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Article

Transformative Pathways: Implementing Intercultural Competence Development in Higher Education Using Kotter's Change Model

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Abstract: This study explores the efficacy of Kotter's eight-step change model in fostering intercultural competence among faculty and staff within a large Midwestern public university. Recognizing the need for intercultural development in higher education, this research applies a structured change framework coupled with the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessment tool to guide the change process. The development of intercultural competence among faculty and staff is crucial for creating inclusive learning environments, as they play a pivotal role in modeling intercultural competence and fostering students' skills necessary to navigate an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. This study employs an instrumental case study design, utilizing interviews, document analysis, and Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessments to examine the change process over a three-year period. The findings demonstrate how each step of Kotter's model was successfully adapted to drive organizational change and enhance intercultural competence among 639 faculty and staff members across 11 departments in the College of Agriculture. This study highlights the importance of creating a shared vision, empowering stakeholders, and anchoring changes in the institution's culture and emphasizes the pivotal role of structured change management in achieving substantive improvements in intercultural learning environments. The insights and strategies presented can serve as a foundation for other higher education institutions seeking to implement similar initiatives and foster inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: intercultural competence; organizational change; Kotter's change model; Intercultural Development Inventory; higher education; faculty development; change management; diversity; equity; inclusion



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1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized and connected landscape, academic and professional institutions are tasked with preparing students to thrive in diverse, multicultural settings [1]. Intercultural learning (ICL), sometimes used interchangeably with intercultural competence development, refers to the process of developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to engage constructively and competently with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. It involves not only recognizing and appreciating cultural differences but also effectively communicating and collaborating across these differences [2]. ICL

encompasses a range of dimensions, including cultural awareness, empathy, adaptability, and intercultural communication competence [3]. The importance of intercultural learning (ICL) for faculty and staff in higher education is multifaceted, with short- and long-term impacts. Faculty and staff participate in increasingly internationalized institutions that develop intercultural skills and competence that impact both students' experience prior to graduation and their potential, performance, and lived experience post-graduation. Faculty and staff play a pivotal role in achieving this goal by modeling intercultural competence and fostering inclusive learning environments. Research has shown that ICL-trained faculty and staff can significantly impact students' educational experiences and outcomes [4].

1.1. Importance of Intercultural Learning in Higher Education

Critics have raised concerns about higher education institutions that they do not adequately prepare students for the challenges of the twenty-first century [5–7]. As our world continues to embrace globalization, there is a prevailing argument that post-secondary institutions should prioritize equipping students with the skills and knowledge required to thrive in an increasingly interconnected global landscape [8–10]. In recent years, this assertion has gained greater prominence due to rising diversity within society, emphasizing the growing need for students to foster intercultural competence [11]. In today's interconnected world, the ability to navigate cultural differences and effectively engage with individuals from various backgrounds is fundamental.

Intercultural learning has emerged as a crucial aspect of higher education, reflecting the increasing globalization of academic environments and the diverse student populations that these institutions now serve [11]. The increasing diversity within higher education institutions necessitates a proactive approach to fostering intercultural competence among all stakeholders [12]. As student populations become more heterogeneous, with individuals from various cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, it is crucial for faculty and staff to develop the skills and knowledge required to effectively engage with and support these diverse learners [13]. Failure to address this need can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and inequitable educational experiences, ultimately hindering student success and institutional effectiveness [14,15]. Research on ICL has primarily focused on students in postsecondary institutions [10,16,17]. With calls for institutions to develop intercultural competence skills explicitly and systematically in college students, there is a new focus on the role of instructors and faculty members in developing the intercultural competence of students [18].

1.2. Impact of ICL-Trained Faculty and Staff on Students

The impact of ICL-trained faculty and staff on students is profound and far-reaching. Educators not only facilitate ICL within the classroom but also provide mentorship and guidance that extend beyond academic boundaries [19]. They attempt to bring students from diverse backgrounds together and engage them in meaningful civil discourse to learn from each other [20]. It has been suggested that as students engage with faculty and staff who possess strong intercultural competencies, they are more likely to develop themselves. Prior research has demonstrated that students who are mentored by interculturally trained faculty show a high level of intercultural gains [21–23]. Moreover, ICL-trained educators can create inclusive and welcoming learning environments where students from diverse backgrounds feel valued and respected. This, in turn, can enhance the overall educational experience and contribute to students' academic success [17,24].

Moreover, the development of intercultural competence among faculty and staff has far-reaching implications beyond the immediate campus community [25]. As educators, they play a pivotal role in shaping the next generation of global citizens who will enter an increasingly interconnected and diverse workforce [26]. By modeling intercultural competence and creating inclusive learning environments, faculty and staff can help students develop the skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to navigate and thrive in a

multicultural society [27]. This, in turn, contributes to the broader goals of promoting social cohesion, fostering innovation, and enhancing global competitiveness.

1.3. Comprehensive Approach to Intercultural Learning

The literature on intercultural learning (ICL) also distinguishes between intercultural encounters and ICL [11]. Successful ICL requires curricula and teaching pedagogies that have an impact beyond the classroom [28,29]. A comprehensive approach considers ICL from two perspectives: the process, which involves examining what occurs during the learning experience [30], and the product, which refers to the outcomes of learning. These outcomes encompass the knowledge, behaviors, and awareness that students acquire or develop. Previous research has demonstrated that intercultural learning typically occurs in an environment characterized by purposeful interactions among students working toward shared objectives [24]. Instructors recognize and leverage the strengths brought by their students into the classroom, and any discord is counterbalanced by relational support [11]. For this to happen, instructors need to be interculturally competent themselves; as the popular adage goes, you cannot give out what you do not have.

A comprehensive approach to intercultural learning also recognizes the importance of ongoing professional development for faculty and staff. Intercultural competence is not a static trait but rather a dynamic and evolving skill set that requires continuous cultivation and refinement [31]. By providing regular opportunities for faculty and staff to engage in intercultural learning experiences, such as workshops, seminars, study abroad programs, and cross-cultural dialogues, institutions can support their ongoing growth and development [32–34]. This not only enhances their ability to effectively engage with diverse students but also fosters a culture of lifelong learning and continuous improvement within the institution [28].

