

MANAGEMENT *Onboarding*

Mt. San Antonio College

Mt. SAC's Management Culture Pivot: The New Generation

How well we do our jobs is not just measured by numbers; it's also—and predominantly—measured by how well our work is integrated with the values and vision of our institution and, for our personal satisfaction, how well that work reflects our own personal values and vision.

It also just so happens that values and vision not only define the *scope* of our work, they define the *culture* within which that work occurs.

Merriam-Webster defines culture in this way:

the set of ***shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices*** that characterizes an institution or organization; the set of ***values, conventions, or social practices*** associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic; the integrated ***pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations***

Culture not only reflects values, beliefs, and practices but its existence ***depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations***. This is what drives our commitment to professional learning and our passion for increasing the capacity for this generation of managers to “transmit” what they know and value to the “succeeding generations” of new managers: culture does not happen by accident, and a culture of high expectations of excellence pursued through the application of positive, productive, and vetted values must be taught, not just absorbed. . . . we must be deliberate.

The history of the Mt. SAC management team's development of its professional learning vision and plan is a history of its commitment to and articulation of a culture of management excellence that supports student success.

In 2015, the Mt. SAC management team came together in its first team retreat in over 10 years and took on the task of beginning to look at the quality of its work through the lens of how well that work was integrated with Mt. SAC's stated values and vision. In other words, we asked, “How well is the manager culture itself integrated with those values and vision?” and “What barriers need to be removed in order for us to be more effective in our work?” As a result of that examination, the participating managers, including three executive managers, identified four themes or areas that they wanted to focus on in the coming year that would increase that integration:

- mentoring

- bridging silos
- work-life balance
- customer service

What is interesting in looking at how each of these themes was defined is they all share at least two elements in common: the articulation and dissemination of shared values *and* the creation of opportunities for collaboration. Only one theme—customer service—was defined as requiring operational training in order to facilitate integration. Although we didn't quite grasp it yet, we had just articulated the necessity for developing a visible "culture" based on values and best practices and using that culture as a basis for professional development.

Based on these four themes, we established three objectives for management professional learning:

- 1) Break down silos: collaborate and communicate.
- 2) Move from a reactive to a predictive state (especially in planning).
- 3) Secure resources.

The three proposed "next steps" resulting from that retreat were *unanimously* agreed upon:

- 1) Form MPDC (the Management Professional Development Committee) to create functional processes for the development of goals, outcomes, strategic actions, and assessment.
- 2) Work closely with the Executive Team to ensure alignment across constituencies as well as transparency of processes and incorporation of values into functional culture of institution.
- 3) Secure appropriate resources to support planning and execution.

Without knowing it, we had commissioned our first professional learning plan—all situated within the attempt to integrate our work with Mt. SAC's values, mission, and vision and in so doing, with the implicit understanding of the essential role of culture in the accomplishment of excellence.

Although we did not have a formal retreat in 2016, as a follow-up to the 2015 retreat and in anticipation of developing learning opportunities to address the themes identified in that 2015 retreat, Management Steering conducted a professional learning needs assessment. It is probably no surprise that out of the 16 professional learning and operational training topics presented, the top seven focused on professional learning and *soft* skills:

- communication
- team building
- dealing with difficult people
- learning ways to motivate your team/engagement
- leadership
- conflict resolution
- personal Wellness (i.e. stress reduction, anger management, reducing job burnout etc.)

It was the work accomplished at the 2015 retreat in conjunction with the professional learning needs survey that set the foundation for our 2017 management retreat and a deliberate attempt to both articulate *and* pivot our culture toward a greater degree of cultural awareness, integration of work with values, and a clearer sense of what "effective" leadership looks like.

In 2017 we had three objectives for the retreat in order to accomplish that initial pivot toward a value-based understanding of leadership development:

- develop a greater self-awareness of personal leadership strengths and areas for learning
- develop a greater group awareness of Mt. SAC's leadership strengths and areas for learning
- develop a shared understanding of the ideal Mt. SAC leadership culture and how it supports the Mt. SAC mission

In order to accomplish this, we invited an outside facilitator, Eric Kaufmann, to offer us a relevant leadership paradigm of Transformative Leadership that addressed our desire to create a culture of integrated values and work behavior—including productivity—and especially to provide us with a shared vocabulary that we could use to identify, apply, teach, and assess management behavior and the quality of leadership expressed across the management team. The activities at this retreat not only allowed us to address the objectives we established for the retreat, but they provided us with the ability to apply this new paradigm and its supporting vocabulary to an *assessment* of our current management culture. With the participation with the Executive Team, we:

- agreed on 4 virtues of a transformative leader
 - Focus: What am I creating?
 - Courage: What am I avoiding?
 - Grit: What am I sustaining?
 - Faith: What am I yielding?
- agreed on the 8 characteristics/abilities of a transformative leader (to which we added a ninth—work-life balance/wellness)
- agreed that all leaders at Mt. SAC, including the Executive Team, would be asked to participate in and take responsibility for the evolutionary process of the management team culture
- completed a gap analysis of the (now) 9 characteristics of a transformative leader in relation to Mt. SAC in general and ourselves, specifically
- prioritized three of those transformative leadership characteristics we would like to work on as a group across the next year: coaching skills, leadership courage, and emotional intelligence.

At the end of the retreat, we collaborated on a specific vision for our management group in the form of a personal commitment to each:

We are committed to building a shared value system and supporting each other in our professional growth and wellness. Specifically, we are initially committed to developing our coaching skills that include the parallel development of leadership courage and emotional intelligence.

This was the most deliberate attempt to date to articulate a vision that comprised all the values and resulting characteristics of effective leadership we had addressed over the previous two years. After the retreat, this commitment was generalized slightly to provide an even broader base for a future professional learning plan:

We are committed to the continued development of a healthy and productive management culture where productivity is maximized and all managers are empowered to thrive.

Both subsequent retreats (2018 and 2019) as well as MPDC's professional learning plan were based on this commitment to our management culture.

The history of our retreats has been a history of the cultural development of our management professional learning; Mt. SAC's values, mission, and vision are inextricably intertwined in our management culture which drives not only our productivity but the value we place on our work and the manner in which we do it.

Study after study shows the direct relationship between a positive workplace culture and productivity. These same studies also decry the need not only to specifically articulate the values of the workplace culture but to *deliberately transmit those values to all employees, including the expectations for excellence that those values clearly anticipate.*

Everything we have planned and accomplished regarding management professional learning over the last five years has been with the expressed purpose of developing and perpetuating a culture of healthy and humane excellence within which everyone thrives. All we want is for our new managers to understand and embrace those values; given the work that we do in supporting the visions of thousands of students every year, how can we expect ourselves as managers to embrace anything less?