UCI OIT Culture Transformation Initiative

Leading Change by Putting People and Culture First

Submitters

Shohreh Bozorgmehri
Divisional Director, Student and Academic Services
Office of Information Technology (OIT)
University of California, Irvine
shohreh@uci.edu | (949) 824-7324

Nick Ayo
Educational Technology Analyst, Academic Web Technologies
Office of Information Technology (OIT)
University of California, Irvine
nayo@uci.edu | (949) 824-5105

Project Strategic Leadership

Shohreh Bozorgmehri
Divisional Director, Student and Academic Services
Office of Information Technology (OIT)
University of California, Irvine
shohreh@uci.edu | (949) 824-7324

Selena Ho
Senior HR Business Partner
Campus Human Resources
University of California, Irvine
selena.ho@uci.edu | (949) 824-1166

Project Work Group and Contributors

April Sather, Assistant Chief Information Security Office, OIT
Jyoti Razdan, Manager, Facilities IT, OIT
Stacey Rose-Hayden, Supervisor, Network Projects and Enterprise Infrastructure, OIT
Katie Chappell, Manager, Communications and Training, OIT
Nick Ayo, Educational Technology Analyst, OIT

Project Senior Leadership and Sponsors

Kian Colestock, Chief Information Officer and Associate Vice Chancellor, OIT
kcolestock@uci.edu

Thomas Andriola, Vice Chancellor, Information, Technology and Data, UCI
tom.andriola@uci.edu

Summary

Our culture demonstrates both who we are and how we work together. It plays a critical role in shaping the behavior and defining the success of an organization, and it is fluid - it does not necessarily stay the same over decades.[1] A healthy culture also contributes to employee engagement, increased trust and greater effectiveness.[2]

In 2019, the leadership of the Office of Information Technology (OIT) at UC Irvine identified a need to pursue a cultural transformation to help unite the eclectic group of people that had been brought together by the office's creation a decade prior. Further, the difficulties we've all faced in the past year have only emphasized the importance of a strong work culture and how critical it is to remain connected to one another.

To address these needs, OIT's leadership collaborated on creating a set of core values, along with a vision and mission statements, highlighting the essential beliefs and cultural priorities of the organization. Seeking to promote engagement with these newly identified cultural values, a cross-departmental Culture Transformation work group was then formed with both staff and managers. Their charge was to take the values that existed as words and find ways to bring them to life within the organization. The group was tasked with demonstrating how the values could be lived out in real world situations and would gradually transform the experiences of all staff within OIT.

OIT's Culture Transformation work group has created a framework of scalable, repeatable and transferrable policies, programs, and techniques used to meet several actionable goals. These goals include:

- Boosting employee engagement and morale
- Driving awareness and adoption of cultural values
- Increasing efficiency and collaboration within OIT

While the work group's efforts started before the world changed due to the pandemic, they have also played a key part in thinking carefully and thoughtfully about how to remain connected during this critical time. The initiatives and efforts that have been prioritized by the work group have shifted as we continue to respond to the needs of the current work environment and our changed world, while aiming for a holistic culture that translates across virtual and in-person staff interactions.

Assessing the Problem

Why a culture initiative? The idea was to create a culture that would harmonize the organization on a deeper level. This was driven by three motivating factors:

- A strong culture is a differentiator for a campus technology organization.
- It ensures that our organization's brand is aligned with that of the University.
- Our shared values position us as a stronger strategic partner with a focus on customer centricity and collaboration, rather than simply a tool provider.

---

[1] Watkins, MIchael. "What Is Organizational Culture? And Why Should We Care?" *Harvard Business Review*, Harvard Business Review, 7 Aug. 2014, hbr.org/2013/05/what-is-organizational-culture.
[2] Alonso, Alexander. "Workplace Culture Matters." *SHRM*, HR Magazine, 26 Nov. 2019, www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/winter2019/pages/workplace-culture-matters.aspx.

OIT is a large, complex organization that, for about a decade, was a cluster of different groups and teams across various independent departments on campus with no shared vision or core values. While these teams were consolidated in response to the 2009 budget crises, there remained some opportunities to better align the organization. In 2019 with 343 staff and 69 student employees distributed across 12 locations on campus, it became apparent that the organization needed a strong north star for unity.

