UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE:

A Practical Guide to Implementing the **Ways We Work** Guiding Principles

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, U-M launched the Ways We Work framework, a comprehensive approach to supporting an inclusive work environment. Guiding Principles were created to develop a more consistent approach to the various ways we work on the Ann Arbor Campus. The five guiding principles are aligned with university values and are:

- Advance the Mission

- Create and Elevate an Engaged Community

- Enable Employee Success and Development

- Ensure Transparency in Setting Work Practices

- Innovate and Adapt

These principles were created using input from the diverse perspectives of staff and faculty members from across the university. Their careful consideration included several group discussions to identify principles that could be implemented in the workplace.

ABOUT THE PRACTICAL GUIDE

The goal of this guide is to ensure a shared understanding of what the guiding principles mean in practice. Managers and supervisors can use this guide to help implement the principles in their departments.

HOW TO USE THE PRACTICAL GUIDE

Familiarize yourself with the guiding principle definitions and then review the practical examples outlined in the section below. The examples are provided to spark your thinking about how the principles can be uniquely applied in your department. These examples are not intended to be a complete list but rather a starting point for how the principles could be applied in ways that work for your individual department.

Regularly review this guide to help you evaluate how the principles are being applied in your unit. Identify opportunities to make improvements based on the feedback you are receiving or your changing work conditions.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

The principles along with their definitions are outlined along with real workplace examples to help illustrate how they can be applied.

ADVANCE THE MISSION:

Support the advancement of the university's mission by aligning the critical contributions of employees with existing and innovative work practices that retain and attract top talent.

Example:

Chris manages the day-to-day operations for a large department that provides services to schools and colleges on the Ann Arbor campus. With hundreds of employees working across campus on various shifts, Chris feels strongly about the department's connection to the mission of the university and ensuring that employees know that their work matters. He holds quarterly meetings where metrics and customer feedback are shared with the team. Guest speakers, including faculty, researchers, and other staff, host presentations about their work to help team members understand how their work impacts university operations.

Ways to implement the principle:

- Align modes of work to meet the needs of stakeholders and customers, and in support of advancing the university's mission. Communicate department goals and explain how they support the university's mission.

- Ensure employees understand how their work supports the university's mission through work plans and projects, team meetings, and workplace discussions.

- Identify customer needs in establishing work practices to ensure your team delivers what is expected.
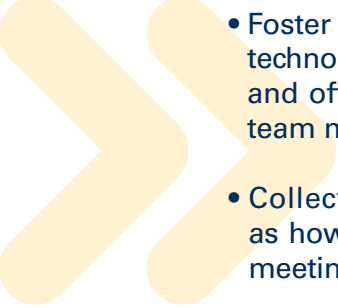
CREATE AND ELEVATE AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY:

Promote an engaged work environment through expressions of appreciation for employees and by creating opportunities for relationship building and partnership.

Example:

Robert manages a central service function that supports customers in various schools, colleges, and units. He's committed to promoting an engaged work environment, but not always sure how to achieve this goal. He initiated "good news shout-outs" during team meetings where employees can show appreciation for the support received that week. He scheduled "innovation workshops" where team members can gather and brainstorm on new project ideas together.

Ways to implement the principle:

- Foster meaningful connections with remote and hybrid/remote staff by using technology for inclusive participation. Implement a department in-office workday and offer open office hours to facilitate informal discussions beyond your regular team meeting.

- Collect employee feedback through discussions or technology on topics such as how should we best utilize our office space; what is working well with our team meetings, and what can we do to build or improve collaboration.

- Use recognition programs to highlight staff contributions and build a positive work environment. Voices of the Staff created these suggestions as a resource if you'd like to create your own program.

