- ASA-Outcome
- ASA-Rules
 - ASA-Covid
- ASA-Subject
- ASA-Tension
- ASA-Tool

VIO - Value of Including Others

- Learning from Others
- Empathetic Perspective
- Forming Relationships
- Lament of Lost Voices

CIP - Communication and Progress

- Grass Roots Comm
- Leadership Comm
- External Factors

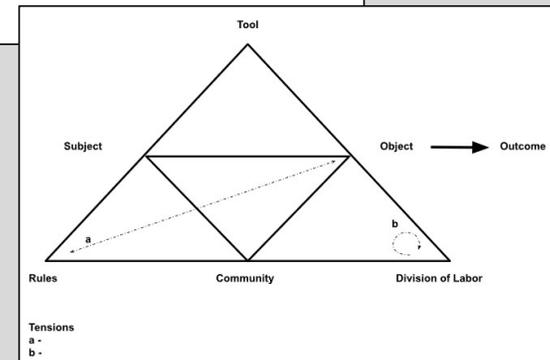
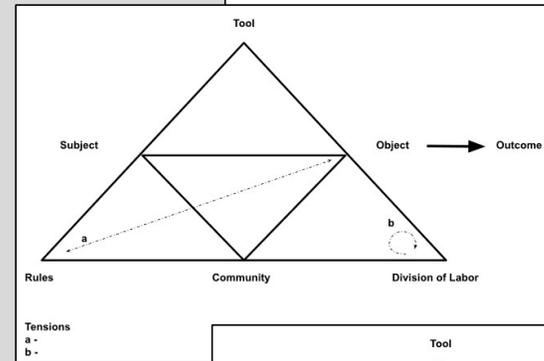
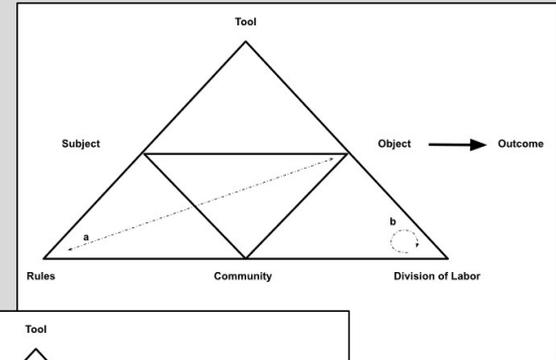
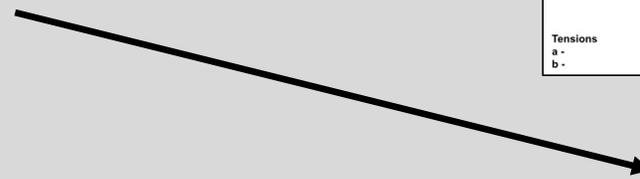
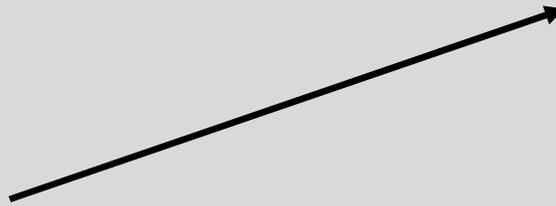
DIEM - Different Institutional and Educator Motivations