In addition, the retirement of OIT's former CIO, who had held the position for many years, provided a unique opportunity to reexamine the culture and begin the culture transformation initiative. Further, the hiring of a new Vice Chancellor of Information Technology and Data elevated IT by providing a seat in the Chancellor's cabinet for the first time in the University's history. This gave us even more reason to look at our culture and consider our role at the University.

Through SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), we determined the overall impact and strategy for our intended main outcomes. Next, to navigate large and complex organizational changes, and obtain buy-in from all levels, we created a change management and communication plan to create opportunities for involvement, crowdsource ideas, and ensure transparency and accessibility of all information on a centralized platform.

Our Solution

The Culture Transformation work group's efforts can be broadly divided into three phases: awareness, adoption, and engagement.
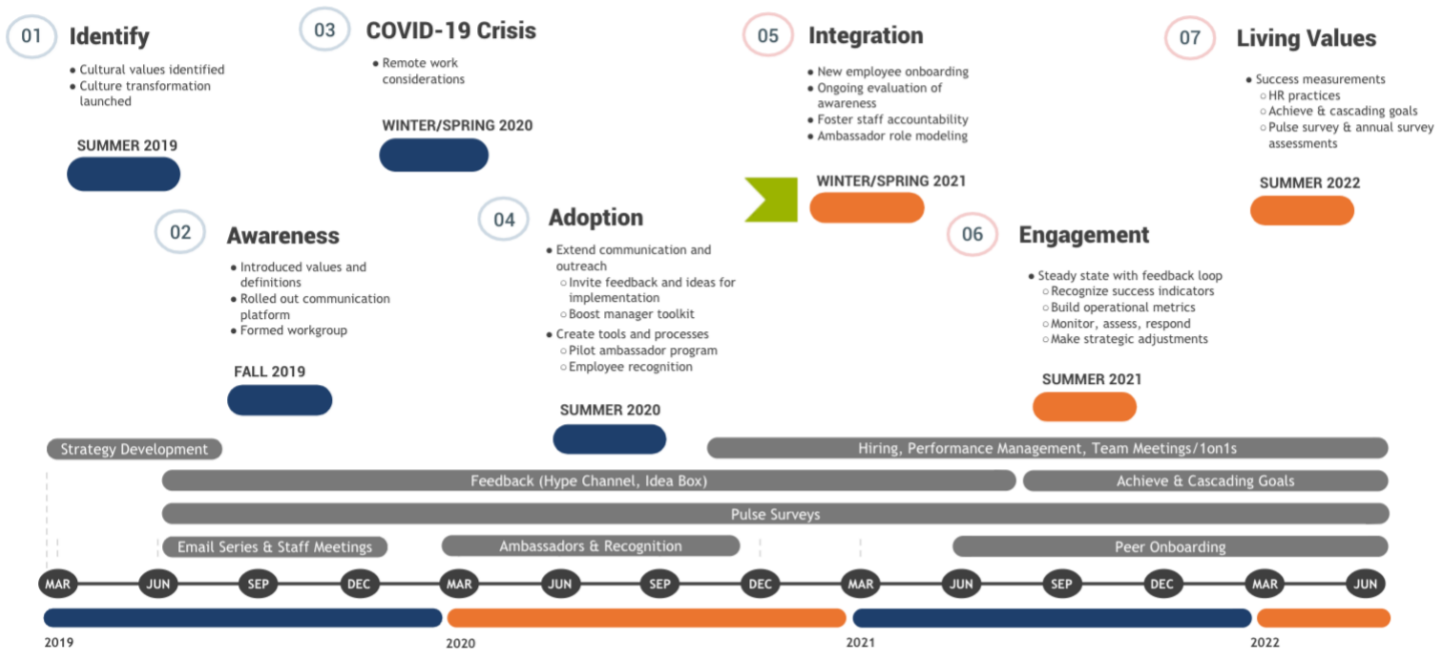

