



Curtin University

# Strengthening a university culture in turbulent times: a case study

Juris Varpins

# Eudaimonia

- A Greek word
- Commonly translated as happiness or welfare
- “**Human flourishing**” has been proposed as a more accurate translation



# OUR VALUES AND SIGNATURE BEHAVIOURS

				
INTEGRITY	RESPECT	COURAGE	EXCELLENCE	IMPACT
TO ACT ETHICALLY, HONESTLY AND WITH FAIRNESS	TO LISTEN, VALUE AND ACKNOWLEDGE	TO LEAD, TAKE RESPONSIBILITY AND QUESTION	TO STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE AND DISTINCTION	TO EMPOWER, ENABLE AND INSPIRE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Honour commitments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensure safety, health and wellbeing are paramount</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Embrace challenges and opportunities with agility and purpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Reflect, learn and improve</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Deliver outcomes that make a difference</li> </ul>
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Building on a foundation of **integrity** and **respect**, and through **courage**, we will achieve **excellence** and have an **impact** on the communities we serve.



			
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...t, learn and improve



Deliver outcomes that make a difference

...nce creativity and  
...ation



Inspire others to fulfil their potential

...exceptional levels of  
...ce



Work together to achieve common goals

...nowledge success and  
...chievements of others



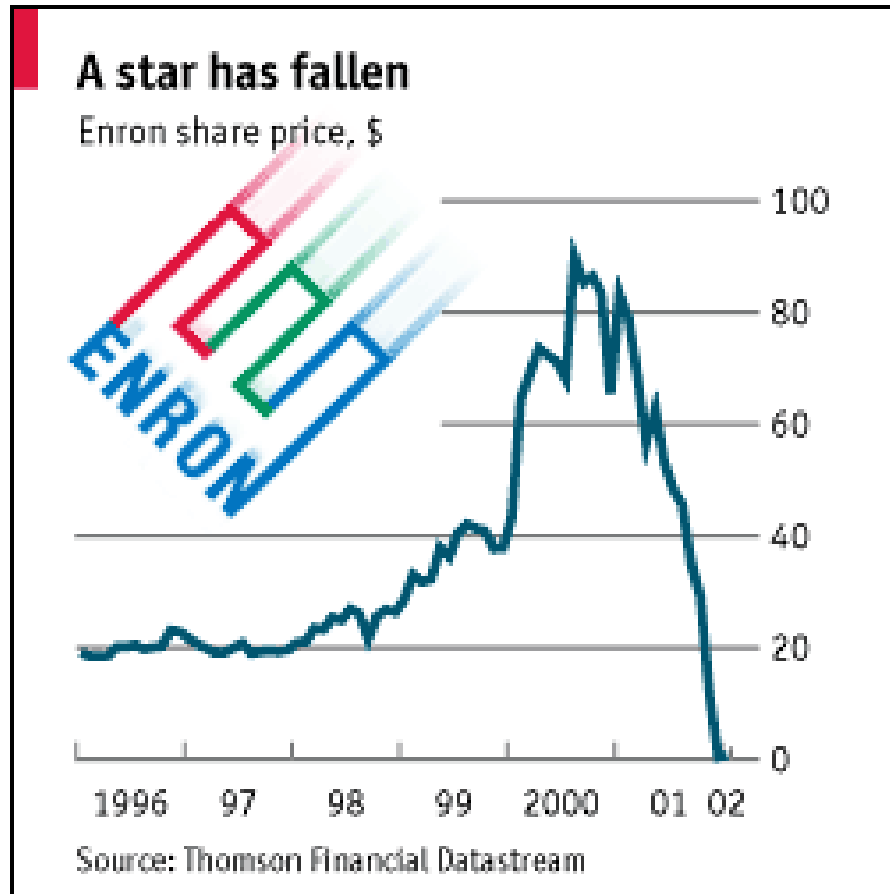
Build partnerships that create opportunities

**INTEGRITY**

**RESPECT**

**EXCELLENCE**

COMMUNICATION



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82%



# of organisational culture change programs



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# fail or stall\*

\*Dr Chris Van Tonder, Curtin School of Management





# Why?



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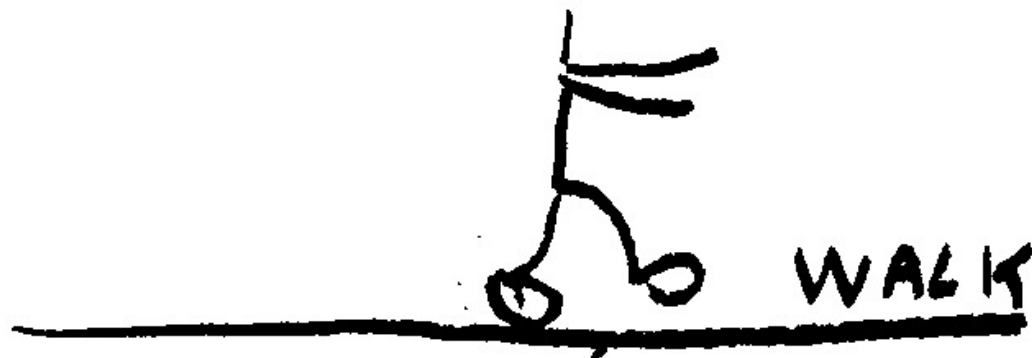
# Many reasons



# But if you had to pick one?









# Pop quiz

Who is stronger? The Rider or the Elephant?

The Elephant



The rider can control the elephant's path while he or she is strong and refreshed.

