

# Making Workplace Culture Intentional: The CU Pharmacy Way

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## Background

- Culture is an abstract notion, often not articulated in the workplace. The concept of culture itself is not sufficient to support the development of a healthy and robust work environment.
- Workplace culture must be carefully designed, and not left to chance.
- The return to in-person work after the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a need to re-connect and strengthen our culture. Additional employee survey data, provided anonymously, further identified a critical need to enhance our culture.
- The 2023 AACP Interim Meeting introduced our leadership team to the Culture by Design framework.

## Methods

- A leadership team of faculty and staff was assembled to examine current workplace culture practices and aspirations, as well as to identify desired culture behaviors that align with the school's values, goals, and vision.
- Guided by an organizational culture consultant, the leadership team followed the 8-step framework described in the book "Culture by Design." (see Fig. 1)
- Feedback sessions gathered employees' thoughts on behaviors that drive positive workplace culture.
- A rollout event introduced the identified culture behaviors - also called fundamentals - to all employees at our school.
- An anonymous culture baseline survey was then distributed to benchmark current culture strengths and challenges. Employee perceptions of whether their colleagues perform each of the 24 fundamentals were collected on a 5-point Likert-scale, where 5.0 = Almost always, and 1.0 = Never.

## Results

Twenty-four fundamentals were identified in areas of communication, student-centeredness, and positive work methodologies. A pocket card defining the fundamentals was distributed and discussed at a school-wide retreat. Fundamentals were also embedded in recurring school practices. Weekly emails expanding on each behavior are sent by the Dean and discussed during meetings with  $\geq 3$  people. Within the first month of rollout, 59% of our school employees were discussing the fundamental of the week at the beginning of work meetings.

Survey results indicate that 70% of respondents have felt encouraged to adjust their actions and behaviors to be consistent with the culture fundamentals. The overall scores on the initial survey reflect that school employees' behaviors are often consistent with the designed fundamentals. The survey results provided an understanding of the acceptance of the fundamentals for employees throughout our school. The average aggregate score across all fundamentals was 3.99. Overall areas of strength are highlighted in green and center on quality, compassion, and ethics. Areas that scored lower, highlighted in red, tended to focus on sharing information, finding constructive solutions, and creating clarity (see Fig. 2).



Fig 1. The 8-step framework, as described in the book Culture by Design.



Fig 2. List of the school's culture fundamentals and their associated scores on the culture baseline survey.

## Initial Lessons, Learnings, & Implications

- The 8-step framework has been an effective guide for our school in designing and implementing its desired culture.
- A vibrant workplace culture fosters belonging and offers a unique advantage, contributing to employee retention, collaboration, and innovation.
- We need to continue to be intentional in our efforts to improve our work culture.
- We have identified dedicated personnel to move the work forward.

## Next Steps

- Annual culture surveys will track progress and inform practices to reinforce designed culture and ensure long-term success.
- We will incorporate intentional planning/programming of activities that drive positive work culture.
- We plan to incorporate fundamentals into all aspects of school operations.
- We will introduce these fundamentals to students during the 2024 Fall semester.

## References

- Friedman, D. J. (2021). Culture by Design: How to Build a High-Performing Culture, Even in the New Remote Work Environment. Independently Published (March 1, 2021).