Furthermore, a comprehensive approach to intercultural learning acknowledges the systemic and structural factors that shape the experiences of diverse students and influence the dynamics of intercultural interactions [12,35]. This includes examining and addressing issues of power, privilege, and discrimination that may be embedded within institutional policies, practices, and curricula [36]. By taking a holistic view of intercultural learning that encompasses both individual development and organizational change, institutions can create more equitable and inclusive learning environments that benefit all members of the campus community.

1.4. Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how Kotter's model of change can be effectively utilized as a framework to implement an intercultural competence development initiative at the organizational level in a large public land grant university in the Midwest United States. By presenting a case study of the successful application of Kotter's model in this context, we aim to provide insights and strategies that can be adapted and implemented in similar initiatives at other higher education institutions.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study employs Kotter's eight-step change model and the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) as the theoretical frameworks to guide the implementation of an intercultural competence development initiative in a large public land grant university in the Midwest United States. Kotter's change model serves as the overarching framework for managing the organizational change process, while the IDI is used as a tool to assess the intercultural competence of faculty and staff throughout the initiative.

2.1. Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model

Kotter's change model is one of the most widely known frameworks for change management [37]. The framework remains popular with many practitioners due to its simplicity and its straightforward nature [38,39]. Kotter's change model has been successfully ap-

plied to guide and account for change in various aspects of higher education institutions, particularly in the administrative and student affairs domains. Its effectiveness has been demonstrated in diverse contexts, such as increasing faculty participation in accreditation activities [39], replacing teaching evaluation systems [40], and developing appropriate governance models for private universities [41]. Moreover, Kotter's model has been specifically employed to implement intercultural competence initiatives in professional development settings [42]. The change model comprises eight steps that potentially lead to a process of change as shown in Figure 1:

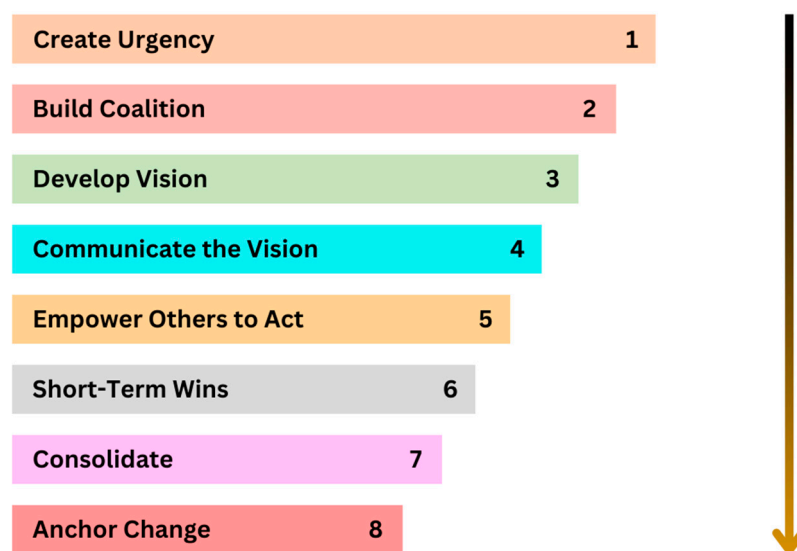


Figure 1. Kotter's eight-step change model.

1. *Create a Sense of Urgency:* This step involves communicating the critical need for change to stakeholders, emphasizing the importance and timeliness of the initiative. It is crucial to support and prepare stakeholders for the upcoming change, ensuring they understand the rationale behind the initiative and are ready to embrace the process.
2. *Build Coalition:* Building a coalition requires identifying and recruiting key individuals to join the change process. These individuals should be motivated and committed to participating in the initiative, as they will play a vital role in driving the change forward and engaging others in the process.
3. *Develop Vision:* Developing a vision involves creating a clear, long-term goal that guides the change process toward a shared, agreed-upon future state. The vision should be aligned with practical, achievable strategies that outline the steps necessary to accomplish the stated objectives.
4. *Communicate the Vision:* Effective communication of the vision is essential to gaining stakeholder buy-in and support. The vision should be articulated in a simple, compelling manner that paints a vivid picture of the desired future state, inspiring stakeholders to take unified action toward achieving the shared goal.
5. *Empower Others to Act:* Empowering others to act involves identifying the relationship between opportunities and barriers to change. This step includes negotiating obstacles and providing stakeholders with the resources, tools, and authority necessary to implement the change effectively.
6. *Create Short-Term Wins:* Celebrating and highlighting short-term successes throughout the change process is crucial for maintaining momentum and motivation. By focusing on and enabling these wins across the organization, stakeholders remain engaged and committed to the initiative.
7. *Consolidate Improvements:* Change is a challenging and energy-intensive process. As individuals and groups navigate the change, they may experience fatigue, leading to a loss of focus and a regression to old habits. To mitigate this, it is essential to

- periodically assess the state of the change, keep stakeholders engaged, maintain momentum, and consolidate improvements to ensure the initiative remains on track.
8. *Anchor Changes*: The final step involves ensuring that the changes implemented become deeply embedded in the organization's culture and way of operating. When changes are well established and integrated into the "new normal", they are more likely to be sustained over time, creating a lasting impact on the organization.

When planning a context-specific change process following the eight steps, it is important to schedule enough resources, especially time for the sequential stages to become fully realized and to occur in the appropriate order. In this study, Kotter's change model is used as a guiding framework to structure and implement the intercultural competence development initiative in the College of Agriculture. Each step of the model is applied to the specific context of the initiative, ensuring a comprehensive and systematic approach to organizational change. Although Kotter's model is primarily associated with top-down change processes, it was deemed suitable for this study due to its ability to highlight incremental progress. By showcasing the small gains achieved throughout the change process, the model enables faculty and staff members to recognize their accomplishments and the potential for further improvement, thereby maintaining motivation and engagement.