When the rider gets tired, the elephant starts to get more freedom to wander in its own direction.

It is the same with us.



# Two independent systems for decision making

We've known this for a long time

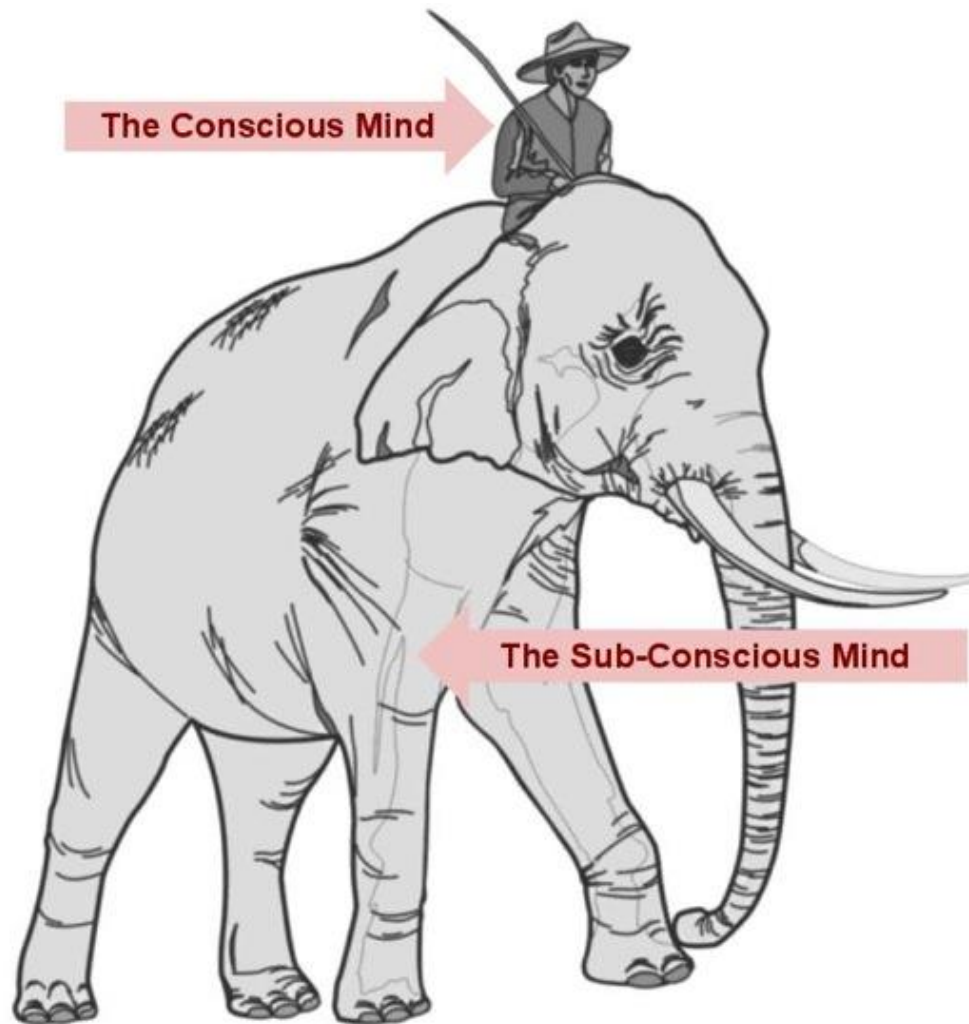
Now there's solid research showing,  
specifically, how the two systems work.

