



THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA®

WHERE LEGENDS ARE MADE

Agility Leadership

The University of Alabama Strategic Plan



THE UA STRATEGIC PLAN: Advancing the Flagship

Goal #2

Increase the University's productivity and innovation in research, scholarship and creative activities that impact economic and societal development.

Objectives:

- Leverage the University's unique, emerging strengths to create a strong culture and opportunities for cross-disciplinary research, scholarship, innovation and creative activities that have economic and societal impact, and which contribute to the University's teaching and service mission.
- Invest in infrastructure that promotes a thriving research and economic development enterprise.
- Develop a multi-level, continuous improvement process that facilitates research, scholarship and creative accomplishments.
- Establish a regular dialog among the administration, faculty, staff and students that creates a climate of shared understanding and addresses opportunities for and barriers to productivity, scholarship and creative activity.
- Cultivate, support, sponsor and conduct community-engaged research that enriches our teaching, research and service missions and enhances the University's designation by Carnegie as a community-engaged institution.

Goal #4

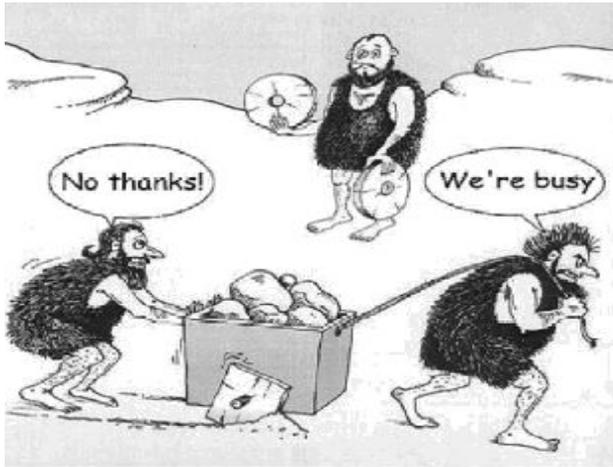
Provide opportunities and resources that facilitate work-life balance and enhance the recruitment and retention of outstanding faculty and staff.

Objectives:

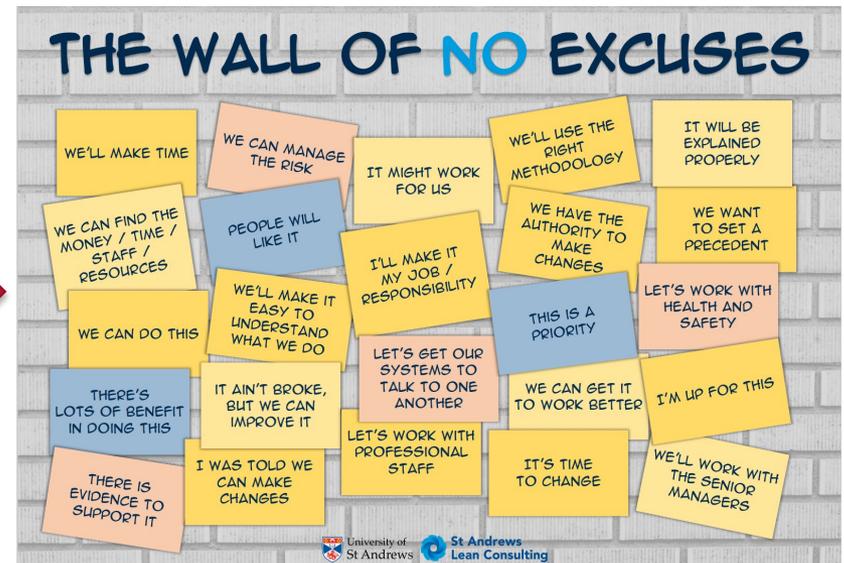
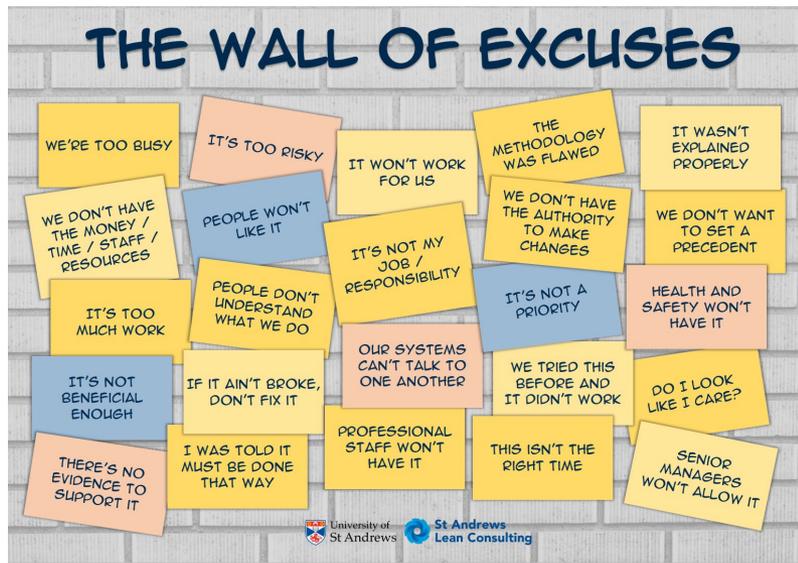
- Establish a Work-Life Center that encourages a family-friendly workplace by supporting a healthy work-life balance.
- Implement employment initiatives that keep UA nationally competitive while ensuring consistency, equity and inclusion.
- Establish clear channels of communication for all University employees that encourage cross-departmental collaboration and consistency.