2.2. Intercultural Development Inventory

The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) is a theoretically grounded and psychometrically valid instrument comprising 50 multiple-choice questions based on the Intercultural Development Continuum [43]. The IDI helps to measure an individual's or group's progress along a developmental spectrum of making sense of and responding to different cultures. It is grounded theoretically in the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) proposed by Milton Bennett [41] which presents an evaluation of the transition from ethnocentrism (perceiving all other cultures relative to one's own culture) to ethnorelativism (one's own culture being understood in the context of all other cultures). The IDI has been used widely in the context of HEIs to assess the intercultural competence of the faculty and students, and the results have been used to develop programs to foster intercultural growth [44].

The Intercultural Development Continuum comprises five stages: Denial (misses differences, IDI score less than 70), Polarization (judges differences, IDI score 70–85), Minimization (focus on commonality, IDI score 85–115), Acceptance (ability to shift frames, IDI score 115–130), and Adaptation (ability to shift behavior, IDI score greater than 130). Figure 2 presents a diagram of the stages of the continuum with the score ranges for each stage.

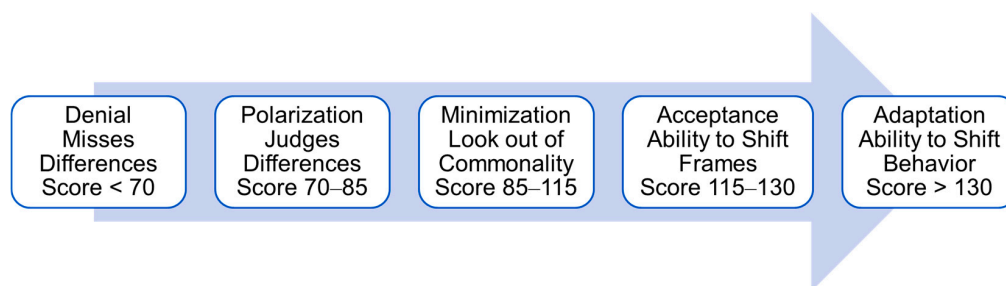


Figure 2. Stages of Intercultural Development Continuum.

The IDI is used in this study as a tool to assess the intercultural competence of faculty and staff participating in the change initiative. The IDI results serve as a diagnostic tool for evaluating the intercultural competence of the participants, help create personalized intercultural development plans, and inform future strategies for targeted improvement. By employing Kotter's change model as the overarching framework and the IDI as an assessment tool, this study aims to provide a comprehensive approach to implementing and evaluating an intercultural competence development initiative in a higher education setting.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employs an instrumental case study design to investigate the application of Kotter's change model in implementing an intercultural competence development initiative at the College of Agriculture in a large Midwestern University. An instrumental case study is appropriate when the researcher aims to provide insight into an issue or refine a theoretical explanation, and the case itself plays a supportive role in facilitating understanding of the broader phenomenon [45]. In this study, the case of the intercultural competence development initiative serves as an instrument to illuminate the effectiveness of Kotter's change model in driving organizational change in higher education settings.

The case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the complex processes involved in implementing the change initiative, as well as the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders. Focusing on a single case helps develop a rich, holistic understanding of the phenomenon, taking into account the specific context and unique characteristics of the institution studied [46]. This approach is particularly suitable for investigating the nuances and challenges of applying a theoretical framework, such as Kotter's change model, to a real-world setting.

3.2. Context

The change initiative was conducted in the College of Agriculture (COA) at a large midwestern public university in the United States over a period of 3 years. The COA goes back to the founding of the university and consists of 18 departmental areas including 11 academic and 7 non-academic or support departments. The 11 academic departments included Agricultural and Biological Engineering, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Science Education and Communication, Agronomy, Animal Science, Biochemistry, Botany & Plant Pathology, Entomology, Food Science, Forestry & Natural Resources, and Horticulture & Landscape Architecture while the 7 support departments included Office of Multicultural Programs, Office of Academic Programs, Communications, Research & Graduate Education, Information Technology, Business Office, and International Programs. All 18 departments participated in the initiative.

The goal of the initiative was to facilitate systemic change to help faculty and staff become interculturally competent. The initiative was led by the Office of Multicultural Programs, which aims to enhance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) by engaging faculty, students, and staff through various initiatives and activities. The specific initiative discussed in this study focused on helping faculty and staff internalize intercultural competence in their daily work and promote inclusive excellence. As part of this initiative, 639 faculty and staff from the 18 departments in COA participated in the program and went through a series of DEIB activities and workshops. All the participants also completed an Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessment as a part of this initiative, followed by individual debriefs and group debriefs at the departmental level conducted by qualified IDI administrators from the Center for Intercultural Learning, Mentorship, Assessment and Research (CILMAR), this is an independent academic center at the university, outside of COA, focused on fostering intercultural competence and global awareness through education, research, and collaboration. A high-level timeline of the initiative is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Intercultural development change initiative timeline.

Timeframe	Event	Description
Year 2020	Announcement of COA Strategic Plan	Commitment to a new five-year strategic plan, integration of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI).
Spring 2021	Launch of IDI in Pilot Departments	IDI assessments begin in two pilot departments with 36 faculty and staff.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Timeframe	Event	Description
Fall 2021	Ongoing IDI Assessments and Debriefs	Extensive roll-out of IDI across various departments, accompanied by debrief sessions to reflect on results.
Spring 2022	Further IDI Administration and Debriefs	Expanded IDI roll-out to additional departments, with scheduled group debrief sessions.
Fall 2022	Strategic Goal Deadline	Achievement of the strategic plan goal: at least 95% of all faculty and staff have completed the IDI by Fall 2022.
Ongoing	Development Activities	Lunch & Learn series, workshops, invited talks around topics of intercultural competence.

3.3. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through multiple sources, namely interviews, document analysis, and IDI assessments. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Associate Dean and Director of the Office of Multicultural Programs, as well as a senior intercultural specialist from the CILMAR. These interviews provided insights into the implementation process, challenges faced, and strategies employed during the change initiative. In addition to the interviews, various program documents were collected and analyzed. These documents included project plans, progress reports, presentations, and surveys. Quantitative data were also collected from the IDI assessment completed by 639 faculty and staff members in the COA. These data provided insights into the intercultural competence levels of the participants.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods as summarized in Table 2. The interview data and program documents were subjected to content analysis, which involved identifying key themes, patterns, and insights related to the implementation of the change initiative. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were coded using a combination of deductive and inductive coding techniques. The deductive codes were derived from Kotter's change model, while the inductive codes emerged from the participants' experiences and perspectives. The program documents were reviewed and analyzed to triangulate the findings from the interviews and provide additional context for the change initiative. The quantitative IDI data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to understand the intercultural competence levels of the participants.