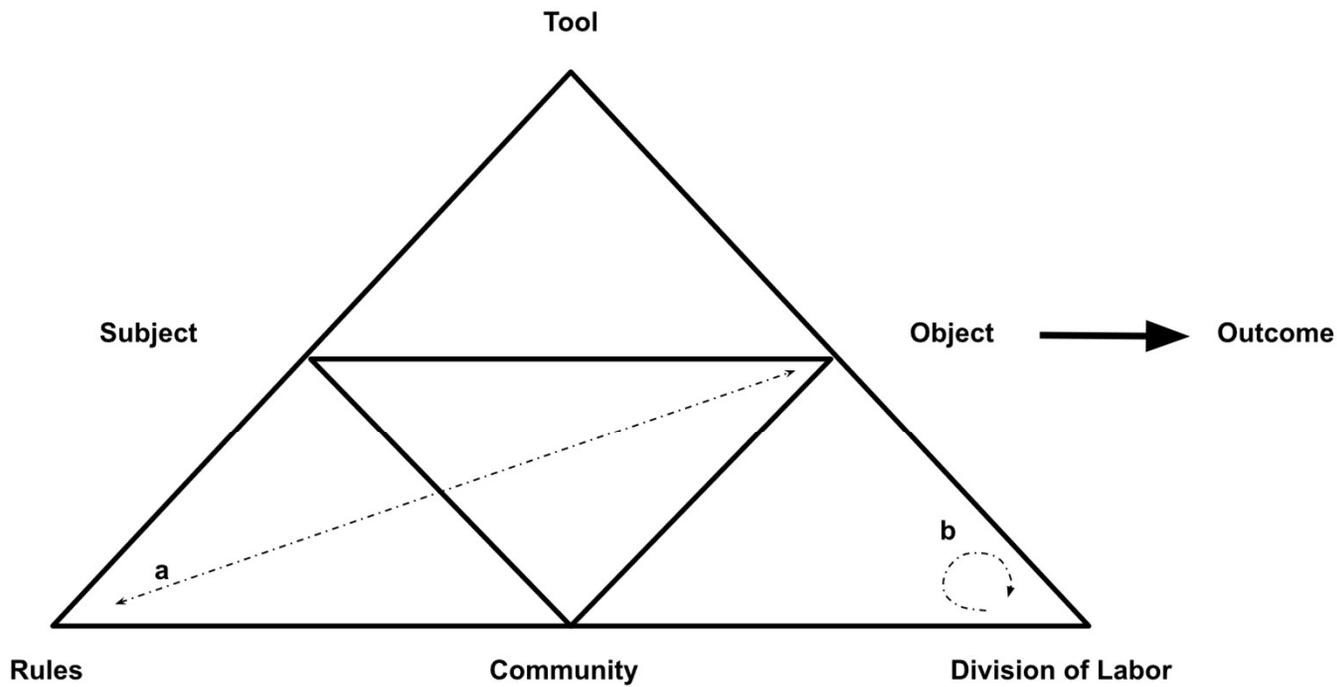
- Institutional Motivations
- Educator Motivations

Selective Coding

Activity Systems Analysis

- ASA-Action
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 - ASA-Covid
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- ASA-Tension
- ASA-Tool





Tensions

a -

b -

Activity Systems Analysis

Yamagata-Lynch 2010;

Engeström, 2015;

Leon'tev, 1974/1981;

Vygotsky, 1930/1978

Example Manifestations - The Value of Including Others

Learning from Others - Valerie from State – Learning about email

- *Valerie described an improvement made to an email user-interface. The institution was trying to figure out why students were not checking their email. She said that it was from advisors that they learned the interface needed to be explicit for students because the existing interface did not use the word “email”.*

Empathizing with Different Perspectives - Darren from Private – Two-year needs

- *“if we're going to collaborate effectively with another partner it can't be all about us. So, making sure we're thinking about what our partners need, how we can support our partners so that they're not just coming to serve our ends and our goals. So, make sure you're asking your partners, what do they need? how can we help them? how can we support them? Because they have goals, too, and maybe we can collaborate and support their goals.”*

Forming Relationships - Margaret from Private – Reflected on first name basis

- *“He's also the [specific title] and maybe something else in his title. I call him [Name]. ... She runs our [student affairs] office, and she has some title that starts with Dean of something, but again I know her as [Name]. So, we don't bother much with titles at [Private], I'm finding out as I'm telling you this.”*

Lament of Lost Voices - Ingrid from State – Insight into who needed to be included

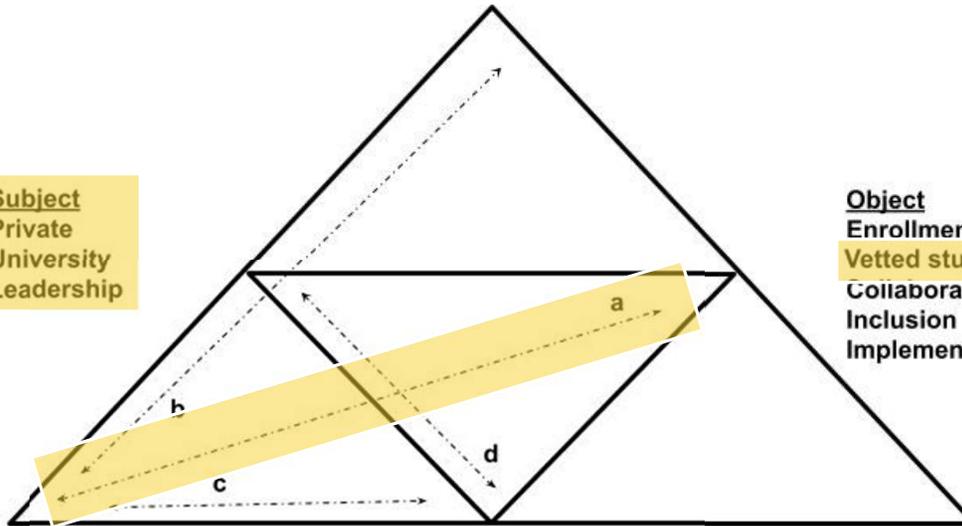
- *This department might be a good department to have here because they're interconnected in this specific way. Maybe not as much as records is or financial aid is, but their vantage point might offer a very specific lens that is able to carry the conversation further.*

