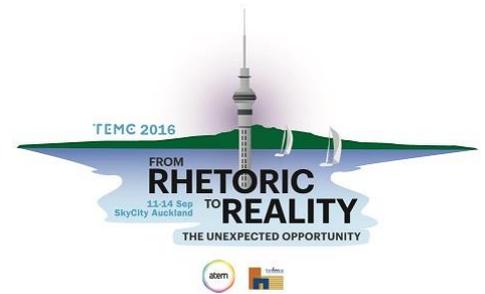


Concurrent Session L
Wednesday 14 September 2016
1:55pm – 2:45pm



Session 5
Strengthening A University Culture in Turbulent Times: A Case Study
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Juris has been Curtin's Director Organisational Development since the function was established in 2007. He joined Curtin in 2001 holding a leadership position within the Faculty of Health Sciences. Previous positions include Manager Professional and Career Development (WA Department of Training), Associate Director Executive Development (Management Development Institute, UWA) and State Training Manager (Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training). He holds a Bachelor of Arts, a Master of Commerce (Human Resource Management) and a Yachtmaster's Certificate. He is the proud father of two sons aged 22 and 19.

It is well known that the majority of culture change programs either fail or stall. This is a story of a program of work that has adapted to challenges and is now in its fourth year.

In 2012, Curtin's leadership decided to directly address internal cultural issues. The initiative responded to three imperatives. First, the need to address the People and Culture dimension of the 2013-2017 Strategic Plan which recognised the importance of shared values and common purpose in achieving Curtin's ambitious vision. Second, the recognition that corporate risks are tied to the strength of our culture and that the cultural tone is articulated from the top of the organisation through demonstrated values-based leadership. Third, the 2012 Your Voice survey revealed that almost half of Curtin's staff believed that the existing values at Curtin were not taken seriously in everyday experience.

By March 2013, Curtin had formulated a Curtin Culture and Experience Strategy to support the implementation of the 2013-2017 Strategic Plan. A key challenge was to align the pre-existing values (Integrity, Respect, Fairness and Care) with the need to achieve an agile, responsive and versatile organisation. A multi-faceted approach was considered essential to build ownership and acceptance of the desired values and behaviours and the translation of those into everyday actions.

This program of work became known as 'Living our values'.

The outcomes of the first phase (May 2013 – March 2014) were an agreed set of core values and behaviours, developed through a program of extensive staff and student engagement. The outcome of Phase 2 was to be the systematic embedding of these agreed values and behaviours throughout the university, so that they would become a core aspect of everyday decisions and actions at Curtin. Phase 2 was to span three years (2014-2016) with the final phase in 2017 which would aim to fully integrate the monitoring, review and development of values and behaviours in the strategic planning cycle.

However it was not to be so simple. During this time, Curtin had embarked on a number of other major transformation programs including a review and restructure of support services and a program to 'reshape' the academic workforce. Both of these transformation programs had a

significant and direct impact on many staff. These events added considerable complexity to the task of embedding the values.

By late 2014, data from a university-wide staff satisfaction survey and an internal review of the 'Living our values' program showed a heightened concern regarding the way staff changes were being managed and implemented. Some staff perceived an acute dissonance between the espoused values and signature behaviours and what they experienced day to day.

As a result of the review, the incoming Vice-Chancellor decided to broaden the remit of the initiative from its emphasis on values and signature behaviours to more directly focus on improving the 'lived experience' of staff at Curtin.

The 'Strengthening our culture' program built on the work of the 'Living our values' initiative and focused on three priorities that were identified from the 2014 staff satisfaction survey: leadership; staff engagement; and systems change. The program is actively led by the Vice-Chancellor and members of the executive through a number of working groups.

In November 2015 a 'pulse check' survey (a sub-set of the full staff satisfaction survey) was conducted with results showing some improvement against a number of key indicators.

This case study will outline the university's considerable efforts since 2012 to strengthen its culture. Importantly it will discuss the challenges, set-backs, adaptations and lessons learned along the way.