Process Improvement Background

Too busy to fix a problem?



Veterans of process improvement initiatives attest to the positive results across an institution: error reduction, risk mitigation, greater staff capacity and morale, and improved beneficiaries' satisfaction, just to name a few.

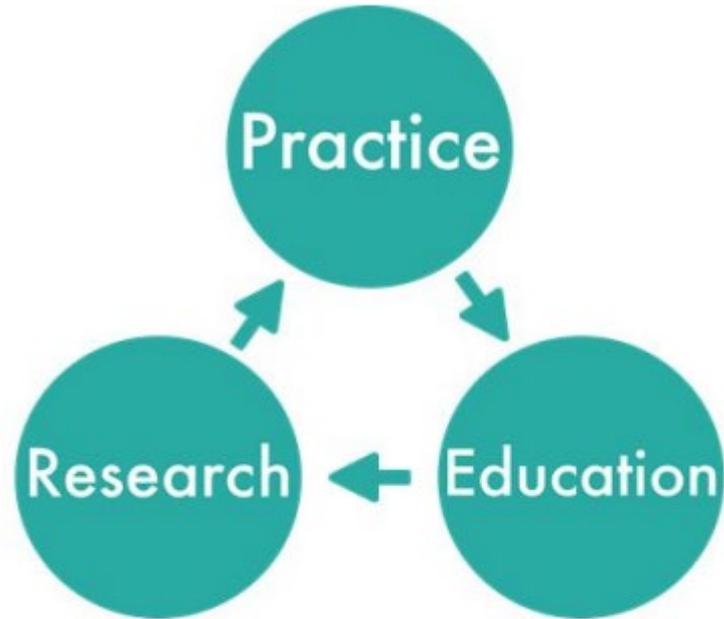


Managing Change



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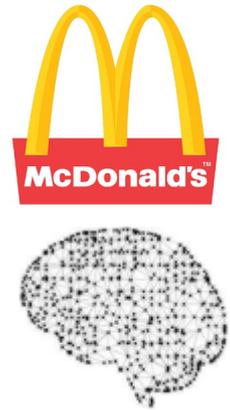
Myths

Myth #1: People are designed to adapt. Anyone who has said humans are built to change has lied to you!

Principle #1: People are designed for predictability and consistency. We live in mental models (experiences) that can get in our way of change..

[Mental Model](#)

How to make sense of the future using prior information.



Myth #2: People resist change.

Principle #2: We struggle with uncertainty. Fill in the blanks for what the employees need to know.

