

# CASE STUDY: GCU

## VALUES AT THE HEART OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

PROFESSOR CAROLINE PARKER, LEAD FOR GCU VALUES PROJECT



### Key lessons from the GCU Value Project

- Organisational values provide a strong foundation for building engagement
- Securing and demonstrating top leadership commitment is key to engaging others in the activity
- Actively involve everyone in the process (staff, students, managers, unions)
- Identifying values is easy, embedding them takes time and commitment
- Managers and individuals need practical tools if values are to be embedded
- Focus on the positive, build on what works (appreciative enquiry approach)
- Recognise that identification and communication of corporate values and behaviours is only the first and easiest step in a long process and plan resources and expectations appropriately

### Achievements

Since the start of the Values project:

- Nine out of ten staff say that they believe that the new GCU Values and value statements provide a good guide to behaviour
- Measurable increase in management participation in communication and cascade events
- Management workshop focused on the Behaviours Framework generated statistically significant increase in confidence in using it for a wide range of management activities
- Use of Values and Organisational level behavior statements within team focused activities generated measurable increase in:
  - perceived link between own work and organizational values
  - belief in the value of the team's contribution
  - belief in the value of the university's contribution
  - sense of pride in own and colleagues contributions
- Over 70% staff felt that Points of Pride exhibition was in sharing the great things that staff at GCU do
- Over 400 staff (largest for any recent university event) attended the final Values celebration event in 2016 and 9/10 rated it positively
- GCU Values and Behaviors are now embedded in a range of university procedures including recruitment, induction, appraisal and promotion, management training, 360 degree management review and the policy review process



## CASE STUDY: GCU

### VALUES AT THE HEART OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

- New leavers survey introduced showing >80% of staff positive about experience and recommending GCU
- Productivity gain proxy of c£7.5m on a £70m pay budget.
- The GCU People Services team were shortlisted for their outstanding Human Resources activities in the 2016 Times Higher Education Awards for Leadership & Management (THELMA) and won the prestigious Excellence in HR award at the Universities Human Resources Awards in 2017.

### Background

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) is a modern university in the heart of one of the UK's liveliest and most popular cities. Despite being one of the newest of the Higher Education institutes it has big ambitions for its research, teaching excellence, outreach and internationalization activities. A big drop in employee engagement in 2011 following a largescale restructuring process was therefore a serious cause for concern. While the aim of realigning departments and subject disciplines was to enhance productivity and effectiveness in pursuit of our goals it was seen, in some areas, to have had the opposite effect. In hindsight it appears that the scale and scope of the changes coupled with a lack of staff connection to the rationale for those changes, had a serious negative impact on employee engagement: this was clearly reflected in responses to engagement focused questions in the 2011 GCU staff survey.

*“Employees who believe that management is concerned about them as a whole person – not just an employee – are more productive, more satisfied, more fulfilled. Satisfied employees mean satisfied customers, which leads to profitability.”*

*- Anne M. Mulcahy, former CEO of Xerox*

It was clear that the breakdown in personal connection between the strategic vision of the organization and that of individual employees had to be addressed. GCU's Executive Board, informed by its People Services department, understood that unless staff felt inspired by and connected to the University and its mission, then it would not be possible to generate the necessary energy, creativity and momentum needed for growth and development. The GCU 2015 Strategic Plan was therefore underpinned by a 2015 People Strategy which specifically outlined a commitment to value staff – to support them to fulfil their potential, be inspired by our mission ‘for the common good’ and contribute to our organisational vision.

### Case Study

Glasgow Caledonian University prides itself on its social, community and widening participation activities which have a long history dating back to our 1875 Queens College roots. This drive to improve life for others locally, nationally and internationally is reflected in our motto ‘For the Common Weal’ or ‘for the common good’ in modern parlance. It became very clear following the 2011 survey that despite other areas of discontent, over 90% of staff believed strongly in our common good mission and were committed to it.



# CASE STUDY: GCU

## VALUES AT THE HEART OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

### The Four Enablers

#### Strategic Narrative

This strong personal connection with our University Mission provided a solid starting point for re-building engagement. In terms of the Four Enablers, the 'Common Good' mission clearly spoke to GCU employees and made a connection between them and the university as an organization. Our Common Good focused strategic planning exercises in 2015 and 2020 narrowed down the field of to those areas in which we felt we could make a significant difference forming another key part of our strategic narrative. We recognized that while the Mission and the Vision described the **Why** and the **What** of our narrative we were missing the **How**.



*A strong alignment between the value set of an organization and that of its employees has been correlated with the level of personal attachment felt by an employee to that organization and to levels of employee motivation. - (Posner, 2008).*

#### Integrity

Values '**have to be reflected in everyday behaviours**' (EngageforSuccess) to be meaningful and to build a sense of shared purpose and engagement. The GCU Values on their own are just labels and it doesn't matter how many posters, mugs or t-shirts they are emblazoned on they will not affect change. At GCU we used the rich data gathered from the values identification exercise and generated a set of behavior statements to illustrate our understanding of each value. Integrity for example is a common organizational value with many shades of meaning around honesty and moral consistency. To demonstrate Integrity at the 'University for the Common Good' means that we also need to "Strive to make a positive difference in the world".