*Metaphor from Haidt (2006), Heath & Heath (2010), and the Buddha (~500 B.C.)*



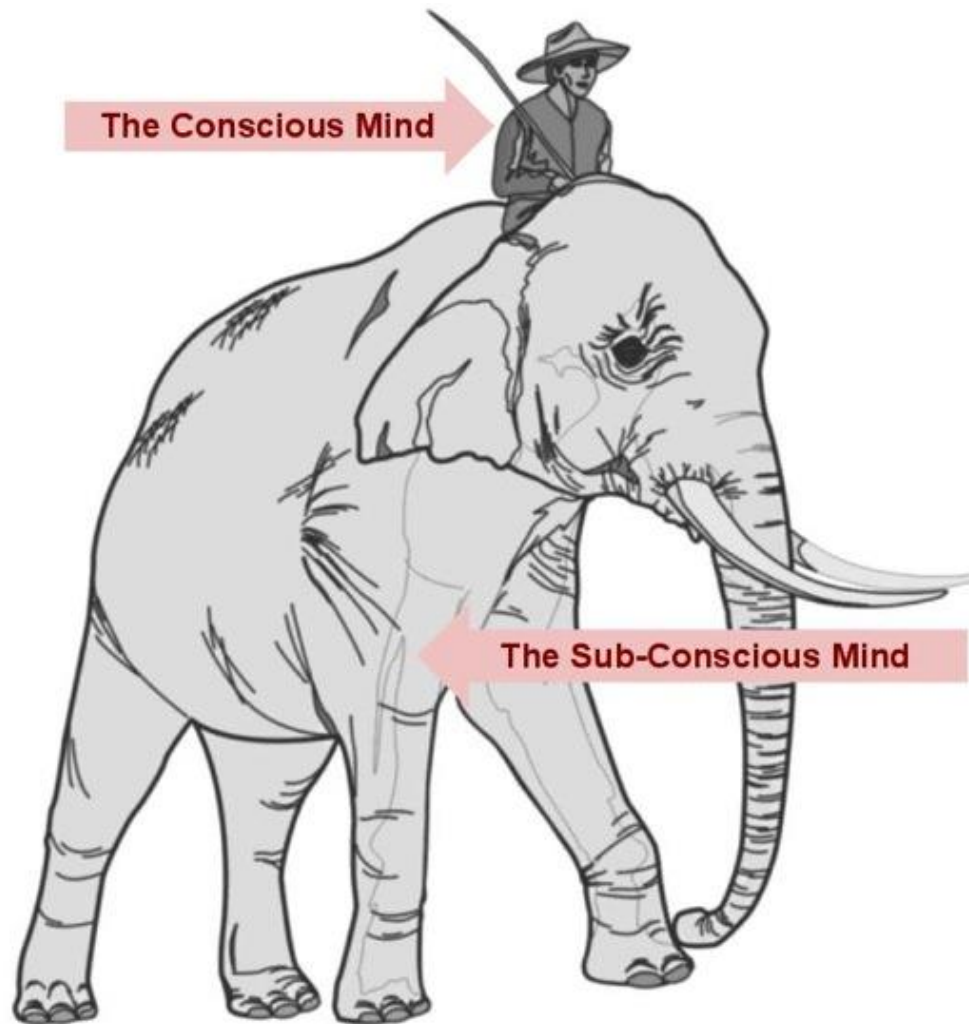
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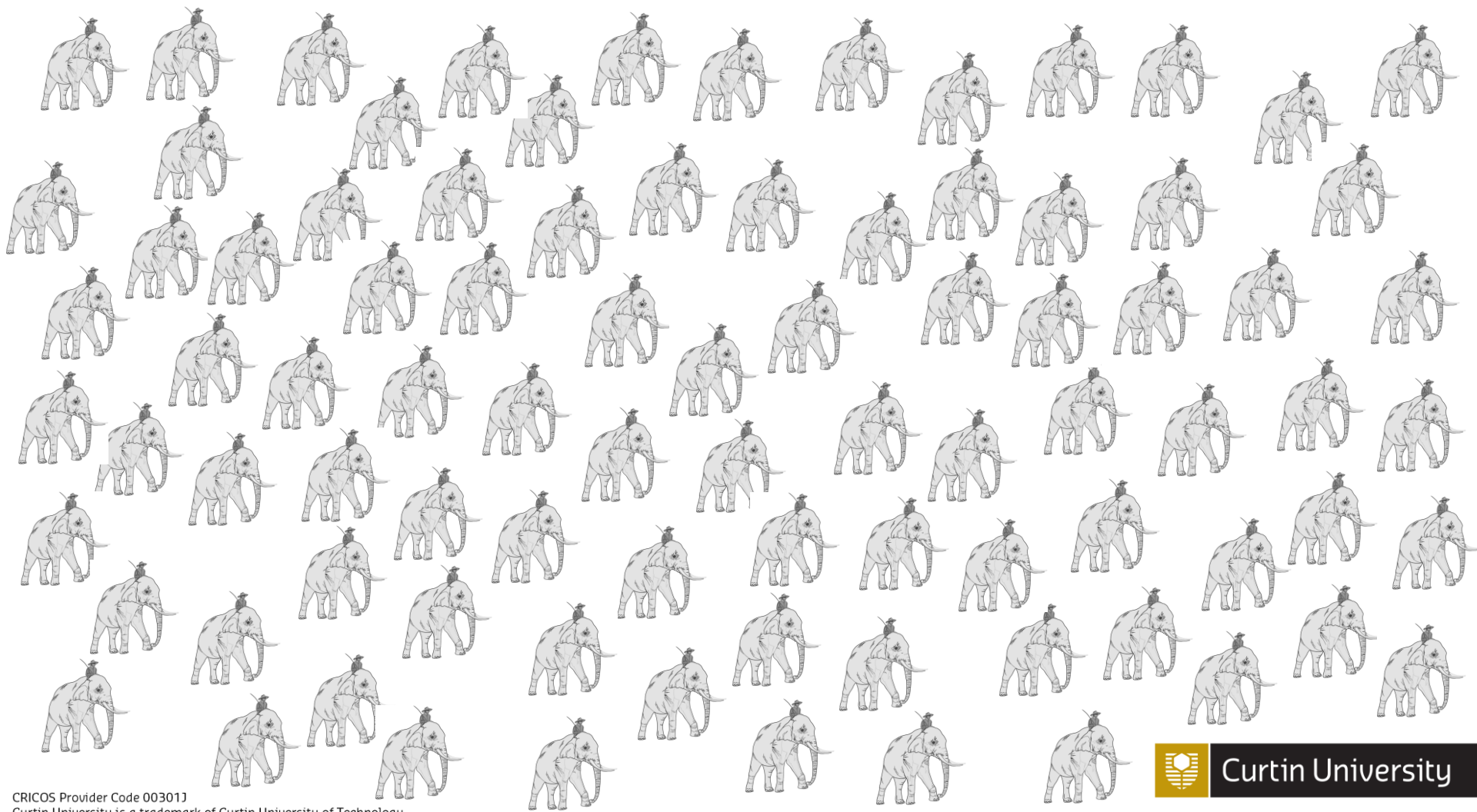