Table 2. Data collection and analysis methods.

Data Source	Description	Analysis Method
Semi-structured interviews	Interviews with the Associate Dean/Director of the Office of Multicultural Programs and intercultural specialist from the Center for Intercultural Learning	Content analysis, thematic analysis
Program documents	Progress reports, presentations, execution plans, IDI profiles, committee resources, and surveys	Content analysis, document review
IDI assessment data	Quantitative data from 639 faculty and staff members	Descriptive statistics

3.5. Ethical and Trustworthiness Considerations

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. First, data triangulation was used by collecting data from multiple sources (interviews, documents, and IDI assessments) to corroborate the findings. Second, inter-rater reliability was established by using three coders who independently analyzed the qualitative data, achieving a 95% agreement rate. Third, an audit trail was maintained to document the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation decisions.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout this study. The confidentiality of the participants was maintained by using pseudonyms and removing identifying information from the data. This study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and all data were stored securely in password-protected files.

3.6. Positionality

Author 1: I am a PhD candidate in the Higher Education program, with a research focus on building intercultural competence among students, faculty, and staff. My academic background includes a strong foundation in Political Science, which has provided me with a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of power, culture, and identity in educational settings.

My engagement with the literature on intercultural competence has highlighted the critical importance of fostering an inclusive and culturally aware academic environment. This awareness is crucial not only for enhancing the learning experiences of all individuals but also for preparing them to navigate and contribute to an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

Throughout my academic and professional journey, I have strived to apply these insights in practical settings, advocating for and implementing strategies that promote cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. My position as a researcher is informed by both my scholarly pursuits and my personal commitment to equity and social justice in education. This dual perspective drives my dedication to developing effective interventions and policies that support intercultural competence development within higher education institutions.

Author 2: As a PhD candidate in the College of Technology at Purdue University, my research areas include engineering education and workforce development, with a focus on developing teamwork skills, intercultural competence, and project management skills in higher education. My interest in intercultural competence development stems from my belief in the importance of preparing students, faculty, and staff to navigate and thrive in a diverse and interconnected world. As a woman of color from a developing nation, I bring a unique perspective and understanding of the challenges and opportunities in fostering intercultural competence. With 5+ years of industry experience as a program manager, I have firsthand experience managing large teams and driving organizational change. I approach this research with a commitment to equity and inclusion, striving to objectively analyze data and provide accurate findings on the effectiveness of Kotter's change model in enhancing intercultural competence. My goal is to contribute to creating academic settings where faculty, staff, and students can thrive in a diverse, interconnected world.

Author 3: As an Intercultural Research Specialist, I am deeply committed to integrating intercultural competence within higher education institutions. This commitment stems from my belief that intercultural competence is essential for fostering inclusive, respectful, and effective learning environments. By designing curricula, and conducting trainings and workshops, I aim to equip faculty, staff, and students with the skills and awareness needed to navigate and thrive in diverse cultural settings.

Intercultural competence is not just an academic requirement; it is a crucial life skill in our increasingly interconnected world. Through my work, I strive to promote empathy, enhance cultural appreciation, and prepare individuals to engage constructively across cultural boundaries. Witnessing the positive impact of intercultural learning on students' personal and professional development motivates me to continue my efforts in this field.

My passion for this work is driven by the tangible benefits it brings to the academic community. Enhanced intercultural competence leads to more collaborative and innovative educational experiences, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of creating a more just and equitable society. By embedding these principles into the fabric of higher education, I aim to support the development of globally minded, culturally sensitive individuals who can make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world at large.

In this study, my role was to design the study, collect and analyze data, and co-author the manuscript. I was not involved in the change initiative and remained an external observer. Additionally, I did not participate in debriefing assessment results or designing assessments. My primary goal was to engage with Authors 1 and 2 in data collection, analysis, and manuscript writing. As a PhD holder, I also mentored Authors 1 and 2, guiding them in research methodologies and scholarly writing throughout the project.

Author 4: I am a PhD candidate in the College of Agriculture. As a research assistant and research fellow, and also a graduate fellow in the Office of Multicultural Programs, I have extensive experience in multicultural and interdisciplinary research. I participated in an Asian Resource Cultural Center and an Anthropology of the Hometown & Abroad Summer Writing Fellowship and have also actively volunteered with the College of Agriculture's Peer Mentoring Program. Through my work I have critically engaged audiences on promoting systematic approaches to engineering, agriculture, resource allocation and utilization, and social dynamics. Additionally, I serve as a member of several professional organizations, including the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers, Agricultural and Applied Economics Association, American Society of Agronomy, and the National Society of Black Engineers.

Author 5: As an Associate Dean and Director of the Office of Multicultural Programs, I played a role in the implementation of the change initiative. I am a cisgender African-American tenured professor in the College of Agriculture at a large land-grant public university in the Midwest United States with a predominantly white faculty, staff, and student body. I formerly served as an inner-city elementary school teacher and principal, with over 20 years in the public school arena. I also served two years as an Extension 4-H Youth Development Program Director in the largest county within the state. My primary areas of focus and scholarship include the following: developing intercultural competence grounded in intersectional theory, which provides a critical lens for bringing awareness and enhancing the capacity of institutions to engage in social justice discourse and practice; investigating resistance to learning in the face of cultural discomfort/disequilibrium; and employing service-learning pedagogy viewed through the lens of cultural diversity/social justice issues. I work collaboratively across academic and support departments to achieve key diversity/inclusion initiatives.