But its still not enough.

A set of organizational behaviours however easy they are to pin on a wall or use in external marketing are not that useful in a grassroots operational setting. **Caroline Parker, GCU Values Project Lead**, knew that she needed to find a means of making the values more locally relevant and useful if they were to have real impact.

No need to re-invent the wheel

Fortunately a ready-made solution was available in the form of the Guys and St Thomas Health Trust (GSTT) Behaviours Framework. This is a set of statements capturing GSTT employee's belief of what their behavior should look like 'on their best day'. It is aspirational, designed to support the delivery of consistently excellent behavior aligned to employees own understanding of what



## CASE STUDY: GCU VALUES AT THE HEART OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

is excellent. The framework operates at four levels from 'everyone' to 'strategic leader' and provides a tool to support staff and managers in all activities from self-assessment to recruitment, induction, change and improvement, feedback and performance. It provided the missing link. With the kind permission of GSTT, and a highly interactive, iterative year-long development process, the **People Services GCU Values Project Team** created its own 3-layer version of the Framework.

Still not enough!

Organisational behaviour is not just driven by a personal understanding of what is appropriate, it is directed and constrained by the processes and policies laid down by the organisation. It is not enough to have Creativity as a value or a Behaviour Statement that encourages cross-disciplinary working if the organizational structures, or financial procedures act as an inhibitor. GCU has therefore undertaken to examine all of its procedures and policies through the lens of the GCU Values and Behaviours and to make adjustments where needed. In a large and complex organization like a university this is long term project however key areas such recruitment, induction, appraisal and management training are now all aligned.

### Engaging Managers

The role of the manager is key to the engagement process. Unless the organizational narrative is linked, and the individual behaviours are seen to be lived, at team level then they can not fulfill their unifying purpose. At GCU the Behaviours Framework was warmly welcomed by managers, employees and union representatives alike as for the first time it clarified what is expected of each of us, not in terms of our tasks but in how we perform them. The Behaviours Framework is now used in performance and development discussions and as a tool in conflict resolution. The higher level Organizational Behaviour Statements have been used as a focus in team building and planning meetings as they allow the teams to make connections between their current and planned activities and the broader aims of the organization. We have held briefings and training sessions to support GCU managers and captured and acted on concerns expressed about using the tools, designing and delivering specific training courses or working with individuals on local issues. A 360 degree evaluation tool has also been designed based on the People Manager level of the GCU Behaviour Framework.



# CASE STUDY: GCU

## VALUES AT THE HEART OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT



### Employee Voice

Engaging employees in the process of development was central to the GCU Values and Behaviours design philosophy. Before the Framework project was initiated a draft version, compiled from the staff and student values data, was shown to a representative sample of staff and students to check its potential. Each statement went through an iterative process of discussion and debate in which everyone had the option to either accept it, reject it or suggest a rewording: the 'everyone' layer was open to all – staff and student, People Managers commented on their layer and the Executive Board had ownership of theirs. Only statements that met an agreed 70% consensus level were included in the final version.



'Not being heard' and 'contributions not being recognised' have been frequent cries from all areas of the university and the GCU Values Project provided one means of addressing this. While one aim of projects like ours is to improve performance, it is important to recognize that excellence already exists in many places across the organisation and also that it takes many shapes and forms. The GCU **Points of Pride** Exhibition is the end point of an annual collection process where staff nominate activities that they believe are exemplars of living the GCU values. The exhibition serves both to showcase and celebrate the efforts of staff and also to provide an opportunity to share best practice and stimulate new ways of thinking.

Employee voice in the form of our regular staff survey provided the starting point for this project and is a means of checking how well we are doing in our efforts to increase and maintain employee engagement.

### Next Steps

Despite the progress made to date and the improved coherence of our **Strategic Narrative** there is still a lot of work to be done before we can say that we are fully living our values at all levels of the university and all of our activities. We believe that it is vital that the work of embedding values to ensure **organisational integrity** is undertaken by everyone as part of daily activity rather than being driven by a central service. With this in mind a Values Forum, made up of representatives from across the university, has been initiated. The Forum acts as a sounding board and problem-solving resource for colleagues seeking advice on using the values and behaviours to resolve local issues, it monitors embedding activities, and identifies opportunities for new activity. The dispersed ownership model adds to levels of **employee voice** and the support it provides to managers helps them to be more **engaging**. Data collection is another area of focus. While the staff survey is the obvious measure it does not take place very frequently and there is a need to implement more sensitive but unobtrusive measures of impact.