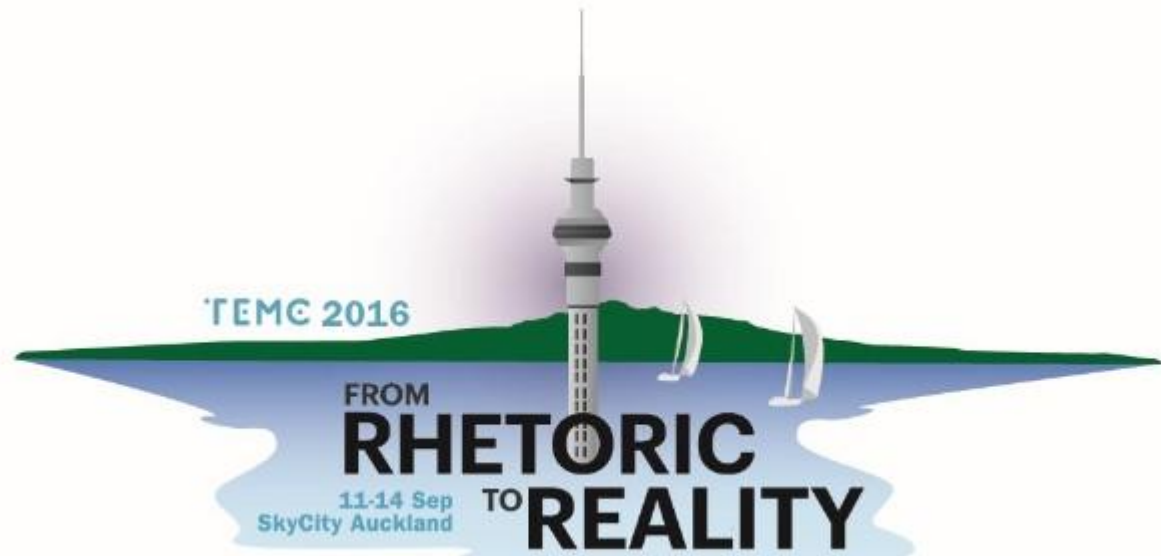
**“Change is not one of understanding but one of feeling.”**

**- Chip and Dan Heath**



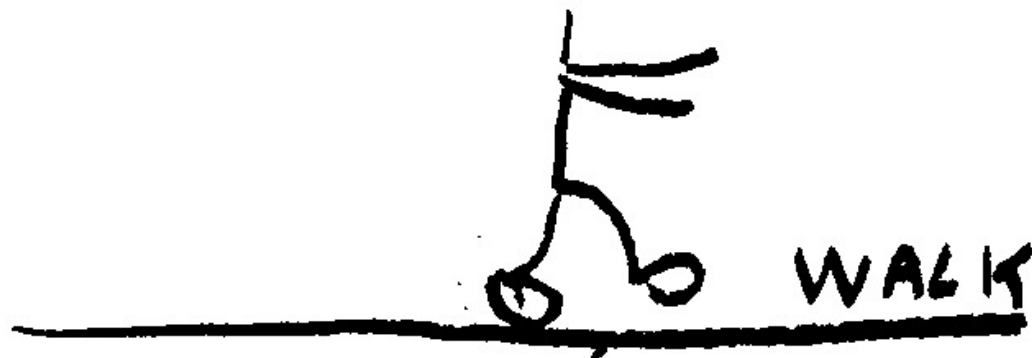


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# This is a case study



# a true story



# a tale of persistence



# and adaptation



# Symbols and culture



# Symbols

A symbol is anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share a culture (a flag, a word, a flashing red light, a raised fist, an animal etc).

- \* non-verbal gestures can be very “symbolic” and diverse.
  - *Diverse meanings can be given to different variations of the same object, for example, the winking of an eye.*

# Act I      ‘Shadows’ 1999-2007







# Development of staff 'deprioritised'



# Act II      New light 2007 - 2012



# Organisational Development Unit established September 2007

Concrete and symbolically positive



However non-verbal gestures can be very “symbolic”



# Senior Managers' Group Conference:

## 18 June 2007



### What is Curtin? A cultural exploration

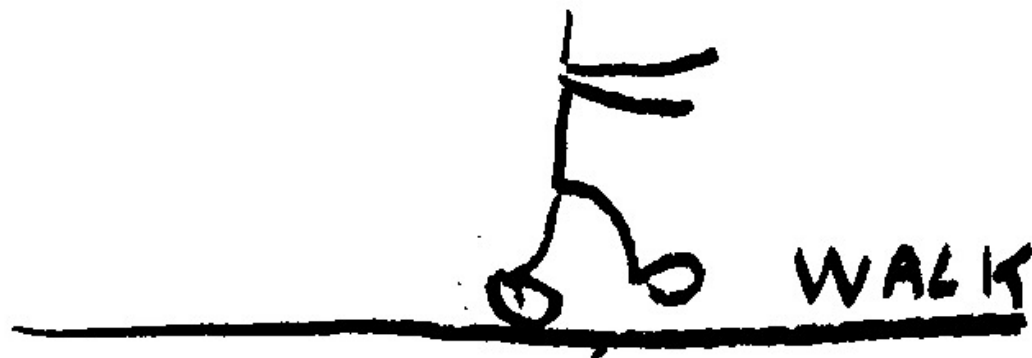
Session facilitators: Jane den Hollander  
Juris Varpins

*"The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them. Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us, but it is essential to leaders if they are to lead."*

Edgar Schein



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# ODU priorities 2007-2011

- A higher performance **culture** through enhanced **leadership** and management
- Improved workplace **performance** and **career** prospects through strategically focused professional development opportunities
- Improved **compliance** to policy and legislative obligations
- Improved **equity** and **diversity** outcomes



We achieved much in our first five years  
however  
ODU's 2012 stand out achievement

One new question in the *Your Voice* Staff  
Satisfaction Survey 2012



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# Act III    Watershed    *2011-2012*





Source: [http://images.dailytech.com/nimage/Burning\\_Platform\\_Wide.jpg](http://images.dailytech.com/nimage/Burning_Platform_Wide.jpg)

# Former Curtin employee pleads guilt to visa scam

Updated 13 May 2011, 4:28pm

MARCH 21 2011

## Uni staff faked test results, CCC hears

UNLOCK EVERY STORY NOW **50% OFF\***

\*for the first 12 weeks, then \$8/week. Conditions apply.