Tool
FoE self-study
Survey, Focus group
Feedback meetings

Subject
Private
University
Leadership

Object
Enrollment/Financial
Vetted study
Collaboration with Two-year partner
Inclusion
Implementation

Outcome
Trust
Agency to act on
curricular relationships



Rules
COVID restrictions
Curriculum policy
State policy
Include broadly
Communicate proactively/ openly

Community
Metro Community College
Competitor institutions
Student voices
Student advisee
Dimension group co-chairs
Steering committee
Faculty - Stanley, Esther, Margaret
AA - Darren, Jill

Division of Labor
Empower academic programs
Include others
Dedicated adult education resources

Tensions

- a - Covid restrictions prevented focus group and feedback meeting tool from occurring as intended
- b - Covid restrictions prevented communication of progress
- c - University and state transfer policy affects different students differently
- d - Faculty are frustrated that adult education was cancelled

Tool
FoE self-study
Survey

Subject
Darren

Object
New, Happy to say "yes"
Learn campus
Make connections
Communication on progress

Outcome
Campus network
Trust
Extra-campus network

Rules
COVID restrictions

Community
Dimension group
Steering committee
Leadership
Metro Community College

Division of Labor
Outsider perspective
Inclusion

Darren's Perceived
Metro Institution Activity

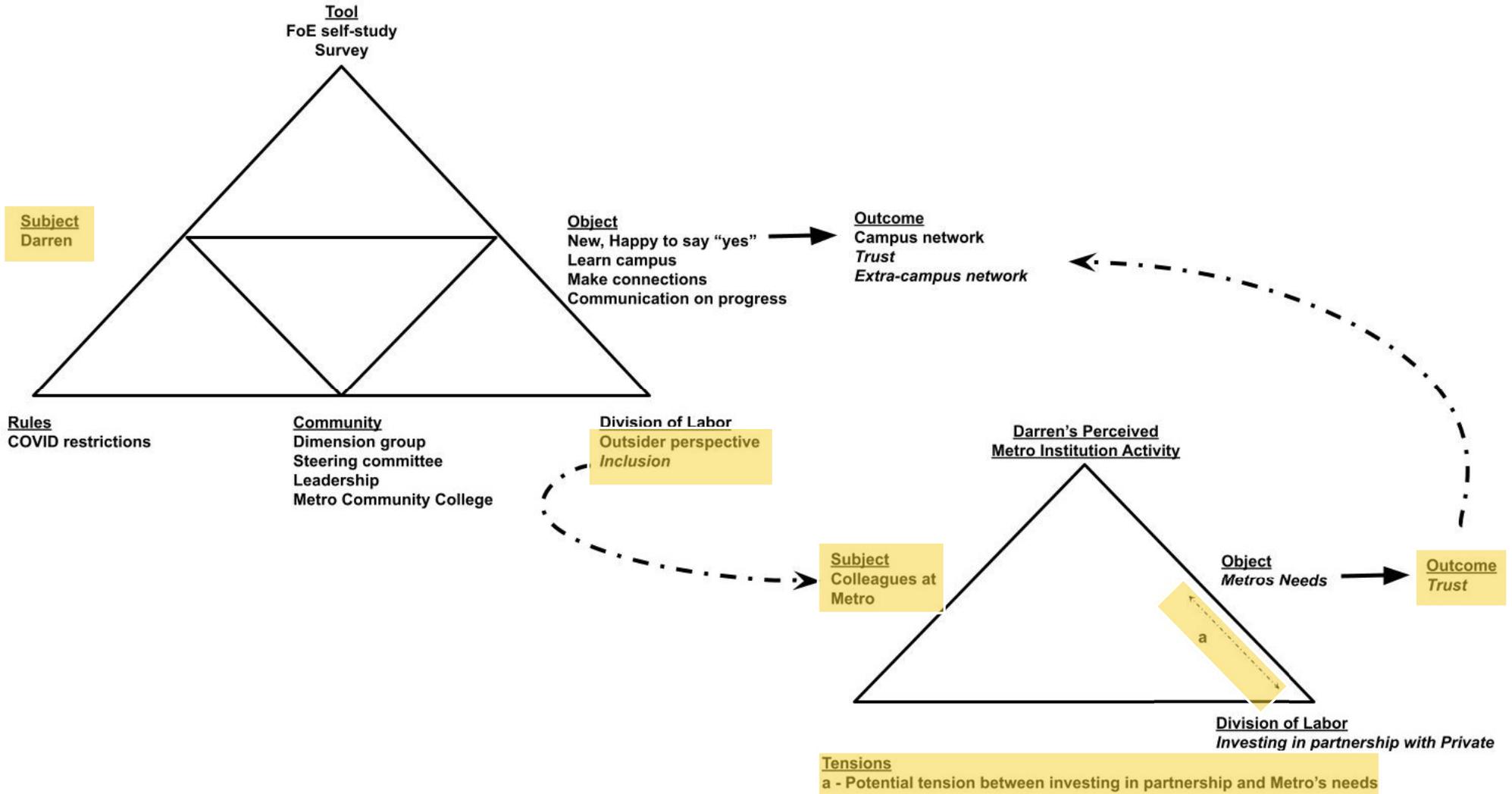
Subject
Colleagues at
Metro

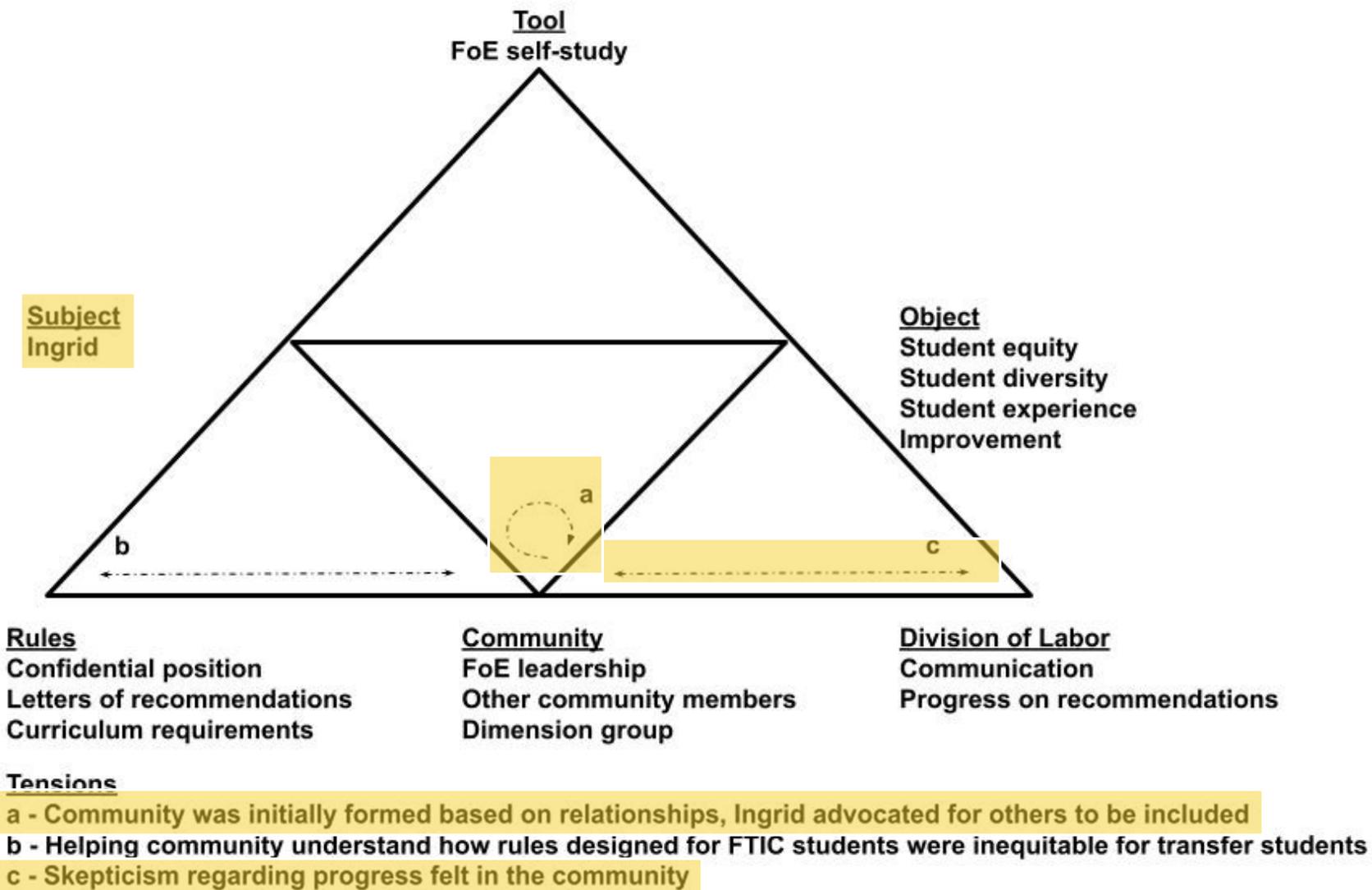
Object
Metro's Needs

Outcome
Trust

Division of Labor
Investing in partnership with Private

Tensions
a - Potential tension between investing in partnership and Metro's needs





Example Manifestations - Communication and Internal Perception of Progress