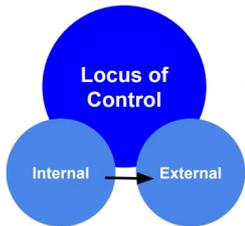


Managing Change - How we lead the change?

- S** TATUS
- C** ERTAINTY
- A** UTONOMY
- R** ELATIONSHIP
- F** AIRNESS

As Individuals:

- Status – Employees’ identity is their current work. Help know how to translate that to the future.
- Certainty – Need to create as much certainty. Communication in higher ed kills us (President to VP to AVP/Deans etc. etc.) Tell bad news!
- Autonomy – Over work and workspace. Give control back even if in minor ways.
- Relationship – When changing the org chart, it messes with people’s relationships with others.
- Fairness – It’s a deep seeded need. End-result doesn’t have to be equal, but it does have to be fair and fair to others.



As Leaders: Trusted Leaders have:

- ✓ Integrity – People understand how leader makes decisions and that they are fair. Gives confidence. It’s okay not to like the decision.
- ✓ Benevolence
- ✓ Ability – The power to act on benevolence.



As Organization:

- ✓ Distributive Justice: All treated fairly, all opinions heard. If people don’t trust the process, then they won’t trust the change.
- ✓ Procedural Justice: Organizations must have integrity. Who are the decision makers? What information is used? If process is transparent, people will trust. If opinion is heard, even if not accepted, that can be okay and is better.
- ✓ Interactional Justice: Treat people with respect. Don’t communicate an organizational change with a note on chairs. Deal with conflict with respect.

Lessons Learned about Change

STATUS

Describe the future often, from the perspective of the present



CERTAINTY

Give people control, even over small things

AUTONOMY

Describe decision-making process and results

Make the decision-maker(s) clear

RELATIONSHIP

Talk and listen to everyone, and listen often

FAIRNESS

Be authentic (in listening and action)



Psychology of Change

What?

So What?

Now What?

1. Write down your thoughts on these questions.
2. Pair up and discuss.
3. Combine into groups 4-6 and discuss.
4. Talk about as the whole group.

Agility: What is Agility?

It is The University of Alabama's Continuous Improvement program using Lean Higher Education (LHE) change methodology. It supports **respect for people** and **continuous improvement**.

- Way of Thinking: Train employees to make better decisions, be more productive, continually identify non-value-added activities or inefficiencies, and use problem-solving tools to remove inefficiencies from their processes.
- Way of Behaving: Engaging employees and departments by respecting each other, having a willingness and ability to collaborate to solve problems, actively soliciting ideas for improvement, encouraging teamwork and helping each other be their best.
- Set of Tools: Provide the support structure and methods by which process improvement can happen. Used correctly the tools help identify underlying problems and their causes which can then be addressed vs. guessing at solutions in the absence of Lean Higher Education.

Agility: Lean Higher Education

- Key Features of Lean Higher Education (LHE):
 - Comprehensive approach to institutional change and improvement that transforms the work experiences of all employees. The role of leaders shifts from direct problem solver to coach and mentor.
 - Respects and balances the needs of the institution with those of its employees
 - clear directions,
 - how success will be measured,
 - delegated authority,
 - how work contributes to success of the University,
 - recognition for ideas and success,
 - feeling valued,
 - training on how to improve work, and
 - continuous coaching.
 - Employees aren't overburdened due to attrition.
 - Offers a practical framework with supporting tools that support relentless continuous improvement to drive out non-value-added activities. These tools have been used successfully at other universities.
 - Favors implementing solutions quickly, i.e., action over talking. Employees are empowered. Imperfect solutions will be enhanced or replaced via ongoing continuous improvement efforts.

From: Balzar, W. 2020. *Lean Higher Education*. New York: Routledge/ Productivity Press. p. 17.