These initiatives include the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, staff, and students; fostering a more welcoming and inclusive college environment; and creating curricular and co-curricular activities that enhance cultural sensitivity for all. Throughout this research, I paid close attention to my dual position as both an insider in the College of Agriculture (COA) and the broader university, as well as my relationship with the participants. I have carefully reflected on how my perspectives might influence this research and recognize the advantages and disadvantages of my insider position as a member of the COA and its leadership structure. Simultaneously, I acknowledged my outsider status as a member of a historically underrepresented group in the COA and my leadership role relative to faculty, staff, and graduate students. I was cognizant of how these dynamics could shape my observations, experiences, and reflections, as well as those of the participants, and how my insights evolved throughout the research process.

4. Results

This case study describes the efforts and initiatives led by the COA to promote inclusive excellence in the College and within individual departments. The goal of the initiative was to help faculty and staff to become interculturally cognizant and competent. Kotter's

eight-step change model was adapted to bring ICL and change to the organizational level. The following sections detail how each step of Kotter's model was applied to the change initiative, highlighting the key actions and outcomes at each stage.

4.1. Step 1: Create Urgency

The change initiative in the College of Agriculture started with the appointment of a new Dean in 2018. Recognizing the need for immediate action to enhance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in the College, the Dean tasked the Associate Dean and Director of the Office of Multicultural Programs (OMP) with developing a strategic initiative to address these concerns. The OMP, specifically its sub-team, the Diversity Action Team in Agriculture (DATA), formulated a comprehensive plan.

The urgency for this initiative was reinforced by the fact that it came directly from the new Dean, emphasizing the high level of institutional support. After thorough research, it was decided to use the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to assess and improve the faculty and staff's ability to work effectively across cultural differences. This decision was pivotal in creating a sense of urgency, as the IDI would measure current intercultural competence and clearly highlight areas needing improvement, thus encouraging all stakeholders to embrace the upcoming changes.

4.2. Step 2: Build Coalition

The initiative sought buy-in from the 18 academic and support department heads in 2019. The Office of Multicultural Programs (OMP) and the Dean held meetings with each department head to help them understand the urgency and importance of the initiative, as well as the specific benefits it would bring to each department. During these discussions, the Dean and the OMP team addressed potential concerns, such as the time commitment required for the initiative, perceived disruption of departmental routines, and skepticism about the initiative's effectiveness. The Associate Dean and Director of OMP shared, *"I asked the Dean to fund this project. She strongly suggested all of us, each of our department heads, our assistant dean as well as the Dean!, to complete the IDI first. Coming from senior leadership told everyone that this was important"*.

Additionally, the initiative sought a strategic partnership with the Center for Intercultural Learning (CIL). This collaboration was crucial as CIL provided intellectual property on intercultural learning and supported the OMP team in leading these programs. They offered qualified administrators who would later conduct IDI debriefs for participants. The Associate Dean while discussing this partnership shared, *"We wanted someone who was unbiased, who was not part of our team, and who had this knowledge. We wanted everybody to feel it was confidential"*. With the support of CIL and the engagement of department heads, the coalition was effectively built, providing a strong foundation for implementing the strategic plan and creating a comprehensive intercultural learning environment.

4.3. Step 3: Develop Vision

The previous strategic plan (2015–2020) provided an important roadmap for the College's success. To build on that success, a task force of 28 faculty and staff members representative of the COA was assembled in Fall 2019. Discussions were held with various stakeholder groups to define the College's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, as well as the current and future grand challenges facing the COA. The 2021–2026 Strategic Plan (refer to Table 3) was built around college-wide goals of improving teaching and learning, research, engagement, and inclusive excellence, serving as a vision for the College to excel at higher levels in the future.

Table 3. The 2021–2026 Strategic Plan.

2021–2026 Strategic Plan	
We are committed to core values and culture that guide us in all that we do. Our activities span the globe in teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and societal engagement through Extension. They are all anchored to these core values and culture that serve as the overarching principles by which we conduct ourselves. We promise to fulfill these expectations by the following demonstrable actions.	
1.	We commit ourselves to ethics, honesty, and integrity in everything we do.
2.	We celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion with respect for each other in a climate that promotes inclusive excellence.
3.	We demonstrate civic values, citizenship, social and cultural competence, and commitment to global responsibilities with responsiveness and leadership throughout the College.
4.	We dedicate ourselves to upholding our responsibility and accountability toward education, society, and the environment.
5.	We pride ourselves in creating new models for cultures and climates that nurture academic and professional career development of all faculty, staff, and students.
6.	We pledge uncompromised commitment to our values and culture in all interactions with all our constituencies at home and around the world.
7.	We render ourselves as an exemplar of demonstrating standards of core values and culture in the practice of higher education. As overarching principles, our core values and culture are embodied in all aspects of this strategic plan. We commit to assessing our success with accountability to all.

4.4. Step 4: Communicate the Vision

The 2021–2026 Strategic Plan was presented to the entire college community in two separate convocations during the spring semester—one for faculty and another for staff. Following this comprehensive overview, specific town hall meetings were conducted in each department to detail the intercultural competence initiative and explain how it would be implemented. CILMAR played a significant role as an external partner, helping to reinforce the initiative’s goals. Its involvement provided an independent and credible voice, assisting in conveying the message effectively. Its intercultural experts helped alleviate concerns by clarifying the process of IDI assessment and debrief sessions, the importance of IDI scores, and how IDI scores would be used.

Many faculty and staff were initially apprehensive about the implications of the IDI assessment, particularly worrying that their scores might be used for promotions or evaluations. The Associate Dean noted, “*staff in particular were very apprehensive about this because they were really concerned about how this is going to be used. Is it gonna be used in our performance reviews? Will our department heads have access to our profiles? So, for instance if I am in denial, how’s that going to impact my ability to continue to do my work in the college. The dean was getting emails left and right*”. The senior leadership reassured participants that no one from the College of Agriculture would have access to individual scores. The debrief sessions would be conducted by external administrators from CILMAR who would maintain confidentiality during the debriefs, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for development. The intercultural specialist shared, “*IDI is upfront about the fact that you cannot use the scores for hiring purposes or for any type of promotion or retention or anything else. They don’t want them to be used in that way, but I think that that kind of questions came up a few times. I think it was super important for establishing trust that information be put out there*”. These town hall meetings were instrumental in addressing concerns, fostering trust, and gaining buy-in. By thoroughly communicating the vision and the safeguards in place, this step allowed the participants to focus on the goals of the initiative with renewed confidence.

