TRI-C'S INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE IN RELATION TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Understanding cultural dynamics is critical to addressing the barriers that influence execution.

What follows is an analysis of feedback from faculty, staff, and managers collected through multiple collegewide surveys, including the Great Colleges survey and feedback from Vision 2030 listening sessions, examining perspectives on institutional culture, performance, and day-to-day practices.

Connection to Vision 2030

Culture shapes how strategy is interpreted, acted upon, and carried forward, influencing whether execution gains momentum or gradually loses force.

Our Challenge:

Tri-C knows what needs to change but hasn't fully built the conditions for a performance-based culture.

Tri-C's Cultural Context

Maslow's Pyramid helps leaders assess whether the culture is strong enough at the foundations to support the higher-level behaviors every strategy depends on.

The Pyramid also reveals how people may steer conversations back to lower-level needs to delay or resist change

Tri-C culture has been candidly assessed across seven dimensions as they relate to organizational change.

Cultural Mindset
- Skepticism as Default Mode
- Feedback is preferred when it affirms rather
- Proposed changes may be discounted as out of touch with the realities of the work

Behavior Patterns
- Rich in Commentary but Poor in Commitment
- Struggles Turning Insight into Action

Structural Manifestations
- Planning not Connected to Execution
- Strong analysis, but limited follow-through across teams

#1: Skepticism as default mode

Skepticism has become the institution's baseline posture because it is easier than engaging responsibly with change.

Skepticism reflects learned caution based on past experience, particularly when change efforts have not consistently translated into sustained action.

#2: Feedback is preferred when it affirms rather than challenges

Candid conversation is welcomed when it is affirming, but often resisted when it becomes evaluative or leads to expectations for change.

Communication is welcomed only when it stays comfortable.

#3: Proposed changes may be discounted as out of touch with the realities of the work

Deep pride in Tri-C's mission and reputation can limit openness to some change

Pride in one's work can lead people to disengage from change requests that they believe do not fully appreciate the realities of their job.

#4: Rich in commentary but poor in commitment

Tri-C's culture rewards commentary over contribution. Conversation is abundant, but ownership is scarce.

People seek belonging through shared skepticism, rather than through activities that involve shared accountability

Phrases like 'student-centered' feel reassuring, but can sometimes replace the harder work of evaluating whether our designs are improving outcomes.

#5: Struggles turning insight into action

Tri-C is intellectually mature but behaviorally cautious. People excel at understanding problems but hesitate at implementing solutions because consensus is expected before action.

Ideas circulate without translation into operational steps or accountability.

#6: Planning not connected to execution

Planning and execution do not always function as a single system, allowing clarity and momentum to diminish as work moves across units. Transformation is not a plan, it's a practice.

Planning and execution feel like separate conversations.

#7: Strong analysis, but limited follow-through across teams

Analytical capability is strong, while coordinated follow-through across teams is uneven.

Problem-solving occurs in isolation rather than through shared frameworks.

What deans and managers may notice early in Vision 2030 implementation

As Vision 2030 moves from planning into action, several familiar cultural patterns may surface.

These behaviors are not signs of resistance to the vision itself.

They are signals of how our culture typically responds when change requires new ways of working.

These signals are also meant to help distinguish between healthy questions and patterns that may slow momentum.

A few cultural signals to watch for

1. Commitment expressed with a wait-and-see stance

What it may sound like:

"I support the direction, I just want to see if this really sticks."

"We've seen initiatives come and go before."

"Let's not rush until we know this is different."

What it may look like:

- Delayed engagement until senior leaders demonstrate visible follow-through
- Attendance at meetings without movement on assigned actions
- Passive support without ownership

A few cultural signals to watch for

2. Pride in existing practices shaping responses to change

What it may sound like:

"That might work elsewhere, but it doesn't fit how we do things here."

"People designing this don't see what really happens on the ground."

"We built our approach for good reasons."

What it may look like:

• Change framed as external or uninformed
• Defensive explanations of current practice rather than exploration of redesign
• Limited experimentation outside established routines

A few cultural signals to watch for

3. Comfort with affirmation, discomfort with evaluation

What it may sound like:

"We're doing great work already."

"I worry this feels too critical."

"Morale could suffer if we push too hard."

What it may look like:

- Hesitation to use outcome data they feel is outside their control to guide decisions
- Feedback focused on effort rather than effectiveness
- Avoidance of conversations about uneven performance

A few cultural signals to watch for

4. Strong analysis occurring in isolation

What it may sound like:

"Our area has been thinking a lot about this."