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### NEWS



**FREE 6-MONTH MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTION**  
WHEN YOU GET THE SUNDAY TIMES HOME DELIVERED\* \*CONDITIONS APPLY

## Former Curtin staffer admits to CCC he tampered with test results

AAP MARCH 24, 2011 1:32PM

DECEMBER 6 2013

## Curtin University's visa testing investigated by WA corruption watchdog

COREY STEPHENSON | PERTHNOW | MARCH 16, 2011 4:35PM



SAVE

## Curtin academic Dr Nasrul Ali offered students higher marks for sexual favours

PAUL LAMPATHAKIS | PERTHNOW | SEPTEMBER 02, 2010 10:52AM

## Corrupt Curtin University lecturer avoids jail



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# Your Voice staff satisfaction survey 2012

I believe in the values of Curtin **83%**

At Curtin, its stated values are taken seriously **55%**



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# ‘Values Based High Performance Culture’ – identified as a strategic risk

Risk rating



# 2012 Your Voice report to Council

- Usual briefing note
  - Positives
  - Areas for improvement
  - Strategies for improvement
  - Attachment: Survey results







# Small academic department

I feel emotionally well at work

**13%**

I am able to keep my job stress at an acceptable level

**0%**



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# Don't we have a duty of care?



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Source: [http://images.dailytech.com/nimage/Burning\\_Platform\\_Wide.jpg](http://images.dailytech.com/nimage/Burning_Platform_Wide.jpg)



# Act IV    Turbulence    *2012 – 2015*





# Curtin Strategic Plan 2013-2017





## PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Curtin will:

- evolve as an agile, responsive and versatile organisation, committed to leadership, innovation and excellence
- excel through dynamic staff with shared values and a common purpose
- engage students and staff as partners in a flexible, inspiring and technologically advanced environment.



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# What's important to the elephant?



# What's important to our staff and student community?



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# What do they value?



We asked our staff and student  
community



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# LIVING OUR VALUES

Realising our shared vision



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Executive Team leadership journey

Values survey

Senior Leaders' Conference

Staff/student debriefs & dialogues

Values Challenge

Values Summit

Finalise values & behaviours for Council approval

Develop implementation plan

Personal alignment of leaders and managers

Learning and development programs

Creating commitment

Systems change

Monitoring and review

Engage Advocates for Living Our Values

Communicate with the Curtin community

June-July  
2013

Aug-Oct  
2013

Nov-Dec  
2013

2014-2016



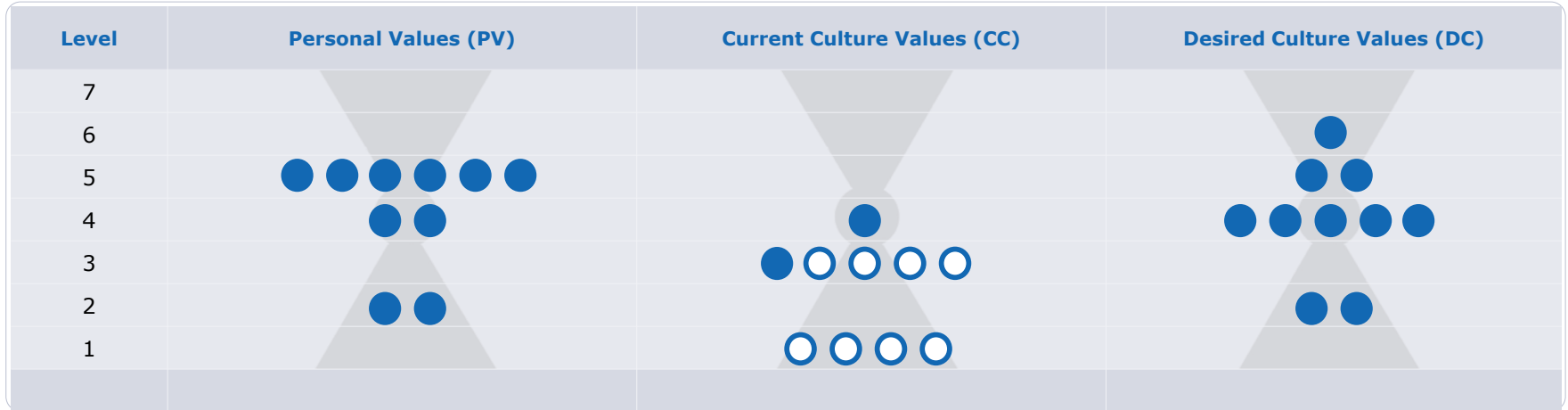
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# Barrett values survey: staff