Agility: Leadership

Conventional Leadership	Agility / LHE Leadership
Most UA processes are working well (including educational processes)	All UA processes can be improved (including educational processes)
Problems are bad and reflect negatively on employees and leaders	Problems are good and provide insights into improving the process that caused them. Deliver bad news first mindset. “No problem is a problem.”
Leaders know best and provide solutions to problems	Leaders develop employee skills and capabilities to solve problems
Leaders use an ad hoc approach to problem-solving	Leaders support the broad-based application of Agility/LHE problem-solving practices
Employees are used effectively to support UA	The skills and capabilities of employees are grossly underutilized

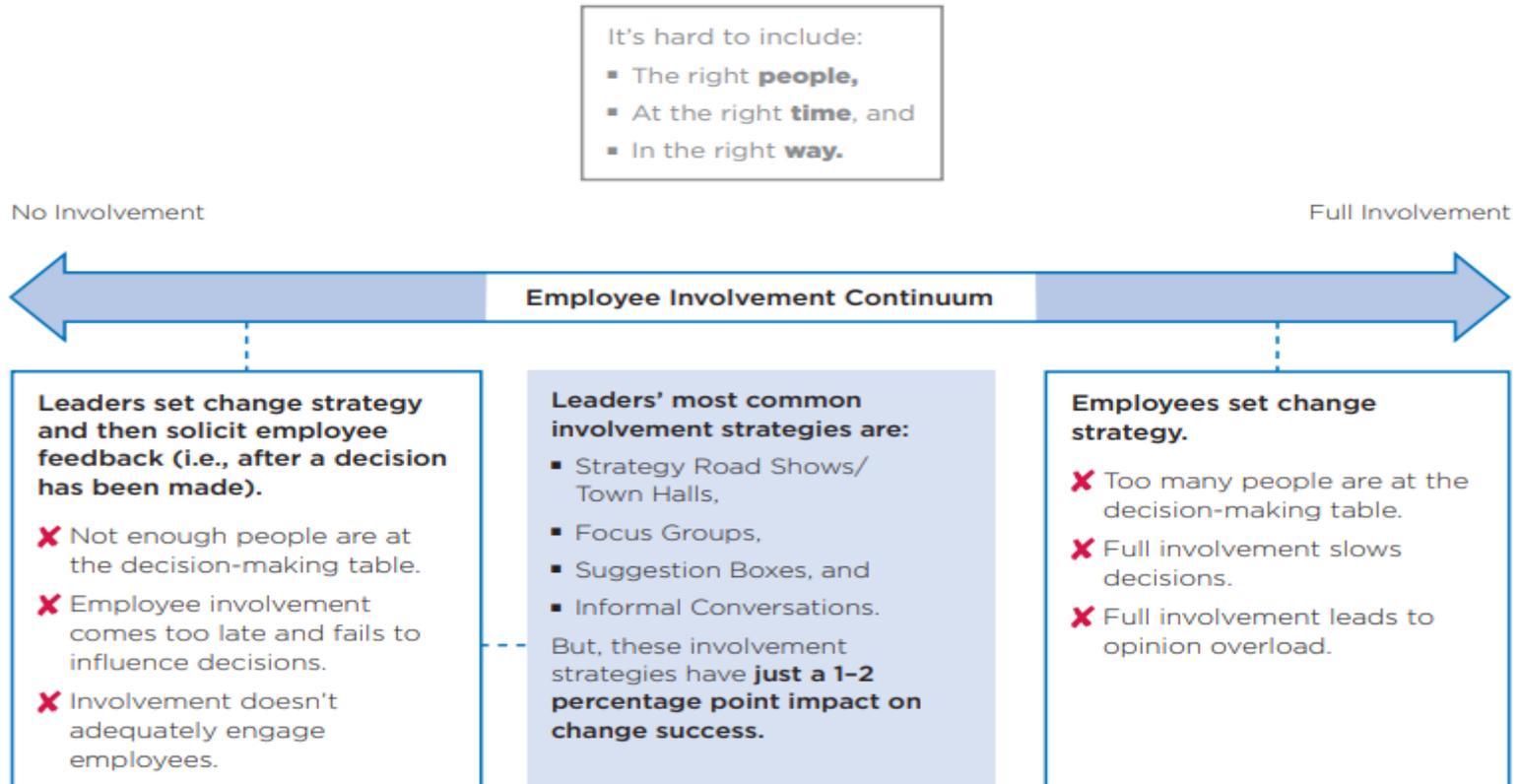
Agility: Psychological Safety

Psychological Safety

- An environment that encourages, recognizes and rewards individuals for their contributions and ideas by making individuals feel safe when taking interpersonal risks.
- Employees are more comfortable showing and employing their authentic selves without fear of being negatively blamed, punished or labeled as ignorant, not a team player, incompetent or disruptive because they feel accepted and respected.
- Employees feel more comfortable asking questions, seeking feedback, discussing their mistakes, experimenting, failing in their experiments, offering opposing perspectives, raising concerns and proposing novel and unorthodox ideas.
- When present in an organization, employee performance improves.

Agility: Employee Engagement

STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE OF INVOLVEMENT IS CHALLENGING



Source: CEB analysis.

Agility: Continuous Improvement

COCREATE CHANGE STRATEGY

Cocreating Change Strategy

Means Including...

✓ The right **people**

✓ At the right **time**

✓ In the right **way**



Selective Participation

Don't try to include all employees.

Selectively include the most relevant employees.

Early Transparency

Don't share just your final strategic vision.

Communicate to employees options for the future before choosing a certain path.

Differentiated Involvement

Don't use a uniform approach to gathering employee input.

Involve select employees based on their unique expertise and the change requirements.



WHERE LEGENDS ARE MADE



Agility: Continuous Improvement

OPEN DECISION FRAMEWORK INVOLVES EMPLOYEES, NOT JUST LEADERS, IN DECISIONS



OPEN DECISION MAKING