"We're doing our own version."

"I wasn't aware other teams were working on something similar."

What it may look like:

- Parallel efforts without coordination
- Local optimization over shared institutional progress
- Inconsistent implementation across campuses or units
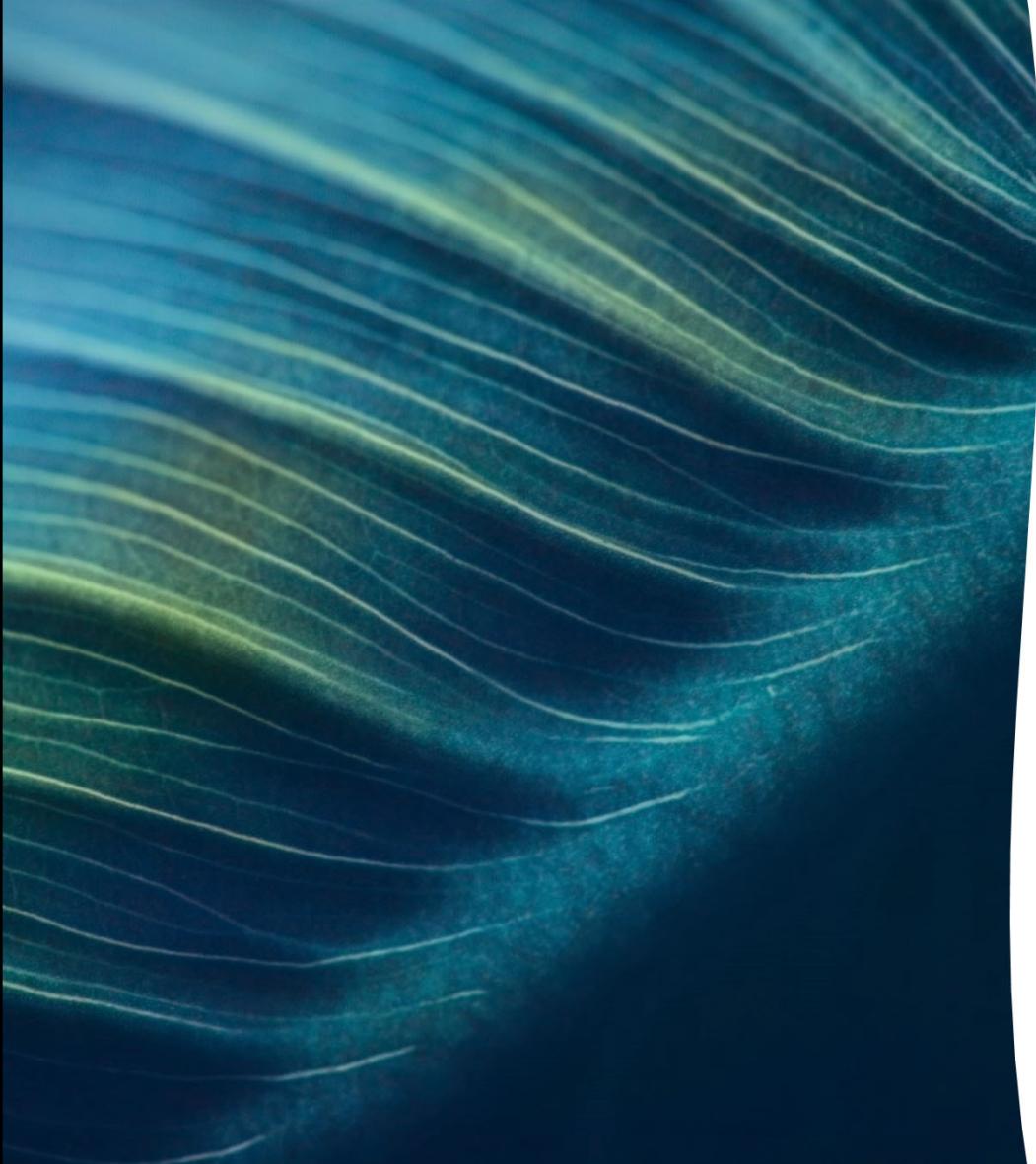
Where do we go from here?

Our culture reflects commitment, capability, and care.

Strengthening ownership, follow-through, and cross-unit coordination will be essential to translating effort into sustained progress.

THANK YOU

Transformation is not a plan but a practice