Grass Roots Communication - Esther from Private – Curricular path comm established trust

- *“At least from the departmental standpoint, I think everyone was somewhat relieved to see that we sort of had clear cut requirements being articulated to the community college, because we hated it when students came from the community college with all these credits that basically didn't count towards their final degree”.*

Leadership Communication - Darren from Private – More progress updates

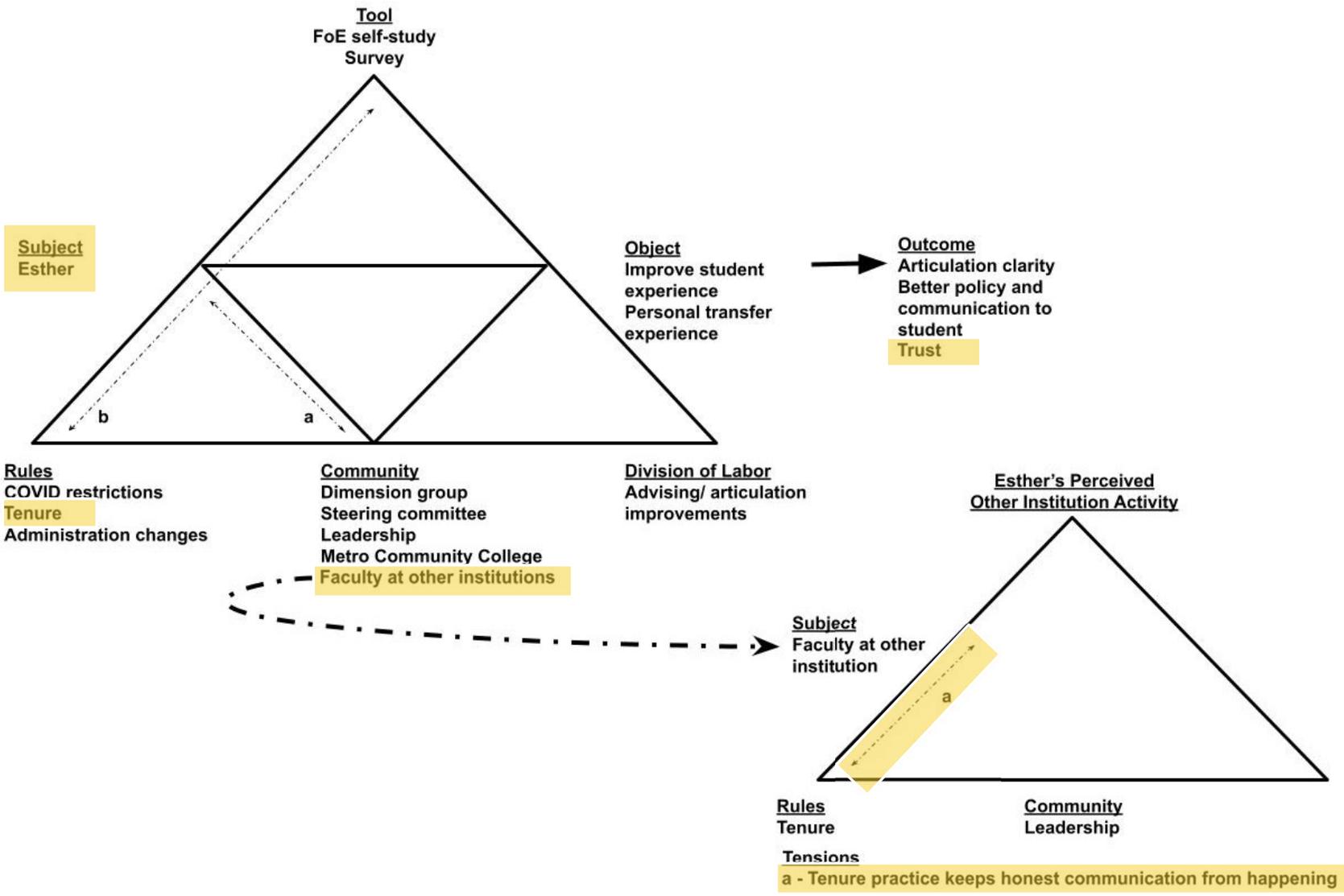
- *“I would love to hear more about the actions. I'd love to hear more about, “hey we did this thing, hey we did this thing, this is one of the action items, guess what we're doing that as of today”. It has been a little quiet as far as action items go. And I think Covid is some of that. Everything got pushed back. Our timelines all got pushed back”.*