4.5. Step 5: Empower Others to Act

To achieve the strategic goals of the intercultural competence initiative, the Office of Multicultural Programs (OMP) took responsibility for executing the identified actions within the 2021–2026 Strategic Plan. They committed to advocating for the intrinsic value

of multicultural competence and fostering an inclusive culture where every individual had the opportunity to thrive. Key strategic initiatives were outlined to empower faculty, staff, and students, including the following:

1. Integrating DEI conversations into orientation programs for new faculty, staff, and graduate students, helping them understand the importance of diversity and inclusion from the start.
2. Providing continuous professional development opportunities to foster ongoing dialogue about DEI, broadening awareness and understanding through interactive workshops and training.
3. Supporting staff with resources like time release and financial assistance for professional development in DEI and career advancement.
4. Establishing DEI core curricula and training programs accessible to all members of the College community, empowering them to actively contribute to creating a more inclusive environment.
5. Creating affinity groups within the College to cultivate a sense of belonging among those with shared experiences and promote a supportive network.
6. Implementing proactive recruitment strategies aimed at increasing the diversity of staff hiring pools, ensuring varied perspectives and backgrounds are represented.
7. Introducing DEI rubrics and guidelines for evaluating merit, emphasizing the importance of embedding DEI principles into every member's core competencies.

By providing these resources and opportunities, the OMP empowered faculty, staff, and students to take actionable steps in supporting the intercultural competence initiative, creating a more inclusive and equitable environment throughout the College.

4.6. Step 6: Create Short-Term Wins

To maintain momentum and motivation throughout the change process, the initiative focused on celebrating the completion of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessments as a significant short-term win. The administration of the IDI across the College's departments served as a pivotal event in the initiative, marking the first collective step toward understanding and enhancing intercultural competence.

The IDI was completed by 639 faculty and staff enrolled in 18 departments from the COA. The results indicated that most participants were in the Minimization stage of the Intercultural Development Continuum (average score: 100.05), where cultural differences are recognized but not yet fully integrated into diverse perspectives. While 60% of participants (refer to Figure 3) were found to be in the Minimization stage, it was encouraging to note that 79% of participants were leaning toward an intercultural mindset across the Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation stages.

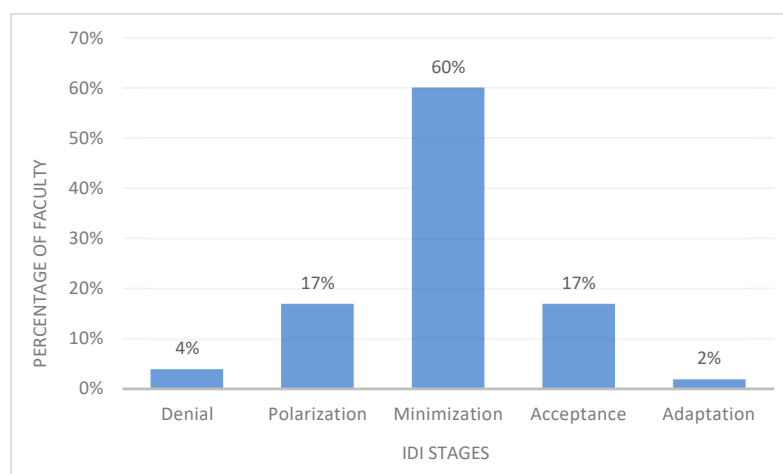


Figure 3. Percentage of faculty and staff in different IDI stages.

The results from the IDI assessments, which provided a snapshot of the current cultural competencies within the College, were used to generate positive engagement and dialogue around the topic. These results highlighted the College's collective potential for growth and reflected the dedication of faculty and staff to embracing diversity. By focusing on these accomplishments, the College was able to cultivate a sense of achievement and collective progress, which was essential for sustaining engagement with the ongoing change efforts.

4.7. Step 7: Consolidate Improvements

Consolidating improvements was a crucial step in the change process, ensuring that the momentum gained from earlier stages was sustained and the initiative remained on track. The results from the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessments were utilized to guide both group and individual debrief sessions. CILMAR intercultural specialists facilitated these debriefs to provide faculty and staff with a comprehensive understanding of their current intercultural competence and outline individualized development plans. Key strategies for consolidating improvements included the following:

1. *Group Debriefs:* Group debriefing sessions were conducted to share collective insights from the IDI assessments, encouraging an open dialogue about common strengths and challenges. This approach fostered a supportive environment where faculty and staff could understand the broader implications of the initiative and align on shared goals.
2. *Individual Debriefs:* Individual debrief sessions provided participants with confidential feedback tailored to their specific results, helping them identify personal growth areas. This personalized approach empowered individuals to take ownership of their development, creating a clear roadmap for improvement.
3. *Individualized Development Plans:* Individual development plans were created during the debriefs to provide a structured pathway for growth. These plans were supported by CIL specialists and included resources, workshops, and continuous feedback to track progress.
4. *External Collaboration:* CIL specialists worked closely with the College of Agriculture to share best practices and provide ongoing support. Their expertise ensured that stakeholders had access to the latest tools and strategies for effective intercultural development.
5. *Resource Tailoring:* The OMP tailored professional development resources based on lessons learned from the IDI assessments to support inclusive practices across departments.
6. *Increase Participation:* Strategies like regular reminders, 20 min scheduled time during department meetings to complete IDI, and incentives for completion at individual and department levels were implemented to encourage participation.
7. *Success Stories:* The Agricultural Communications department was recruited to create and disseminate materials and "success stories" of how taking the IDI and completing the debriefing helped faculty and staff members, showcasing the positive impact of the initiative and inspiring others to participate.

These methods and strategies were essential in consolidating improvements and ensuring that the change initiative remained on track. By engaging stakeholders at all levels, providing ongoing support and resources, and celebrating successes along the way, the College was able to maintain momentum and work toward the long-term goal of creating a more inclusive and interculturally competent environment.