Seven Levels of Consciousness



## Curtin University: Overall Group (1515)



Copyright 2013 Barrett Values Centre

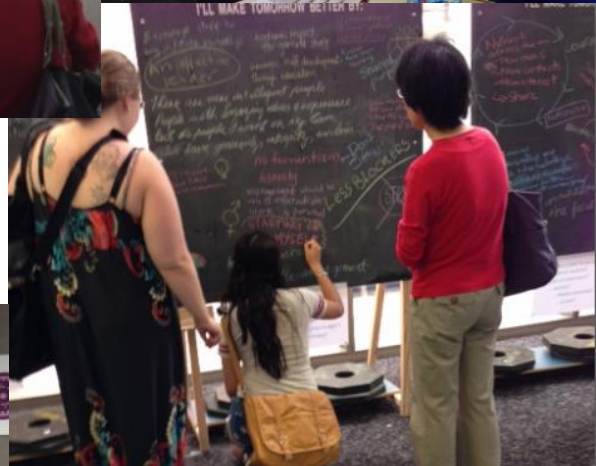
Values Plot



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## Values challenge



# From-To Shifts

FROM		TO	
Limiting Values (CC)	Limiting Behaviours	Guiding Behaviours	New Values
<i>Bureaucracy</i> <i>Hierarchy</i> <i>Control</i> <i>Long hours</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dogmatic adherence to rules and procedures</li> <li>• Micromanaging</li> <li>• Setting unreasonable workloads</li> <li>• Not valuing others</li> <li>• Intimidation and bullying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act professionally with courtesy and consideration of others</li> <li>• Ensure safety, health and wellbeing are paramount</li> <li>• Advance creativity &amp; innovation</li> <li>• Inspire others to fulfil their potential</li> </ul>	<i>Respect</i> <i>Excellence</i> <i>Impact</i>
<i>Silo mentality</i> <i>Empire building</i> <i>Internal competition</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lacking trust in others</li> <li>• Reluctance to share information</li> <li>• Excluding others</li> <li>• Closed thinking, insular</li> <li>• Closed doors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engender trust through openness, honesty and consistency</li> <li>• Value diversity and promote equity and inclusion</li> <li>• Work together to achieve common goals</li> <li>• Build partnerships that create opportunities</li> </ul>	<i>Respect</i> <i>Integrity</i> <i>Impact</i>
<i>Risk Avoidance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of failure</li> <li>• Blaming</li> <li>• Complacency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embrace challenges &amp; opportunities with agility and purpose</li> <li>• Support intellectual freedom and value bold ideas</li> <li>• Take ownership of decisions and learn from experience</li> <li>• Make informed decisions and be accountable for outcomes</li> </ul>	<i>Integrity</i> <i>Courage</i>







# The values summit



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# OUR VALUES AND SIGNATURE BEHAVIOURS

				
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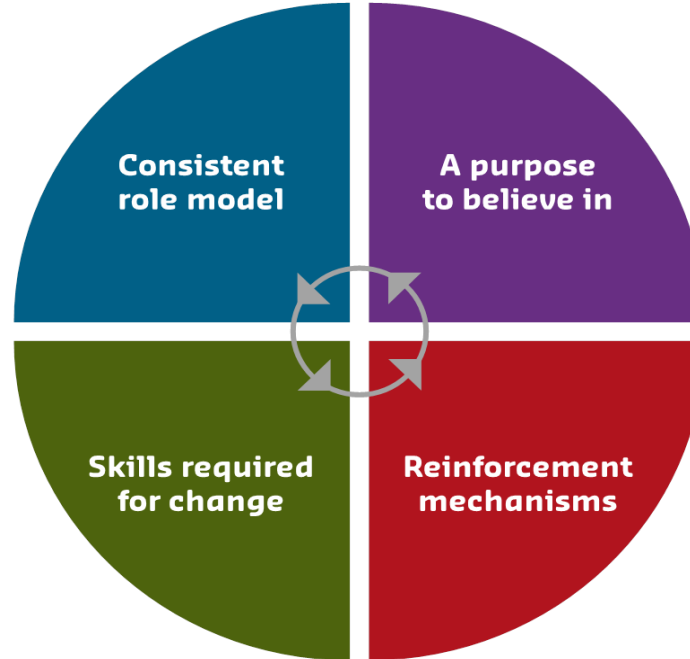
# Design Philosophy

**'I see leaders behaving in the new way'**

- Top team transformation
- Symbolic actions
- Influence leaders

**'I have the skills, capabilities and opportunities to behave in the new way'**

- Technical and relational
- Refreshing the talent pool
- Training



**'I know what is expected of me – I agree with it and it is meaningful'**

- Transformation story
- Language markers
- Rituals to embed messages
- Shared, lived values