- Clarify expectations, inspired by the university's workplace values, for how employees are expected to treat one another. Model these behaviors and hold yourself and others accountable.
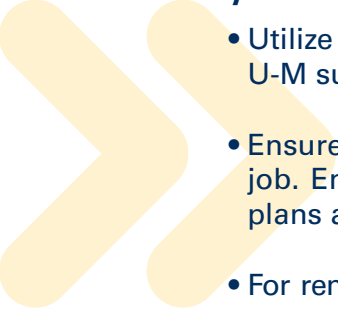
ENABLE EMPLOYEE SUCCESS AND DEVELOPMENT:

Create an environment that enables employees to do their best work, values the contributions of all employees in making the University of Michigan a top public university, and supports employee development.

Example:

Maria manages student services professionals in a busy academic department supporting students and faculty. Maria is intentional about fostering a productive environment where the team can perform their best work. To cultivate this culture, there are acknowledgments of the team's contributions during staff meetings, encouragement for professional development through training and workshops, and support for knowledge sharing amongst the team. Because Maria's staff is hybrid/mobile with only one common work day, she uses google chat to provide real-time feedback to her staff throughout the work week.

Ways to implement the principle:

- Utilize central resources for onboarding to ensure new employees transition into U-M successfully.

- Ensure staff have access to professional development opportunities to grow on the job. Encourage employees to list professional development goals on their work plans and dedicate time in one-on-ones to discuss career goals and interests.

- For remote or mobile-hybrid staff, identify ways to support learning that traditionally occurs through on-site interactions. An example could include job shadowing opportunities using Zoom for newer or less experienced staff.

- Use university resources offered to managers and supervisors to support well-being. Some resources include learning opportunities led by Organizational Learning, resources to support faculty, staff and students through MHealthy, the Well-being Collective, and mental and emotional health to help support a healthy culture.

ENSURE TRANSPARENCY IN SETTING WORK PRACTICES:

Provide clarity and transparency for employees to understand the reasoning behind decisions about their work practices. Work arrangements should be based on transparent and consistent criteria that are aligned with job functions and take into account business needs.

Example:

Alexander is the manager of a research lab at U-M for a faculty member. The work of the lab team is important for supporting faculty and ensuring the smooth operation of the lab. Alexander understands that it's vital to foster an environment where clear and transparent communications are prioritized. As a general practice, Alexander explains the rationale behind decisions that affect the department and ensures understanding across the team. He recognized that implementing practices such as clarifying job responsibilities and sharing research updates promotes transparency in the lab and while also creating a knowledge sharing culture.

Ways to implement the principle:

- Clearly define expectations for team members, ensuring they understand what is expected of them in their job and why. Use one-on-one meetings to clarify employee roles and alignment with unit goals, and implement a system, such as a project management tool, for employees to easily reference objectives and expectations.

- Be aware of the interactions between work modality, customer and stakeholder needs, and work practices. Changes in business needs and operations may impact where employees can perform work.When possible,share criteria used in decision-making and provide context that might help them better understand business needs.

- For jobs performing the same or similar responsibilities, use consistent criteria to determine the appropriate work modality.

INNOVATE AND ADAPT:

Commit to continued partnerships within and among units to create innovative and adaptable ways to perform work that reflect the evolving needs and best interests of the university and its faculty, staff, and students.

Example:

Sarah manages a team of billing clerks. As their customers transitioned to on-site work during the academic year, Sarah's team scheduled on-site days to provide in-person support for faculty and staff. They also held in-person team meetings once a week to discuss concerns. As the summer approaches, the team has the option to return to fully remote work and weekly team meetings will be held via zoom. Sarah's approach to managing work modalities reflects the changing or seasonal needs of her customers while also providing flexibility for her staff.

Ways to implement the principle:

- Encourage adaptability as a keystone for how your team approaches work, which promotes an openness to new ways of accomplishing work tasks, department projects, and university initiatives.

- Foster a workplace where creative thinking and identifying new ways of approaching work is celebrated. This environment enables employees the flexibility to explore, discover and offer feedback.

- Encourage collaborations with units or departments to enhance organizational and employee experiences.

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