<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Inviting diverse perspectives and ideas✓ Managing expectations✓ Explaining requirements, constraints, and trade-offs✓ Engaging potential detractors (early and often)✓ Staying engaged with those who reject solution✓ Remaining open to new information and ideas✓ Working together to get stuff done	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Giving everyone a vote✗ Trying to please everyone✗ Ignoring requirements and constraints✗ Avoiding uncomfortable conversations✗ Having endless debates✗ Failing to execute✗ Achieving consensus

Slower decision making leads to more effective and faster results because:

- All levels of employee are **involved**,
- Responsibilities are **clearer, and**
- **Reasons** for the project are understood and accepted, if not always liked.

“Red Hat strives for change management to happen during the decision process, not during execution.”

Jim Whitehurst
Red Hat CEO

Source: Rebecca Fernandez, “Open Decision Framework,” Red Hat, <http://redhat.slides.com/rfernand/deck-1-3-3-4-6#/>, Accessed May 2016; Jim Whitehurst, *The Open Organization: Igniting Passion and Performance* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2015); CEB analysis.



WHERE LEGENDS ARE MADE

Agility

Agility: Building a Problem Solving/Change Culture

Be deliberate about shaping your culture.
If you get the culture right, the rest becomes a lot easier.

- Role Model the Behaviors (Mahatma Gandhi example)
 - Look for and possibility create opportunities to show desired behaviors (must be genuine!)
 - Practice asking “why” on processes you’ve created, try to ask for opinions from a new group of employees before decisions are made and tie work to goals, for a few examples
- Establish and Reinforce Clear Expectations
 - Set the minimal expectations (don’t have to set up the entire culture at once)
 - Set the tone that participating isn’t optional; making an effort is how we learn
 - Examples – getting beneficiaries to weigh in early on, ask a few others to read a communication, set aside time to talk about problems and issues.
 - Practice relentless patience!
- Support Your Team
 - Be available and engaged, but not interfering
 - Provide resources or remove barriers
 - Provide clarity around boundaries and rules
 - Ask questions

Now What?

- What are the primary themes about leading change and continuous improvement?
- What are you committing to today to start including in your day-to-day actions as a leader?
 - Write down what you will do and put it under the appropriate theme(s).

Let's make Agility and its *respect for people and continuous improvement* be
the way we've always done things!

References

Balzar, William K. (2020). *Lean Higher Education*. Routledge/Productivity Press.

Flinchbaugh, Jamie (2021). *People Solve Problems*. Old Dutch Group.