4.8. Step 8: Anchor Changes

Anchoring changes in the COA's culture was essential to ensure that the progress made during the initiative was sustained and integrated into the fabric of the organization. This process of instituting sustainable change was made possible through multiple buy-ins from individuals and groups over time. Several strategies and methods were employed to anchor changes:

1. *Lunch & Learn Series:* The COA introduced a Lunch & Learn series, inviting external speakers to discuss various topics related to intercultural competence. These sessions

provided ongoing learning opportunities and exposed faculty and staff to different perspectives and strategies. The Associate Dean remarked, *“We did a series of speakers coming in. We had something each month. They were pretty well attended. A good mix of faculty and staff. The presenter for that month had a topic and people would come with their lunch, sit around and discuss the topic”*.

2. *Qualtrics Survey*: A Qualtrics survey was designed and distributed to all faculty and staff to assess individual needs for intercultural competence. Unlike the IDI, the survey did not score participants but instead provided tailored resources based on their answers. This allowed individuals who prefer IDI to still access relevant support.
3. *Graduate Student Engagement*: The COA organized graduate-student-specific town halls separate from faculty and staff. This accounted for the power differential and created a safe space for graduate students to express their concerns and needs, fostering open dialogue. Future plans included rolling out the IDI assessment to graduate students, given their roles in teaching and mentoring younger students.
4. *Intercultural Champions*: Intercultural champions were established within each department to facilitate future IDI rollouts, address questions, and advocate for the initiative. They served as points of contact for their respective departments, communicating progress, providing feedback, and ensuring consistent engagement.
5. *Policy Changes*: New policies were developed to promote equitable treatment and experiences, reflecting the changes introduced by the initiative. These policies were communicated broadly, ensuring consistent implementation at all levels of the College.
6. *Periodic Review*: The COA established a plan to revisit the strategic initiative at regular intervals to assess progress, ensure alignment with overarching goals, and adapt to evolving needs. An intercultural specialist from the Center of Intercultural Learning mentioned the following:

“I usually encourage them (participants) to pop something in their calendar down the road six months, a year that will remind them of both their goals and not so much how they were planning to meet them, but that the measures that would tell them that they made progress as a way to at least recall the conversation and think about whether their goals have shifted or not”.

7. *Town Hall Discussions*: Wins and challenges were shared during town hall meetings, encouraging transparency and collective problem-solving. In these meetings, specific time was allocated to celebrating successes and addressing difficulties, reinforcing a culture of continuous improvement.

By taking these actions, the COA successfully anchored changes in its culture, enabling the initiative to continue driving positive outcomes. The regular assessment, community engagement, and policy implementation ensured that intercultural competence remained a priority across departments, embedding it deeply into the institution’s values and practices.

5. Challenges and Solutions

Implementing the intercultural competence initiative in the College of Agriculture (COA) presented several challenges, many of which were shared by interviewees involved in the process. Despite the hurdles, the team found innovative solutions to ensure the program’s success. The sections below discuss some of these challenges and the strategies employed to address them.

5.1. Time Commitment for Debriefs

Conducting individual and group debriefs for 639 faculty and staff required substantial time and effort. Each session lasted around 45 min and required significant preparation by qualified administrators as shared by the senior intercultural specialist,

“So the challenge with and why it needed to be two years was everybody’s capacity. Even drawing on the other QA on campus, we didn’t have the capacity, trying to do individual departments, getting them prepared and then doing a group debrief”.

To resolve this, to an extent, the Office of Multicultural Programs (OMP) trained new staff to become certified IDI administrators. They volunteered their time to support CIL in other projects, freeing up CIL personnel to focus on these debriefs.

5.2. Concerns about IDI Scores Use

Faculty and staff expressed concerns about how their IDI scores would be used, fearing they might be shared or influence evaluations. To alleviate this concern, participants were reassured that only CIL administrators would have access to individual scores and would use them to conduct debriefs and maintain confidentiality. Additionally, the Dean and OMP members were the first to take the IDI, followed by all 18 department heads, building trust and setting an example. The Associate Dean shared,

“So once we had our department heads onboard, because you know we had to get the buy-in. So once department heads made the effort to get their individual feedback and started their own journey toward developing intercultural competence, it was easier to present it to the faculty and staff”.

5.3. Group Debrief Logistics

Organizing group debriefs across departments was challenging due to varied schedules and the need to engage diverse stakeholders. To resolve this, the team reused pre-scheduled departmental meetings to facilitate group debriefs. This approach ensured that all participants were available and minimized disruptions to their schedules.

5.4. Expectations around IDI and Support for IDI Non-Participants

Some faculty and staff were hesitant to participate in the IDI assessment due to concerns over its usefulness or discomfort with being scored. The team provided intentional focus during town halls to explain the IDI's benefits as discussed by a senior intercultural specialist,

“They (IDI assessments) are snapshot in time. And I think they're great for starting a conversation, but anybody who's replicating the program, I think it's kind of important to put it out front there, that they're not there to defend the instrument, the validation and all the other things”.

The team also created a Qualtrics survey, which, while not scoring participants, generated a list of personalized resources for those who did not want to complete IDI. This survey was available to all faculty and staff.

5.5. Concerns about Qualified Administrators

Some participants were curious about the credentials of the intercultural specialists conducting the debriefs, specifically wondering if they were qualified enough to guide these sessions. CIL responded to these concerns by including information about the administrators' academic degrees and qualifications in their biographies on the calendar. The senior intercultural specialist shared,

“before, I had always downplayed my degree and suddenly I realized I probably shouldn't. We start listing our degrees, like if we had a PhD, on are little mini bios on the calendar so that if that mattered to somebody, they might self-select that administrator”.

This transparency allowed participants to self-select administrators based on the credentials they felt were most relevant, ensuring comfort and confidence in the process.

5.6. Limited Progress despite Prior IDI Experience

Some faculty members had taken the IDI assessment in previous programs but felt that they had not advanced along the Intercultural Development Continuum. They expressed concern about their perceived lack of progress. The CIL team recognized this concern and tailored specific targets for these individuals to achieve. They emphasized setting small,

achievable goals and provided guidance to internalize the necessary changes. Debriefs focused on practical strategies for growth, helping faculty and staff understand how to leverage their intercultural competence as leaders and better support their departments.