**'the structures, processes and systems reinforce the change in behaviour I am being asked to make'**

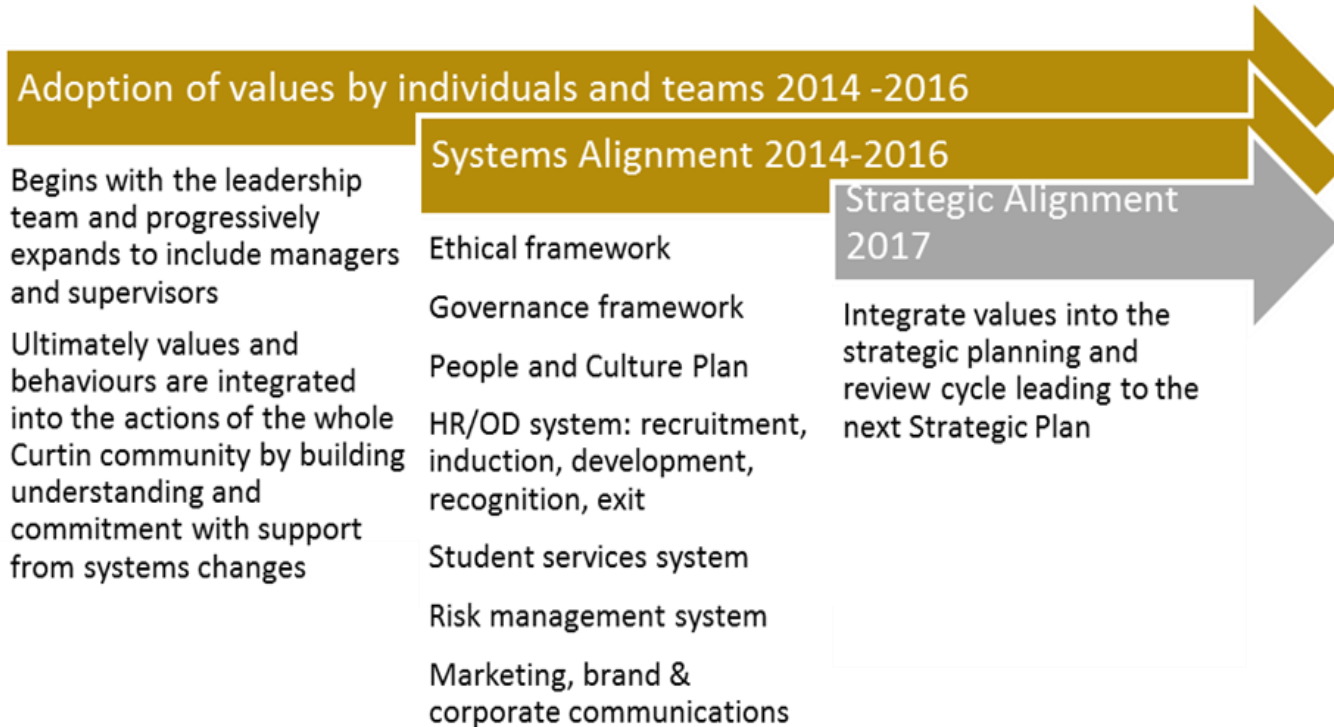
- Reward and consequences
- Talent management processes
- Structure and systems

*Source: McKinsey and Company: Influence Model*



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# Phase II: Living our Values 2014 to 2017



# New VC

## February 2014





Embedding clear and shared values into every aspect of life at Curtin will build the strong and successful culture needed for us to realise our future potential.

As we do so, I agree with the focus on John Curtin's sentiment: "the great university should find its hope in the future; it should look ever forward; for it the past should be but a preparation for the greater days to be".

When I tracked down the 1932 article in the West Australian in which John Curtin expressed this view, the other statement that resonated strongly with me was the view and I quote: "... above all things, the University must have a soul. In it the divine spirit of service, and sacrifice for service, must pervade all its works". By doing both – striving for excellence and impact in everything we do at the same time as ensuring that the University has a soul and a strong sense of purpose – we will realise our immense potential and meet the expectations of all our stakeholders: our students; our staff at all of our sites, regional and international; our alumni; and our government and industry partners.

Extract from Deborah Terry's Investiture speech 24 February 2014



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## Academic Reshaping



# Transforming Learning at Curtin



## Transforming IT at Curtin



## Transforming Facilities and Place



# Greater Curtin: Creating a City of Innovation



## EQUIP



**Academic  
Reshaping**



**Transforming  
Learning at  
Curtin**



**Transforming  
IT at Curtin**



**Transforming  
Facilities and  
Place**



**Greater  
Curtin:  
Creating a  
City of  
Innovation**



**EQUIP**

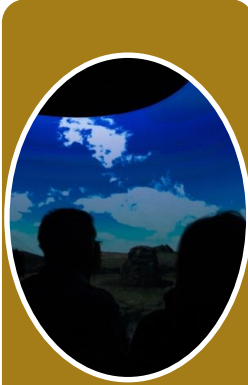


**Living our Values**





Academic  
Reshaping



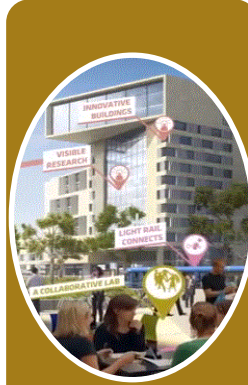
Transforming  
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Create  
Curtin:  
Creating a  
City of  
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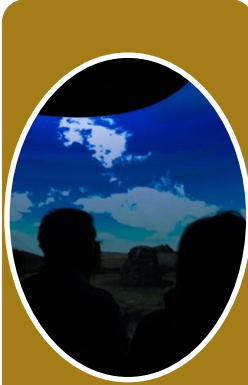
EQUIP

# TURBULENCE

Living our Values



Academic  
Reshaping



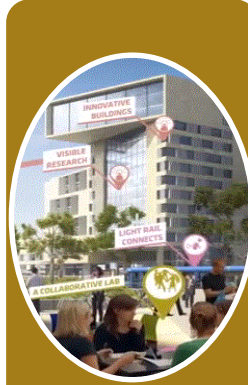
Transforming  
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Curtin



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Transforming  
Facilities and  
Place



Greater  
Curtin:  
Creating a  
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Innovation



EQUIP

# LANGUAGE TO CHALLENGE CHANGE PROCESSES

Living our Values



Academic  
Reshaping



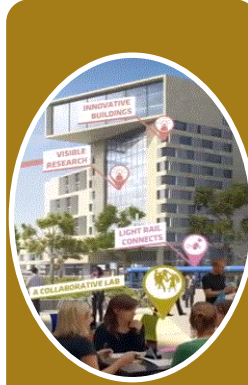
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EQUIP

