ALIGNMENT AND PURPOSE
Campus Crowdsourced

UMD’s Thriving Workplace Initiative hosted an open-invitation Campus Conversation on April 10, 2018 with a focus on alignment and purpose. The Thriving Workplace Survey gauges alignment and purpose through three items: the mission or purpose of my organization makes me feel my job is important (Q08); my supervisor or department chair emphasizes my strengths rather than my weaknesses (C07); and leaders at UMD help me see how changes made today will affect the institution’s future (C09).

Over 100 ideas were generated during the Campus Conversation through small group conversations and individual reflection. When combined, four “buckets” emerged that most aptly hold the thoughts and ideas generated by our participants: communication, empowerment, support, and leadership. Below is a snapshot of what we heard from you:

COMMUNICATE:
For supervisors to improve alignment and purpose, they must first promote better conversations and improve person-to-person connections. How can supervisors improve communication and promote a shared purpose? Here were some of the recurring ideas:

- Establish and articulate a shared purpose or goal with team members.
- Be proactive: communicate and provide advance notice about changes.
- Ensure there are regularly scheduled meetings that cover pertinent university and departmental topics. Weave in communication that reinforces alignment of the mission and purpose.
- Be transparent and open to conversation, even when there's not an easy answer or when there are things outside your control.
- Encourage “talk-backs” so that you know there is a mutual understanding of information and to help your employees see the bigger picture.
• Provide affirmation and positive feedback in a variety of ways, both publicly and privately.
• Share positive feedback prolifically: look for the small things individuals do to “raise their game” and let them know you notice!
• Don’t wait for the PRD: one-on-one meetings should be regular conversations, not just part of the formal review.
• Be present and listen intentionally: employees will notice and feel their perspective is important.
• Speak to the future: communicate what’s on the horizon and explain how that’s in alignment with the group’s purpose and mission.

What can the University do?
• Hold targeted conversations about UMD’s institutional mission(s) with diverse units to see how it is understood, what it means among different units, and how it is interpreted or translated.
• Compile an end-of-year accomplishments report of all campus units/departments—share widely to showcase successes with the larger community.
• Create a campus campaign to build culture around alignment and purpose.
• Address strategic priorities for campus to faculty and staff, and what’s happening on campus to advance these priorities.
• When communicating news, simplify language and highlight the main points (not too long).
• Communicate more immediately when something happens to acknowledge it, even if next steps are still unknown.
• Provide more transparency from the senior leadership about where we are going, what our priorities are, etc.
• Share accolades—over email, on the University website, at meetings—when someone is working with purpose.
• Highlight best practices and share them so units aren’t “recreating the wheel.”

"The mission should be easy to understand and achievable to everyone on campus."

SUPPORT:
The right support can clear the way to connect with an organization’s, department’s, or unit’s mission and bring greater purpose to the job. How can supervisors offer the right support?
Here’s what you said:

• Provide ongoing training for supervisors and staff and create opportunities for collaboration with each other. Set time aside for all employees to sharpen their skills outside of their regular work responsibilities.
• Set up mentoring structures.
• Offer more touchpoints between supervisors and staff.
• Instigate listening sessions to create a culture of trust.
• Set timelines for execution and follow up of goals and expectations.
• Show appreciation for employee involvement. At the same time, encourage people who are not engaged.
• Monitor the scope of tasks assigned to individuals reporting to you. Protect them and don't let them say "yes" to everything.

"Check the temperature with your staff early and often. Are they finding purpose in their work? Don’t wait for them to come to you."

• Recognize the duality of some employees (for instance, working in the office by day, teaching at night). Understand and be sensitive to balancing those roles.
• Understand that employees have different styles and motivations—learn them!
• Have candid, supportive conversations about "soft spots;" help employees devise strategies to manage those areas.

What can the University do?