Figure 1. *Roadmap*

Awareness

Initially, we drove awareness through all-staff and leadership meetings, surveys, a virtual watercooler and additional web resources. As a result, pulse survey respondents in OIT indicated that their familiarity and engagement with our core values have doubled since September 2019.
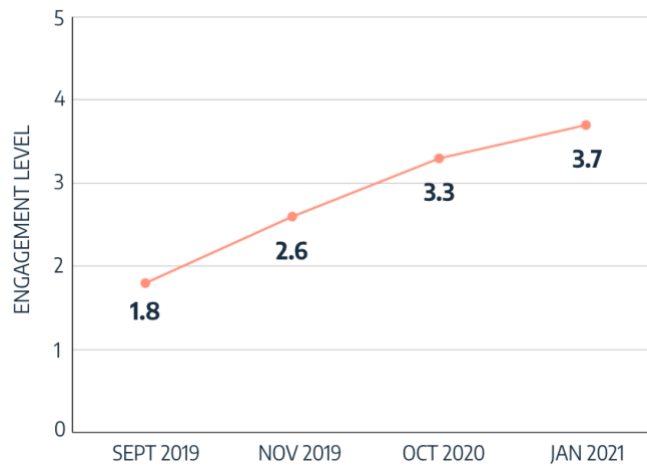
Figure 2. Survey participants rated their level of familiarity and involvement with the OIT Cultural Values on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (actively)

This is particularly encouraging given the ongoing pandemic and our shift to remote work. During this time, we have emphasized the importance of staying connected by creating chat channels in the virtual watercooler to discuss everything from cooking to movies, or even model aircraft. We've also created Zoom backgrounds that showcase our core values to serve as frequent reminders for everyone and to give people a way to display which values are most important to them.

Further, we now have a dedicated [Culture Initiative website](#). Here, people can find information about the initiative itself, the work group, our core values, plans, upcoming activities, and additional resources. It also provides a convenient way for people to contact the work group, which has resulted in people expressing their interest in joining the team and taking a more active role in the culture transformation.

Adoption

More recently, the work group's efforts have turned toward illustrating how to make the core values applicable to daily work. This begins on day one with new hires in our Peer Onboarding Program.

The Culture Transformation work group created the Peer Onboarding Program as a way of making sure that people felt welcome, included, and involved in our culture from day one. Aside from the cultural benefits, it also has tangible networking and efficiency benefits by providing additional insight for new hires into organizational structure and operations.

Kristen McIntyre *New Hire*	Alissa Powers *Peer Guide*
"I have loved this program. It's been amazing, especially given the remote environment where there aren't any water cooler conversations happening. My peer guide has been able to offer so much information and support. Having access to this program, and knowing OIT has invested in me having a successful onboarding, was one of the things that **confirmed UCI is the right place for me**."	"I really enjoyed this opportunity! I like that we're on different teams and have different jobs. It's okay that I can't necessarily help her with something job-specific because that's what her team is for. The most valuable part of this program is **sharing institutional knowledge, getting to know each other, and growing our networks**."

In addition to Peer Onboarding, our messaging has encouraged people to consider the core values during project planning, and we're working on a peer-to-peer recognition program that will help staff identify and call out when they see the values being lived out. We created a management toolkit to help leaders, supervisors, and managers become more comfortable modeling and talking about culture. This toolkit gives managers speaking points, background information, and tips for how they can incorporate culture discussions into team meetings or day-to-day operations.

Engagement

Finally, our work group recognizes that improving culture is not something that can be checked off of a list and set aside. It is a daily effort; it is an ideal for which we strive. To that end, we have put several things in place to supplement the efforts above:

- An anonymous virtual Idea Box that provides a mechanism for people to provide candid feedback or suggestions.
- Culture presentations led by staff, helping give a voice to anyone willing to share.
- A new sub-group within the Culture Transformation work group focused specifically on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
  - This group has been made in consultation with UCI's Inclusion and Diversity Officer.
- Regular pulse surveys that provide staff feedback on OIT's culture. Annual Qualtrics surveys provide extensive feedback that informs our strategy.

The above items will help ensure that we stay informed, that everyone can share their voice, and that we are positioned to identify and correct future challenges quickly.

Additional Resources

- Culture Website: [OIT Culture Initiative Website](#)
- 2020 Educause conference: [Leading Change by Putting People and Culture First](#) - a case study on best practices for transforming organizational culture that walked the audience through the key strategic components of a people-centered culture shift
- Examples of taking the Culture from concept to reality through toolkits and tangible assets: [value definitions](#), [Zoom backgrounds](#), [Dos and Don'ts](#)
- Employee stories through [value presentations](#)
- [Peer Onboarding Program](#)