6. Discussion and Implications

6.1. Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on the application of change management models in higher education, particularly in the context of intercultural competence development initiatives. While previous research has explored the effectiveness of Kotter's change model in various organizational settings [23,24], this study extends its application to the specific context of intercultural competence development among faculty and staff in a large public university.

The successful implementation of the change initiative in the College of Agriculture aligns with the findings of previous studies that have highlighted the importance of leadership support, stakeholder engagement, and a clear vision in driving organizational change [47,48]. This case study demonstrates how the involvement of key stakeholders, such as the Dean, Associate Dean, and the Office of Multicultural Programs, played a crucial role in creating a sense of urgency, building a coalition, and communicating the vision for change. This supports the notion that effective change management in higher education requires a collaborative and inclusive approach that engages diverse stakeholders in the process [48].

Moreover, the use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) as an assessment tool in this study adds to the growing body of research on the effectiveness of IDI in measuring and promoting intercultural competence development [49–51]. This case study highlights how the IDI results were used to inform the design and implementation of targeted interventions, such as group and individual debriefs, to support faculty and staff in their intercultural competence development journey. This aligns with previous research that has emphasized the importance of data-driven approaches and personalized support in fostering intercultural competence growth [44,52].

Another noteworthy aspect of this study is its focus on the intercultural competence development of faculty and staff, as opposed to solely focusing on student outcomes. While much of the existing literature on intercultural competence in higher education has centered on student development [53–55], this study highlights the critical role that faculty and staff play in creating inclusive learning environments and modeling intercultural competence. By investing in the intercultural development of faculty and staff, institutions can create a ripple effect that positively impacts student learning and campus climate [28]. This study contributes to a growing body of research that emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to intercultural competence development, one that encompasses all members of the campus community [11,21].

6.2. Theoretical Implications

The successful application of Kotter's change model in the context of an intercultural competence development initiative in higher education has several theoretical implications. First, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on the effectiveness of Kotter's model in driving organizational change. While the model has been widely used in business settings, its applicability in higher education contexts has been less explored. The findings of this study suggest that Kotter's eight-stage process can be effectively adapted and applied to guide change initiatives in academic institutions, particularly those aimed at enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Second, this study highlights the importance of considering the unique characteristics and challenges of higher education settings when applying theoretical frameworks for change management. This case study demonstrates how the specific context of the institution, such as its history, culture, and stakeholder groups, can influence the implementation and outcomes of the change initiative. This highlights the need for researchers and practi-

tioners to critically examine and tailor theoretical models to address the distinct needs and complexities of academic environments.

6.3. Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for higher education institutions seeking to implement intercultural competence development initiatives for faculty and staff. First, this case study provides a roadmap for applying Kotter's change model in a systematic and comprehensive manner. The detailed description of how each stage of the model was implemented in the College of Agriculture can serve as a guide for other institutions looking to initiate similar change efforts. The strategies and recommendations provided, such as creating a shared vision, empowering stakeholders, and celebrating short-term wins, can be adapted and applied in different institutional contexts.

Second, this study highlights the importance of assessing and monitoring the intercultural competence levels of faculty and staff throughout the change process. The use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) in this case study demonstrates the value of employing a valid and reliable assessment tool to inform future strategies for improvement. Institutions can consider incorporating similar assessment methods to track progress and identify areas for further development.

Third, this case study emphasizes the critical role of leadership and collaboration in driving successful change initiatives. The involvement of key stakeholders, such as the Dean, Associate Dean, the Office of Multicultural Programs, and Center of Intercultural Learning, in spearheading and supporting the initiative highlights the importance of securing buy-in and commitment from influential individuals and groups. Institutions can learn from this example and strive to foster a collaborative and inclusive approach to change management, engaging diverse stakeholders in the process.

Finally, this study emphasizes the ongoing nature of intercultural competence development and the need for sustained efforts to embed the change in the institution's culture. The recommendations provided for consolidating improvements and anchoring the change, such as developing policies that promote equitable treatment and conducting community assessments, highlight the importance of long-term planning and continuous assessment. Institutions can use these insights to develop strategies for ensuring the sustainability and long-term impact of their intercultural competence development initiatives.

7. Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Work

This study demonstrates the successful application of Kotter's change model in implementing an intercultural competence development initiative in the College of Agriculture at a large public university. This case study highlights the effectiveness of the eight-stage model in driving organizational change and enhancing intercultural competence among faculty and staff. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by providing a practical example of how Kotter's model can be adapted and applied in higher education settings. The results also offer valuable insights into the factors that contribute to the success of such initiatives, including the creation of a shared vision, effective communication, and the empowerment of stakeholders.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, this study relied on a single case, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other institutions. While the instrumental case study approach allows for the illumination of broader issues, the unique characteristics of the institution studied may not be representative of all higher education settings. Second, this study primarily focused on the implementation process of the change initiative and the short-term outcomes, as measured by the IDI. The long-term impact of the initiative on faculty and staff intercultural competence development and the potential effects on student outcomes were not explored in depth. Third, this study relied on purposefully selected interview participants, which may have introduced some bias in the qualitative data collected. Although triangulation methods were employed

to mitigate this limitation, a more diverse range of perspectives could have enhanced the richness and robustness of the findings.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of how Kotter's change model can be effectively applied in higher education settings to drive intercultural competence development among faculty and staff. Future research could build upon the findings of this study in several ways. First, longitudinal studies could investigate the long-term impact of intercultural competence development initiatives on faculty and staff, as well as on student outcomes. Tracking the progress of participants over an extended period could provide valuable insights into the sustainability and effectiveness of such initiatives. Second, comparative studies could explore the application of Kotter's change model in different institutional contexts, such as community colleges, liberal arts colleges, or research-intensive universities. Examining how the model can be adapted to address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by various institutional types could enhance the generalizability and applicability of the findings. Third, researchers could investigate the potential synergies between intercultural competence development initiatives for faculty and staff and other diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts on campus. Exploring how these initiatives can be integrated and mutually reinforced could lead to more comprehensive and effective approaches to creating inclusive learning environments. As institutions continue to navigate the challenges of preparing students for an increasingly diverse and interconnected world, the insights and strategies presented in this study can serve as a foundation for future research and practice in this critical area.

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