CYNICISM



Living our Values

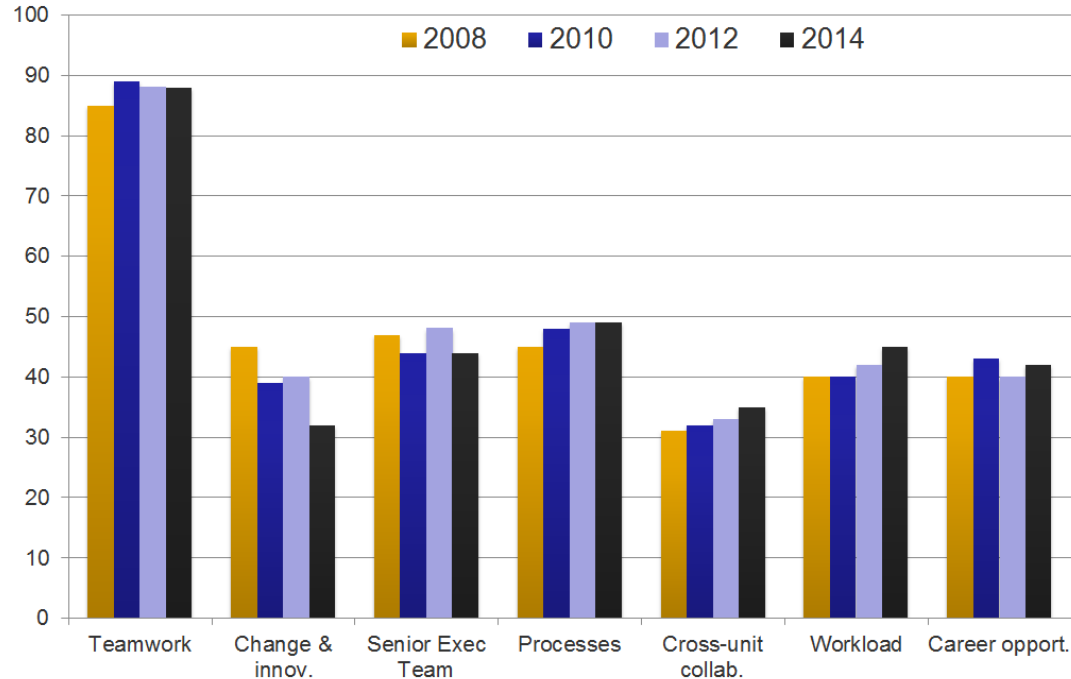
# Your Voice Staff Satisfaction Survey 2014

Courageous timing?



# Your Voice results: VC's presentation Nov 2014

## Consistencies over time:



# Living our Values program review



# Adaptation



# Act V    Renaissance 2015 –





Shifting from  
*‘Living our Values’*  
to  
*‘Strengthening our Culture’*



# The adaptation

Broaden the remit of the program to improve the ***lived experience*** of staff at Curtin

With focus on

- leadership
- staff engagement and
- systems change
- gender equity



# Examples of current initiatives

## **Leadership**

- 360 degree feedback
- Approach to change management

## **Systems Change**

- Recruitment processes to select candidates for culture fit
- Curtin Culture Suggestion Box



# Examples of current initiatives

## **Staff Engagement**

- Enhanced new starter experience
- Consultation continuum

## **Gender Equity**

- Identify and implement strategies to increase the representation of women
- Ensure a successful application for an Institutional Bronze Award under the Athena Swan Charter (Australia)



# Are we getting anywhere?



# 2015 Pulse check

YOUR VOICE ITEM		% CHANGE
37	I have confidence in the ability of the University Senior Executive Team	+6%
39	The University Senior Executive Team keep people informed of what is going on	+7%
40	The University Senior Executive Team listen to other staff	+11%
43	My Local manager keeps people informed about what's going on	+4%
44	My Local manager listens to other staff	+3%
56	I am encouraged to give feedback about things that concern me	+2%
57	I am consulted before decisions that affect me are made	no change
108	The way Curtin is run has improved over the last year	+11%
130	I feel my feedback was acted upon from the 2014 Your Voice Survey	-9%



# Lessons

## What has worked well:

- Commitment at the most senior levels
- Strong governance
- Strong vision, design philosophy and measures of progress/accountability
- Engagement of staff using deliberative and creative approaches
- Monitoring, evaluating and willingness to adapt
- Culture Representatives program (local champions)
- Focus on practical actions that improve work life

## Challenges

- Integration/interplay with other strategic initiatives and priorities
- Appropriate and effective communications – individuals, teams, whole system
- Impact of new leaders – VC, Provost, DVCI, DVCR, PVCH, HR director
- Academic staff engagement and work with remote campuses
- Capability and capacity to deal with complexity and deep work of culture change



## STRENGTHENING OUR CULTURE

[Home](#)[About](#)[Curtin Values](#)[Getting Involved](#)[Contact us](#)[Suggestion Box](#)[Blog](#)[Resources](#)[Curtin Home](#) > [Strengthening our Culture](#)

### Strengthening Our Culture: Listening to Your Voice



***Building on a foundation of integrity and respect, and through courage, we will achieve excellence and have an impact on the communities we serve.***

*Strengthening our culture* is one of Curtin University's strategic initiatives which aims to foster an environment in which values play an important role in the decision-making of every staff and student.

[View our values and signature behaviours](#)