• Offer and encourage professional development for supervisors.
• Create initiatives that foster a sense of culture and community.
• Help departments generate a mission that is in line with the institutional mission.
• Invest in more accessible talent and development structures.
• Make sure departments are sufficiently resourced to carry out mission-related work.
• Host campus celebrations for faculty and staff, where they can interact with President Loh, Vice Presidents, Deans, etc.

EMPOWER:
When you empower employees, they take more ownership and pride in their work. What can supervisors do to empower others? You said:

• Go beyond announcing a change to explain the "why" and provide opportunities for group input on the "how".
• Connect the PRD process to the goals of the unit.
• Connect the dots: show how an individual’s contribution connects to both departmental success and campus mission.
• Provide opportunities for employees (staff especially) to interact with the constituents they serve so they understand their role in the unit’s success.
• Take a collaborative approach to envisioning the mission and how to achieve it. Make it a living document, not static.
• Remind employees that the mission doesn’t work without them.

Get to know superpowers
“Help people discover their strengths and use them.
Assign tasks and responsibilities by affinities and strengths—it’s a win-win!”

FEARLESS IDEAS THRIVING WORKPLACE INITIATIVE
• Ask employees what excites them.
• Listen with intention and ask for feedback regularly.
• Encourage team groups to get out of their areas and meet with other colleagues; create opportunities to do so. Don’t make it an annual retreat activity only!
• Allow staff to be part of the creative solution.
• Give ownership of projects, initiatives, and responsibilities that connect employees to unit goals.

What can the University do?
• Provide supervisor/manager training to frontline leaders that help with alignment and purpose; this includes human capital and emotional intelligence training.
• Invite input on priorities.
• Reinforce the idea of “what you do is important” with every entity on campus.
• Incentivize staff inclusion and participation. Missions generally focus on faculty and students, and staff sometimes don’t know how they fit in.
• Include faculty and staff when creating task forces.
• Allow access to the data people need to do their jobs.

Create opportunities for people to get out of their silos.

LEAD:
Leadership goes beyond support, communication, and empowerment. It sets the tone. Here are some ideas you had to bring leadership to the workplace:

• Make sure you know and are comfortable explaining the mission.
• Flip the hierarchy: look for ways to serve your team.
• Be willing to do anything you ask of your team.
• Learn on the job: shadow staff to see and understand what they do.
• Practice MBWA (manage by walking around): engage employees daily, on the job.
• Stop and ask, “are we on track with the mission?”
• Have a passion for the mission—it can’t be faked!
• Model what it means to work with purpose.
• Participate in the PRD process.
• Have a plan for when someone is not on board with the mission.
• Prioritize your leadership role. There are many aspects to running a unit, but leadership should be at the top of the list.
• Say thank you! Show gratitude for strengths.
• Be an active participant—it’s not just a checklist!
• Don’t be afraid to bring in outside perspectives for help.
• Question whether multiple missions are nested properly. How are they connected? How do they serve the mission of the university?

Working towards a mission is like exercise: you have to keep at it or you lose what you’ve gained!
• Monitor and redirect negative comments and behavior; work through difficulty and conflict.
• Let there be adaptability to the mission and process; revisit and review it regularly.

What can the University do?
• Assess the PRD process.
• Hold a “state of the division” talk annually, where people can talk, ask questions, and interact.
• Consider holding a “conversation with Dr. Loh”-type forum; offer a different focus or topic each session.
• Fewer silos! Streamline systems and processes. Promote programs, such as the Administrative Modernization Program, that are connecting elements across campus and helping departments work efficiently and with purpose.
• Hold people accountable for driving the mission, top to bottom; everyone should be held accountable to the mission and goals of the university.
• Acknowledge that there is no one-size-fits-all; the university is a system of different units with different capacities.
• Connect the mission to every facet of campus and every employee. Everyone should feel they make an impact on achieving the mission.
• Foster more cooperation across campus.

Join members of the campus community at upcoming Campus Conversations to discuss dimensions of a thriving workplace and generate strategies for action. Click here for the 2018 schedule.

Need more ideas? Have a specific challenge?
Visit the TWI Resource Library for videos, strategies, and more.

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