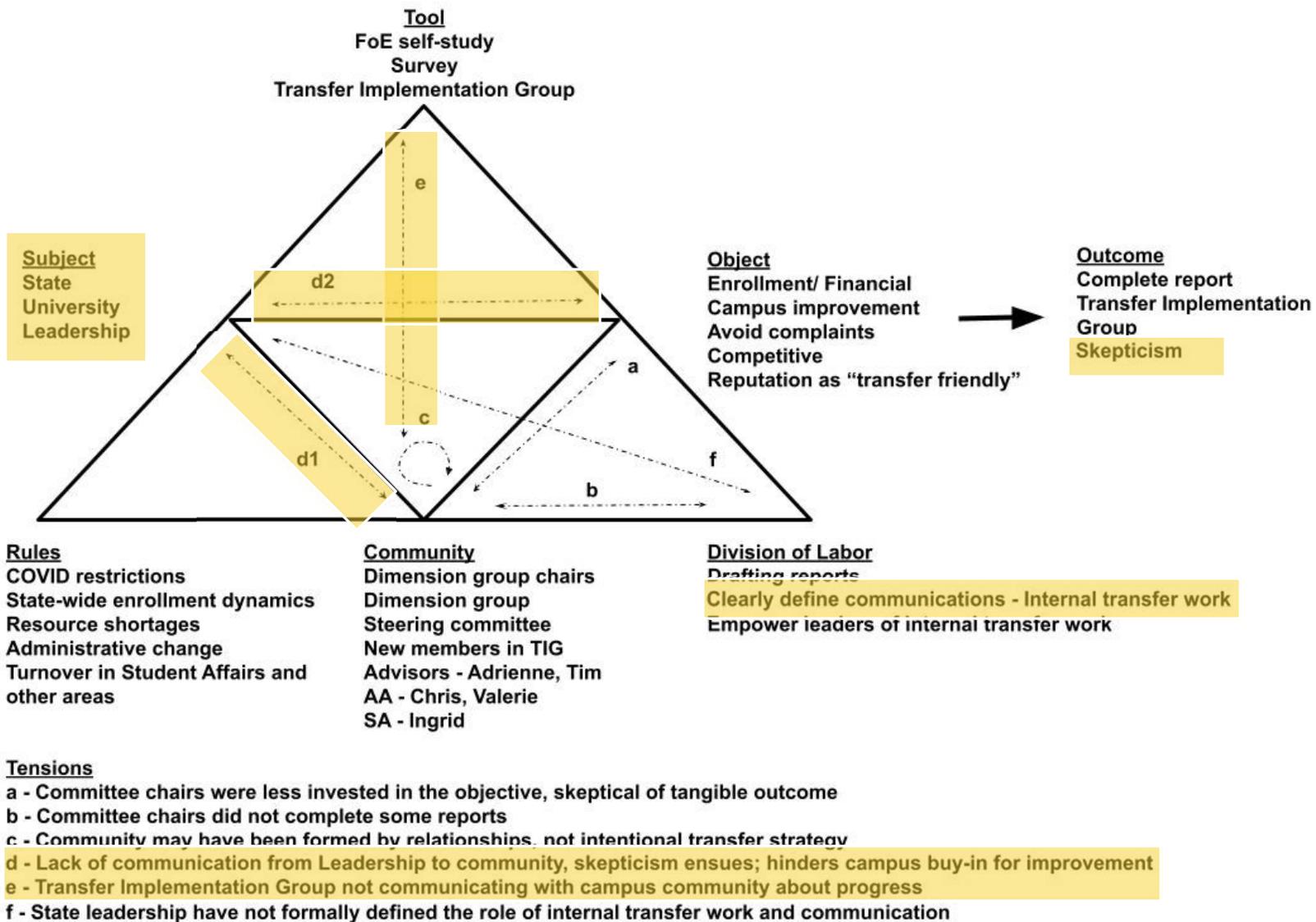
Leadership Communication - Valerie from State – Quasi-lead role and internal comm

