Get to Know Your Teammates, Transform Your Office Culture

University Communications
February 2019

Have you always been an idea person? Or is implementation more your strong suit? Perhaps research or project development is where you shine? Knowing your natural affinities in the workplace—as well as those of your co-workers—can go a long way in strengthening a team.

If you're not sure what those affinities are, the Office of Leadership and Organizational Development, in the Division of Human Resources, may be able to help.

The office, which focuses on improving workplace culture at the University, offers a variety of organizational development and leadership coaching opportunities. It recently added two new programs—one focused on team dynamics and the other on how to self-initiate cultural change in the workplace.

Decoding team dynamics

The first program is FourSight, which is designed to help team members engage in the problem-solving process more creatively and communicate more effectively with one another.

FourSight is composed of a brief online assessment, followed by an interactive debriefing session. It focuses on four steps essential to the problem solving or creative process: ideation, clarification, development and implementation.

The assessment reveals which of those four steps come most naturally to employees. While ideators enjoy brainstorming, clarifiers prefer providing context and data, developers like to further refine ideas, and implementors enjoy moving ideas into action.

"Everyone can do each of those steps, but this assessment measures where your natural affinity is," said Julie Forster, manager of leadership and organizational development. "For example, it might be easier and might be exciting and energizing for you to clarify, but you find implementation harder. It doesn't mean you can't do it; it's just not your natural preference to do that step in the process."

All units on campus can request the FourSight assessment for their teams. Once employees have completed the assessment, a leadership and organizational development representative will meet with the team to facilitate an interactive two- to three-hour session designed to help employees understand how they can work best with their colleagues based on the different preferences that have been revealed.

"Our preferences lead us to approach challenges and opportunities differently," Forster said. "FourSight gives you the strategies and tools to gain a deeper understanding of yourself, to better connect with colleagues, and to use these tools to uncover more innovative and
creative solutions."

The FourSight framework was developed by FourSight LLC, which creates research-based creativity and innovation tools to help individuals, teams, and organizations solve complex problems more effectively.

**Kicking off a cultural transformation**

The second new program is the UA-developed Workplace We Want.

Workplace We Want is a highly interactive session that lasts 90 minutes to two hours, depending on team size. The session is designed to help teams identify issues and challenges in the work environment and come up with goals and strategies to achieve the professional culture they desire.

"We know what research says about the ideal workplace, and we could share that, but it's much more powerful when you hear from each other," said Diane Brennan, director of leadership and organizational development. "The goal is really for participants to understand and articulate what the characteristics of their ideal workplaces are, to learn and practice strategies to support the individual and the department in communications, and to build a better culture together."

Activities cover a variety of topics, including current and desired office culture and strategies for managing difficult situations.

"Changing workplace culture takes time, and we have found the Workplace We Want to be an effective first step in building awareness and creating a plan for action," Brennan said.

Olivia Bernal, coordinator of business and personnel services in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, was among the first UA employees to participate in the Workplace We Want program, along with colleagues in her department.

"In our department, we really love what we do?we love our jobs, we have ideas and we're creative in our own areas, but we found that we had a break in communication and weren't always working well together," Bernal said. "With the Workplace We Want, we hope to create a more cohesive group where we're all pulling for each other."

Bernal said the program helped surface a number of challenges and opportunities that the department is now actively working to address. It also brought together some employees who had never met, and helped start a conversation about how to build a greater sense of community in a large department.

Although Workplace We Want is offered at the unit level, as it gains in popularity, its effects have the potential to spread to the greater UA workplace culture as well, Brennan said.

"It's really helping people to have a voice," she said. "We're not tackling the whole organization; we're doing one department or one college at a time, and it is bubbling up and people are recognizing that they have an opportunity to speak up in a respectful way, to influence and create positive change."

For more information on FourSight, Workplace We Want or any other Office of Leadership and Organizational Development programs, call 520-621-9561 or email leadershipcoaching@email.arizona.edu