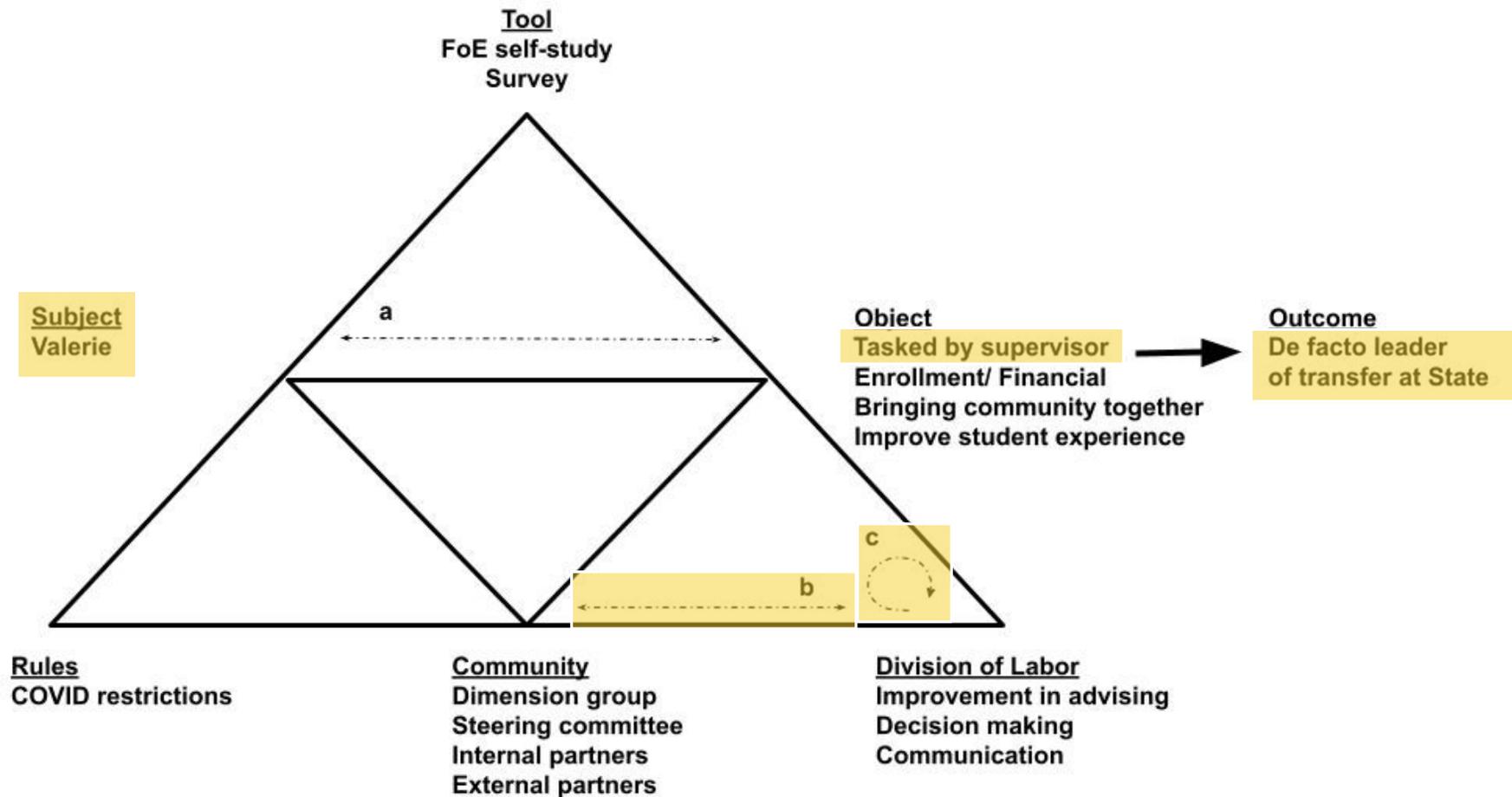
- *Tim, Chris, and Ingrid were unaware of communication to students or any two-year partners. However, Valerie indicated in her interview that she was the one who personally communicated to Public's two-year institutional partners. No other participant was aware this had occurred.*

External Factors in Communicating Progress - Chris – Evidence from piecemeal sub reports

- *“I remember looking at the recommendations that were made from each of the committees and then looking at some of the evidence that they use to support those recommendations. I felt that there were some disconnect at times between those two”.*







Example Manifestations - Differences in Institutional and Educator Motivations

Institutional Motivations - Margaret from Private – Metro students' sense of belonging

- *“Basically, we wanted [Metro] students to feel like they were [Private] students, the whole way. And just that they were starting out at [Metro] and then coming over to us permanently, but even in that time that they had access to the amenities, of a four-year college”.*

Institutional Motivations - Chris from State – Competition and declining hs population

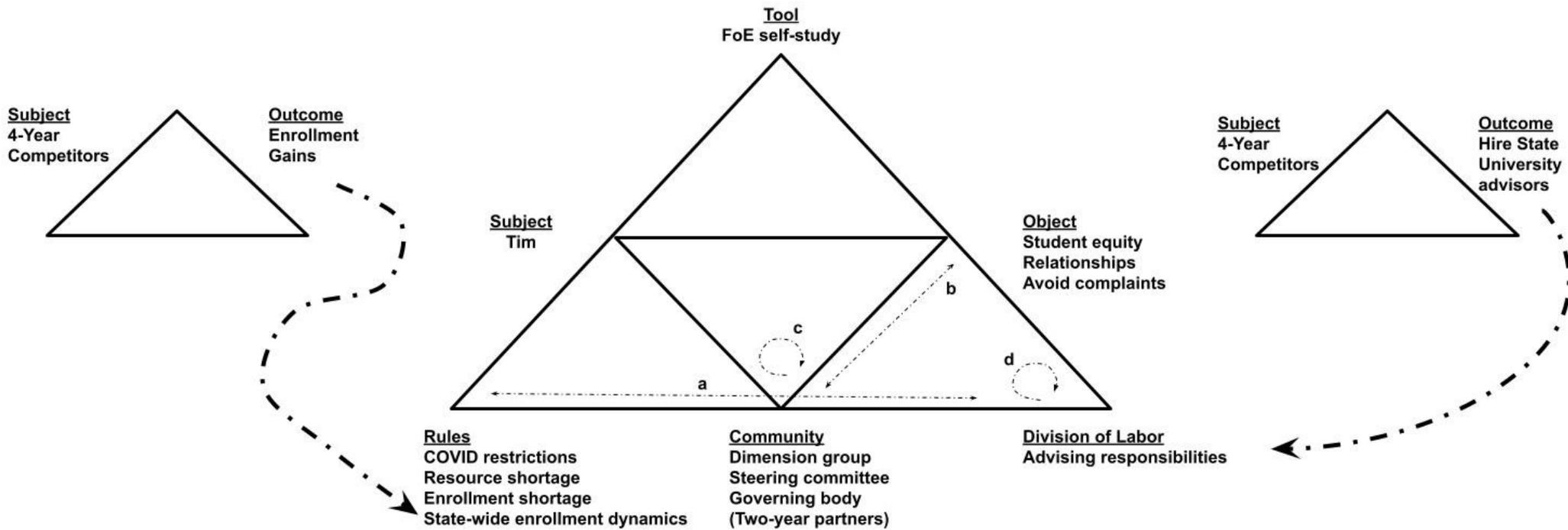
- *“We feel that our policies are competitive in that area. But, knowing that as our high school population in [Public’s State] continues to drop for the next 10 years or so, we're going to be relying even more so on our transfer student population for enrollment. And so, we thought that would be an opportunity to review our whole approach to student transfer and make sure that we're doing the things that we need to do to be competitive”.*

Educator Motivations - Darren from Private – Help Student

- *“we see an opportunity to help students attain their 4-yr degree from us in a more affordable way through effective partnerships with [Metro]. We just haven’t effectively implemented those pathways—hence, the motivation for the transfer self-study”.*

Educator Motivations - Tim from State – Existential

- *“I can't count the number of really sharp young professional advisors that we have lost to the [Public’s four-year competitor]. And well, it’s understandable, because the [Public’s four-year competitor] doesn't have the enrollment issues we have. They want to enroll more students; they just turn on the tap. The dynamic is a little bit different for us. ... And as individuals leave, ... those of us who remain wondering, “my God, so will they let us replace this one?”*



Tensions

- a - Tim blamed resource shortage on state-wide dynamics and Governing body, resource constraints impact advising responsibilities
- b - Tim was skeptical that Governing body would allow his objectives to happen
- c - Tim appreciated two-year partner involvement, but others disputed that they were even involved
- d - Inconsistency in college advising practices

End